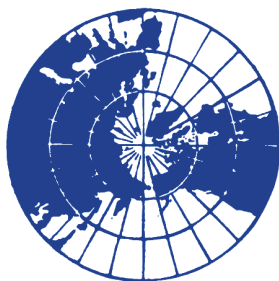


PROVERBIUM

Yearbook of International Proverb Scholarship



42:2025



THE JOSIP JURAJ STROSSMAYER UNIVERSITY OF OSIJEK

**FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
AND SOCIAL SCIENCES**

Proverbium 42 (2025)

Proverbium is an open-access peer-reviewed journal of International Proverb Scholarship that publishes papers dedicated to research in paremiology in English, German, French, Russian and Spanish languages. It is published in accordance with the International Ethical Principles for Scholarly Publication on the webpage <https://naklada.ffos.hr/casopisi/proverbium/>

Publisher: Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek

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ISSN 2806-7568

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VOLUME 42:2025

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Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek
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ISSN 2806-7568

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PREFACE

It is with great pride and pleasure that we open the preface to this year's *Proverbium* Volume 42 with wonderful news: *Proverbium* has been officially indexed in two highly esteemed databases, Scopus and the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ). These recognitions affirm the journal's consistent commitment to scholarly excellence and position it alongside the most respected publications in the field. The Scopus review team highlighted several strengths that contributed to our successful indexing. They commended the journal's regular publication of academically rigorous and internationally relevant articles, the consistency between the journal's content and its stated aims and scope, and the clarity and transparency of its editorial policies. This encouraging feedback serves as both a validation of our efforts and a motivation to continue the diligent work required to uphold and enhance the journal's quality.

In our continued effort to meet the high demands of international proverb scholarship, we are also pleased to announce that our Online Supplement Series has been granted an ISSN (3044-3873), officially elevating the series to the status of a recognized periodical. We look forward to publishing more high-quality monographs that explore diverse aspects of proverbial studies worldwide.

The publication of this 42nd volume would not have been possible without the expertise, dedication, and hard work of our contributing authors and reviewers. This year, over twenty scientific articles were submitted for consideration. Our sincere gratitude goes to our reviewers, whose careful readings and insightful evaluations have ensured the continued high standard of our publication. We extend heartfelt thanks to: Dragana Antonijević, Saša Babič, Péter Barta, Fionnuala Carson Williams, Charles

Clay Doyle, Christian Grandl, Galit Hasan-Rokem, Ivana Jozić, Tamás Kispál, Anna Konstantinova, Outi Lauhakangas, Marcas Mac Coinnigh, Matej Meterc, Wolfgang Mieder, Draženka Molnar, Aderemi Raji-Oyelade, Kathrin Steyer, Aneta Stojić, Grzegorz Szpila, Anna T. Litovkina, Georgios Tserpes, Katalin Vargha, and Damien Villers. Your unwavering commitment to scholarly excellence and the advancement of paremiological research is deeply appreciated.

This volume features contributions in three languages—English, French, and German—reflecting the truly global scope of our field. The articles span a rich variety of topics: from Latin proverbs and the intersection of Artificial Intelligence and paremiology, to studies on Albanian proverbs, the Tangkhul paremiological minimum, proverb semantics, proverbial expressions in poetry, Anglo-American anti-proverbs, and Biblical proverbs. Each article offers fresh perspectives and underscores the enduring relevance of proverbs in both historical and contemporary contexts.

In addition to the research articles, this volume also presents two insightful book reviews, one on postproverbials in Nigerian languages and another on a German-Bulgarian phraseological dictionary. We are also thrilled to feature three important bibliographies, including our traditional listings meticulously compiled by Professor Wolfgang Mieder and, for the first time in *Proverbium*, a bibliography of Hausa proverb studies by our fellow paremiologist, Patryk Zając.

We are proud and excited to share this volume with our readers. It represents a milestone for the journal and a testament to the vibrancy and diversity of paremiological scholarship today. As we look to the future, we remain committed to fostering dialogue, collaboration, and innovation among paremiologists worldwide.

With gratitude for your continued support and enthusiasm for the field,

Melita Aleksa Varga and Hrisztalina Hrisztova-Gotthardt

[https://doi.org/ 10.29162/pv.42.1.1008](https://doi.org/10.29162/pv.42.1.1008)

Original scientific paper

Received on 25 September 2024

Accepted for publication on 2 March 2025

ADINA CHIRILĂ
IOAN MILICĂ

FROM TRANSLATION TO PROVERB: *CINE SAPĂ GROAPA ALTUIA CADE SINGUR ÎN EA / WHOEVER DIGS A PIT FOR OTHERS SHALL FALL INTO IT*

Abstract: This research examines the genesis of a well-known Romanian proverb from both philological and translation studies perspectives: *Cine sapă groapa altuia cade singur în ea / Whoever digs a pit for others will fall into it*. The aim of the research is to determine in which historical period of the cultural development of the Romanian literary language it is possible to ascertain the existence of a popular proverb with an existence independent of the biblical prototype from which it originates. The primary methodology is drawn from diachronic linguistics, more precisely the comparative-historical method, supplemented by linguistic and stylistic textual analysis. By studying both concordances and divergences, it is possible to identify and interpret an important moment in the cultural context of the 17th century. This is the period in which the translators of biblical and popular literature of the time became aware of the emergence of a proverb that follows a different cultural trajectory from that of the biblical translations. Furthermore, the research argues in favour of the idea that proverbs are not fixed-form constructions, but miniature texts of wisdom, whose form and meaning vary from one era to another.

Keywords: proverbs, Romanian language and culture, wisdom literature, Bible translation, biblicalisms.

1. Preliminaries

Proverbs are miniature texts of wisdom (Permyakov 1979: 9-10) that succinctly convey reflections on human nature and the way people view the world. The discursive tradition of proverbs coincides with the dawn of writing. Thanks to scholars such as Samuel Noah Kramer (1956), Edmund Gordon (1968) and Bendt Alster (1997), it is now known that the clay tablets excavated from the sands of ancient Sumer contain a wealth of information about the wisdom literature of the Mesopotamian civilizations. This body of literary texts originally contained five types of evidence: a) proverbs, b) miniature essays, c) instructions and precepts, d) didactic fragments concerning schools and scribes, and e) disputes and debates (Kramer 1951:28). The repertoire was later expanded to include fables, folktales, riddles, parables, or satires (Murphy 1981: 9).

Sumerian proverbs outline the ancient ways of life (Alster 1997/ I: xix). These millennia-old wisdom texts have easily recognizable characteristics: lapidary form, terseness of expression, generic use of the grammatical person, symmetry (parallelism), and figurative meaning usually conveyed through metaphor, irony, simile, hyperbole, metonymy and synecdoche (Gordon 1968: 10-20). Over time, some of this treasure trove of wisdom was incorporated into the books of the Bible (Murphy 1981: 3). Through cultural transfer, some of the world's oldest proverbs found their way into the Christian tradition.

For Christian peoples, the Holy Scriptures serve as a significant repository of proverbs, alongside other sources such as i) borrowings from one nation to another, ii) the legacy of Greek and Roman antiquity; and iii) the cultural heritage of medieval Latin (Mieder 2004: 10-13). The total number of biblical proverbs is estimated at three hundred and five hundred units that are known to and regularly used by the general public (Mieder 1990: 2). The collections of proverbs, maxims and adages of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance combined the language and tenets of the Bible with those of classical antiquity, contributing to the proliferation of phrases, quotations and texts that eventually emerged from the collective consciousness of the people as idioms, sayings, proverbs and other forms of expression.

The study of the relationship between the proverbs of the Bible and the folk proverbs of various peoples has gained enduring support from the international scientific community, as evidenced by the contributions of Crystal (2010), Dundes (1999), Mieder (1990), and Taylor (1962), among others. In Romanian culture, this field of research has only recently emerged as a research topic. However, notable contributions to paremiology and phraseological lexicography have been made by Negreanu (1983), Tabarcea (1982: 141-153), Toma (2011) and Zanne (1895-1903/ 2019).

In numerous vernacular languages, the translation of the Bible has contributed to the development of a rich reservoir of linguistic resources, including words of wit, idioms, sayings, and proverbs. This centuries-long activity has had a multitude of consequences, including those pertaining to ideology, culture, and language. Consequently, the objective is to identify and analyse the pathways followed by various proverbial units during their journey from the Holy Scriptures to the mind and language of the people. This process often results in the loss of awareness that a certain string of words or linguistic sequence is of biblical origin. An in-depth study of the process would improve our understanding of:

- a) the importance of translations for the spread of what Mokienko (2011: 92) referred to as “biblicisms” in most European cultures;
- b) the linguistic and stylistic adaptations to the semiotic profiles of the languages into which such translations were made;
- c) the impact of the old Romanian writings on the mentality of different generations of speakers;
- d) the description of the mechanisms that led to the transformation of the textual and stylistic identity of specific biblical passages into linguistic forms commonly present in the vernacular;
- e) the dynamic equilibrium between tradition and innovation, that is between conventional norms and creative use of language, with reference to the adaptation of biblical excerpts into the proverbs of the people;

f) the grammatical and semantic variation of proverbial units with biblical prototypes.

In recent decades, scholars and scientists have approached the study of proverbs from a variety of different but neighbouring perspectives. These include ethnology and folklore (Dundes 1999, Krikmann 2009, Mieder 1993), pragmatics (Colston 2015; Norrick 1985), psychology (Honeck 1997), rhetoric (Bland 1997: 1-21; Winton 1990), and semiotics (Permyakov 1979, Grzybek 1987). From a linguistic perspective, the analysis of proverbs has been conducted from one of the two fundamental perspectives: the synchronic (descriptive) perspective or the diachronic (evolutionary) perspective. The approach is usually either static or dynamic. The static approach views proverbs as clichés, stereotypes, or fixed-form units of the discourse level of language (Permyakov 1979: 10, Schapira 1999). The dynamic approach, on the other hand, studies proverbs as speech acts (Jesenšek 2014: 135) or texts (Norrick 1985) and views proverbs as instances of language in the making. More recently, researchers have turned to the cognitive framework to gain insights into the interpretation of proverbs as generic-level metaphors (Gibbs 2001; Lakoff 1993: 233-235), conceptual blends (Andersson 2013) or mental models (Shore 1996: 362-363).

The richness of this intellectual landscape illustrates the inherent difficulty of defining proverbs in a way that aligns with their communicative properties. It is therefore important to show that the construction of proverb corpora based on the matrices of sacred or other religious texts requires a high degree of philological expertise. For example, Romanian idioms or expressions such as (a trăi) *ca-n sânul lui Avram*, meaning “to live happily”, and referred to in Luke 16:22, (a trimite /a purta/ a duce pe cineva) *de la Ana la Caiafa*, which translates to “here and there”, according to John 18:13-28, or the admonition *Ce ție nu-ți place altuia nu face* / *Do not do to others what you would not like to be done to you*, as found in Matthew 7:12 and Luke 6:31, are considered to have biblical origin by the Romanian writer and scholar George Coșbuc (1903, in Chivu 2007/II: 908). However, not all units correspond to the defining characteristics of proverbs. Similarly, David Crystal examines the cultural heritage of

the English idioms *an eye for an eye*, with reference to Exodus 21:24 and Matthew 5:38 (Crystal 2010: 58-59), and *the blind leading the blind*, with reference to Matthew 15:14 and Luke 6:39 (Crystal 2010: 136-137), whereas Wolfgang Mieder identifies similar sequences as proverbs: *An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth* (Mieder 1990: 41), and *When the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch* (Mieder 1990: 64). Furthermore, reference works such as Tilley (1950: 54 B452) attest only to the latter proverb in English literature of the 16th and the 17th centuries. This detail suggests that the Old Testament law of retribution must have captured public attention no earlier than the 18th century. This assumption is also supported by the 16th-century collection of the Erasmian *Adages*, which includes the Latin *Caecus caeco dux/ The blind leading the blind* expression (Barker 2001: 112), but it does not make any reference to the idiom “*an eye for an eye*”. In short, many examples do not correspond to the theoretically-acknowledged features of proverbs, and the appeal to taxonomic precision does not seem to hinder researchers in their efforts to identify the biblical origin of various language elements.

With regard to the knowledge of biblical verses, paragraphs, quotes, sayings, or scenes, there are two fundamental approaches to the study of Scripture. The first is an unmediated contact with the religious texts, and the second is indirect, through cultural borrowings. Direct contact with the religious texts can be achieved through a variety of activities, including attending the liturgy, listening to sermons, reading the Bible and prayer books such as the Psalter, and, last but not least, familiarising oneself with Christian literature on the lives of the saints, the wisdom of the Church Fathers, and related topics. In addition, the pervasive dissemination of diverse forms of religious folklore, including legends, apocrypha, and superstitions, influenced the collective understanding of the tenets of the faith even before the protracted efforts to translate the sacred texts. As Dundes (1999: 10) notes, “orally transmitted folklore such as proverbs and legends can survive relatively intact for centuries with no help from written sources. In modern times, we tend to rely heavily upon print or other means of recording data, and we fail to realize that hu-

mankind throughout most of its collective history has depended almost exclusively upon orally transmitted knowledge”.

There are a variety of sequencing options for the transfer of biblical language and style into the vernacular, ranging from individual words to complete miniature texts. As Földes (1990: 59) and Toma (2012) posit, the clippings can be either:

- a) words and biblical terms: Rom. *iudă* “traitor”; Rom. *caiafă* “hypocrite”;
- b) compounds and collocations: Rom. *alfa și omega* “the beginning”, with reference to Apocalypse 22:13, Rom. *fiică a Evei* “daughter of Eve, woman”; Rom. *fiul omenesc / fiul omului* “son of man, Jesus Christ”; Rom. *înger păzitor* “guardian angel”; Rom. *vițel de aur* “the golden calf, the adoration of riches”;
- c) idioms and expressions: Rom. *pâinea (cea) de toate zilele* “daily bread”; Rom. *a se spăla pe mâini de ceva* “to get rid of something”, with reference to Matthew 27:24;
- d) paraphrases: Rom. *a da cezarului ce-i al cezarului* / Engl. *render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's*, with reference to Matthew 22:21, Mark 12:17, Luke 20:25;
- e) proverbs: Rom. *Cine ridică sabia de sabie va pieri* / Engl. *He who lives by the sword dies by the sword* (Mieder 1990: 53), with reference to Matthew 26:52;
- f) *twists and antiproverbs*: Rom. *Cine nu caută nu găsește / Nu cauți, nu găsești*, referenced in Matthew 7:7 and Luke 11:9, in relation to Rom. *Caută și vei afla* / Engl. *Seek, and you shall find* (Mieder 1990: 34).

In accordance with the hypothesis proposed by Nida (1975: 24), it can be argued that the Bible occupies a unique position within the cultural history of humanity. It is probably the most translated book, with over 1,100 languages into which the Bible has been translated, including 210 languages that have produced a translation of the entire Bible. This rich tradition, which has spanned millennia, commenced in the mid-third century BC with the translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek and continues to the present day. By the middle of the 16th century, when the oldest Romanian translations of the Psalter were is-

sued, there were only 33 languages in which the Bible was available in translation (Nida 1975: 24). Towards the end of the 17th century, in 1688, the inaugural Romanian edition of the Bible was completed. By the end of the 18th century, new translations were printed, in 1760 and 1795. The Romanian editorial milestones demonstrate the challenges inherent in tracing the historical development of biblical textual sequences that have become proverbial prototypes of common usage. Nevertheless, the limitations of this study do not preclude the examination of select folk proverbs and their Biblical roots. This analysis aims to illustrate the intricate cultural connections, multifaceted overlaps, and the profound richness of meaning that underpin the history of proverbs.

2. *Cine sapă groapa altuia cade singur în ea / Whoever digs a pit for others shall fall into it*

2.1. The religious translation reflex

In most oral and written European cultures, the proverb is well-known, ranking ninth in popularity¹ (Paczolay 1997: 77-82). The

¹ The proverb is considered the most prominent in the Finnic common repertoire (Krikmann 2007: 58). The popularity of the Romanian proverb has yet to be rigorously assessed. A pilot proficiency test conducted during the 2009-2010 academic year, with the participation of 50 students, aged between 18 and 30 years, revealed that the proverb *Cine sapă groapa altuia cade singur în ea* is particularly familiar. Specifically, the respondents were requested to compile a list of proverbs that they could readily recall within a limited time frame (approximately 15 minutes). A total of 91 proverbs were recorded with 354 occurrences across the 50 lists. The text *Cine sapă groapa altuia cade singur în ea* was the third most frequently occurring proverb, as determined by the number of times it was listed in the proficiency tests. The 15 most commonly known Romanian proverbs among the participants in the experimental proficiency test, in the descending order of frequency, were as follows: 1. *Buturuga mică răstoarnă carul mare / Little strokes fell great oaks*; 2. *Cine se scoală de dimineată departe ajunge / The early bird catches the worm*; 3. *Cine sapă groapa altuia cade singur în ea / Whoever digs a pit for others shall fall into it*; 4. *Prietenul la nevoie se cunoaște / A friend in need is a friend indeed*; 5. *Ai carte, ai parte / Knowledge is power*; 6. *Nu lăsa pe mâine ce poți face azi / Never put off until tomorrow what you can do today*; 7. *Lupul își schimbă părul, dar năravul ba / The wolf may lose his teeth but never his nature*; 8. *Ulciorul nu merge de multe ori la apă / The pitcher goes so long to the water until it breaks*; 9. *Meseria e brățară de aur / A handful of*

proverb owes its vitality to the Bible. It is used in several² books of the Scripture, and features in narrative and declarative speech acts:

- (a) Ps 7:15: *Groapă a săpat și a adâncit-o, și va cădea în groapa pe care a făcut-o.* (B 1997) / Engl. He made a pit and dug it out and has fallen into the ditch which he made;
- (b) Pv 26:27: *Cine sapă groapa (altuia) cade singur în ea, (și cel ce rostogolește o piatră se rostogolește (tot) peste el).* (B 1997) / Engl. Whoever digs a pit will fall into it, (and he who rolls a stone, will have it roll back on him);
- (c) Eccl 10:8: *Cel ce sapă o groapă poate să cadă în ea (și cel ce dărimă un zid poate fi mușcat de șarpe)* (B 1997) / Engl. He who digs a pit may fall into it; (whoever breaks through a wall will be bitten by a snake);
- (d) Sir 27:26: *Cel ce sapă groapa altuia va cădea el în ea, (și cel ce întinde cursă prinde-se-va în ea)* (B 1997) / Engl. Whoever digs a pit falls into it, (and whoever lays a snare is caught in it).

The earliest known religious writings in Romanian date back to the first decades of the 16th century. In consideration of the distinctive cultural characteristics of the linguistic milieu, the instances of the aforementioned proverbial sequences are relatively scarce in the initial Romanian translations of the Psalter:

trade, a handful of gold; 10. Ce ție nu-ți place altuia nu(-i) face / Do not do to others what you would not like to be done to you; 11. Așchia nu sare departe de trunchi / The apple doesn't fall far from the tree; 12. Ochii care nu se văd se uită / Out of sight, out of mind; 13. Vorba dulce mult aduce / Kind words are sweet to the soul; 14. Apa trece, pietrele rămân / Water flows, rocks remain; 15. Minciuna are picioare scurte / A lie has no legs. Out of these 15 well-known Romanian proverbs, Paczolay (1997) mentions 7 texts: Cine sapă groapa altuia cade singur în ea; Prietenul la nevoie se cunoaște; Nu lăsa pe mâine ce poți face azi; Lupul își schimbă părul, dar năravul ba; Ulciorul nu merge de multe ori la apă; Ce ție nu-ți place altuia nu(-i) face; Ochii care nu se văd se uită.

² We concentrated our attention on four instances documented in the Bible, although the idea expressed by the proverb can also be identified in other sections of the sacred text, such as Psalms 9:15: "The nations have fallen into the pit they dug; their feet are caught in the net they have hidden".

(a) Ps 7:16:

Părau rimă și săpă, și cădzu în groapă ce făce (PV);
Pîrau rim și săpă și căzu în groapă ce feace (P 1577);
groapa scurmă și o săpă, și cădzu în groapă ceia ce făcea
(P 1589).

During the 17th and 18th centuries, the considerable efforts devoted to the translation and the objective of producing a comprehensive Romanian translation of the Bible resulted in a notable increase in the number of occurrences:

(a) Ps 7:16:

groapa o scurmă și o săpă, și căzu în groapa ce o făcu (PB³);
groapa o scurmă și o săpă, și cădzu în groapa ceea ce fece
(M);
groapa ce scurmă și săpă, și cădzu în groapa ceea ce fece
(M₁⁴);
groapă scurmă și săpă pre însa și va cădea în săpătura pre
care o lucră (DP 1680);
Groapă săpă și o adâncă pre ea și va cădea în groapa carea
au făcut (B 1688); cf. Groapă săpă, și o adâncă pre ea, și va
cădea întru borta carea au făcut (MS. 45);
Groapă săpă și o adâncă pre ia, și va cădea în groapa carea
au făcut (P 1694);
Groapă au săpat și o au deșchis pre ia și va cădea în groapa,
carea au făcut (P 1757);
Groapă au deșchis și o au săpat și au căzut în groapa carea
au făcut (B 1760);

³ “The Psalter of Bălgrad (the contemporary Romanian city of Alba Iulia – editors’ note) was translated with greater care, displayed a more evolved literary language than other 16th-century Romanian versions of the Psalter, and seems to have enjoyed great prestige. [...] It is beyond doubt that Milescu made use of this version in his translation of the *Old Testament*” (Ursu 1987: 440).

⁴ “The analysis of the Romanian psalms from the mss. 4818 reveals the following: The copies were written in Transylvania either by a Moldavian or a Transylvanian scribe. The copy was made between 1637 and 1647, with a possible date range of 1640 to 1644. The Romanian translation of the vespers psalms is a copy of a Moldavian version of the Psalter that is closely related to the mss. 540 (M in this study, as noted by the editors)”. See Chivu (1972: 154).

Groapă au săpat și o au deschis pre ea, și va cădea în groapa carea au făcut. (B 1795)⁵.

Sl. роѣъ изры, и ископа и, и впадетсѣ въ ѿмѣ, юже съдѣла (o);

Gr. λάκκον ὄρυξεν καὶ ἀνέσκαψεν αὐτὸν καὶ ἐμπεσεῖται εἰς βόθρον ὃν εἰργάσατο (LXX);

Lat. Lacum aperuit, et effodit eum; et incidit in foveam quam fecit (VUL).

(b) Pv 26:27:

Cela ce sapă groapa aproapelui său într-însa va cădea; (și cel ce tăvălește piatră, preste el se va tăvăli) (B 1688); cf.

Cela ce sapă groapă aproapelui său va cădea întru ea (și cel ce tăvălește piatră, preste el să va tăvăli) (MS. 45);

Cel ce sapă groapă cădea-va într-însa (și cel ce prăvale piatra să va întoarce la el) (B 1760);

Cel ce sapă groapă deaproapelui său va cădea însuși într-însa, (și cel ce prăvălește piatră, preste el să va prăvăli) (B 1795);

Gr. ὁ ὀρύσσων βόθρον τῷ πλησίον ἐμπεσεῖται εἰς αὐτόν (ὁ δὲ κυλίων λίθον ἐφ' ἑαυτὸν κυλίει) (LXX);

⁵ In order to understand the relations between these texts, the following overview delineates the pivotal points: "During the decade between 1651 and 1660, with the publication of the Bălgrad Psalter and the elaboration of the Moldavian Psalter, a significant advancement was made in the process of improving the translation of the Psalter in Romanian. The second significant advancement in the process occurred during the subsequent decade with the translation of the Old Testament by Nicolae Milescu and his revision of the translation, which was likely conducted by Dosoftei and his followers. In addition, both Milescu and the reviewers of his translation made use of earlier Romanian versions of Psalter, most notably the Moldavian Psalter and the Bălgrad Psalter. [...] Furthermore, Milescu's translation underwent a new revision and was published in the Bible of 1688. Thereafter, the Psalter was reproduced without changes by Antim Ivireanul, in the 1694 edition, which was issued in Bucharest. From the 1710 edition of Târgoviște onwards, the definitive edition of the Psalter was repeatedly reprinted in the 18th century, exhibiting minor discrepancies from one edition to another. These reprints were produced in Râmnic, Bucharest, Buzău, Iași, Blaj and Sibiu" (Ursu 1987: 441-442).

Lat. Qui fodit foveam incidet in eam, (et qui volvit lapidem revertetur ad eum) (VUL);

(c) Eccl 10:8:

Cel ce sapă groapă într-însa va cădea (și pre cel ce curățește gardul mușca-l-va pre el șarpe) (B 1688); cf. *Cel ce sapă groapă întru ea va cădea, (și pre cel ce curățește gardul, mușca-l-va pre el șarpe)* (MS. 45);

Cel ce sapă groapă cădea-va într-însa, (și cel ce rășipește gardul mușca-l-va șearpele) (B 1760);

Cel ce sapă groapă el va cădea într-însa, (și cel ce curățește gardul mușca-l-va pre el șearpele) (B 1795);

Gr. ὁ ὀρύσσων βόθρον ἐν αὐτῷ ἐμπεσεῖται (καὶ καθαιροῦντα φραγμόν δήξεται αὐτὸν ὄφις) (LXX);

Lat. Qui fodit foveam incidet in eam, (et qui dissipat sepem mordebit eum coluber) (VUL);

(d) Sir 27:27 (sau 29):

Cel ce sapă groapă într-însa va cădea, (și cel ce întinde cursă întru ea să va prinde) (B 1688); cf. *Cel ce sapă groapă la ea va cădea (și cel ce întinde laț la el să va prinde)* (MS. 45);

Și cel ce sapă groapă va cădea într-însa; (și cel ce pune piatră aproapelui să va lovi de ea; și cel ce întinde cursă altuia va peri într-însa) (B 1760);

Cel ce sapă groapă cădea-va într-însa, (și cel ce întinde cursă prinde-să-va într-însa) (B 1795);

Gr. ὁ ὀρύσσων βόθρον εἰς αὐτὸν ἐμπεσεῖται (καὶ ὁ ἰστῶν παγίδα ἐν αὐτῇ ἀλώσεται) (LXX);

Lat. et qui foveam fodit in illam decidet (et qui statuit lapidem proximo offendet in eo et qui laqueum alio peribit in illo) (VUL).

In general, the Romanian translations are consistent with their foreign counterparts in terms of fidelity to the source text. The discourse structure and grammar of the biblical sequences are consistent with those of the source texts. Similarly, the vocabu-

lary selections of the Romanian translations adhere to the lexical semantics and the synonymic variation (where applicable) of the source language, while also incorporating the synonyms that emerge in Romanian over time⁶.

It would appear that the initial context, (a) *Ps* 7:16, is not an exact reflection of the original text. Nevertheless, irrespective of the source language (Slavonic, Greek, Latin), the biblical verse presents a textual model characterized by variation in expression in two key aspects: (1) the name of what is being dug and (2) the names of the two actions referenced in the opening part of the verse. The early Romanian versions adhere closely to the expressive valences of the original textual model:

PS: (1) *părău* – *groapă*, (2) *rimă* – *săpă*;
 P 1577: (1) *părău* – *groapă*, (2) *rim* – *săpă*;
 DP 1680: (1) *groapă* – *săpătura*, (2) *scurmă* – *săpă*;
 MS. 45: (1) *groapă* – *borta*, (2) *săpă* – *adâncă*.

In other versions, a pair of distinct lexical elements is retained solely with regard to the names of the actions referred to in the initial part of the verse. This more economical pattern, also documented in the 16th-century Romanian translations, became the dominant approach in 17th-century translation practices and remained so for the remainder of the period under consideration:

P 1589: (1) *groapa* – *groapă*, (2) *scurmă* – *săpă*;
 PB, M, M₁: (1) *groapă* – *groapa*, (2) *scurmă* – *săpă*;
 B 1688, P 1694: (1) *groapa* – *groapă*, (2) *săpă* – *adâncă*;
 P 1757: (1) *groapă* – *groapa*, (2) *au săpat* – *au deșchis*;
 B 1760: (1) *groapă* – *groapa*, (2) *au deșchis* – *au săpat*.

It can be seen, therefore, that the “innovation” does not deviate from the patterns of the source texts, as it illustrates a Romanian

⁶ In addition to the aforementioned discussion, we wish to draw attention to the situation in *Sir* 27:27/29, the second part of the verse. Here, the Greek term *παγίδα* (*παγίς*, *ἰδος* ἡ), and its Latin correspondent *laqueum* (*laqueus*), are translated by Rom. *cursă* “trap” and Rom. *laț* “snare” in successive versions and editions.

equivalence created within the conceptual and linguistic frame provided by the Slavonic, Greek, or Latin synonyms:

Sl. **рѡѡ** \ ‘λάκκος’, ‘fovea’ (Miklosich), and **ѡѡѡ** ‘βόθρος’, ‘λάκκος’, ‘fovea’ (Miklosich);
 Gr: **λάκκος ѡ** ‘1. a pond for water-fowl, 2. a pit, reservoir’ (Liddell-Scott), and **βόθρος ѡ**, ‘any hole or pit dug in the ground’ (Liddell-Scott), ‘a pit, a ditch’ (Thayer, Louw-Nida);
 Latin: **lacus** ‘fosse, tombe, sépulcre’, and **fovea** ‘fosse’ (Blaise).

In the context of the syntagmatic structure of the verse, the pairing of nouns referring to (1) what is being dug does not preclude the repetition of the same word with distinct syntactic functions. From a diachronic perspective, it can be concluded that the double use of the Romanian word *groapă* in Ps 7:16, probably arose independently of the linguistic contexts evidenced by other verses. This is because the double use of the word is derived from the suppression of lexical synonymy through the reiteration of the same word. In Prov 26:27, Eccl 10:8, and Sir 27:27, the Romanian translators consistently utilized the same noun, *groapă*, to translate the verses. The formal resemblance of the four biblical loci found in the Romanian translations from the 16th to the 18th century does not support the hypothesis that the suppression of synonymy among words meaning “pit”, “ditch”, “hole” and the like serves as evidence for the origin of a proverb. Had this been the case, the translators would probably have been inclined to quote the proverb, even if this would have resulted in a deviation from the patterns of the source texts.

2.2. The literary translation reflex

Towards the end of the 16th century, apart from the translation of the Bible, the translation of the literature from the period contributed to the circulation of what came to be known as popular books. In terms of both form and content, such translations facilitated the creation of sayings and proverbs rooted in the Bible, regardless of whether they made explicit reference to the Scripture. Such texts can be classified within the genre of wisdom literature.

In *Florea darurilor* (*The Flower of Virtue*), a Romanian manuscript (Mss. 4620) of a translation that may have descended from a Slavonic version translated from Greek (Gheție & Mareș 1985: 390), or that may have been translated directly from Greek (Moraru 1996: 60), the linguistic pattern follows the biblical prototype expressed in such loci as *Pv* 26:27, *Eccl* 10:8 and *Sir* 27:27. The authority of King Solomon is invoked to validate the explicit or the implicit attacks on the character of a particular individual:

“Solomon dzise: Cine face groapă să bage altul într-însa, însuș va cădea într-însa”. Și iarăși: “Cine rostogoleaște pietri întorcu-se spr-însul” (FD 1996: 543^r/151).

He (Solomon) also says: “Who digs the grave falls into it and who turns the stone causes it to fall over him” (FFV 1953: 63).

Other filiate versions (Moraru 1996: 46) included in the 17th and 18th century miscellanies, display the same pattern used to convey words of wisdom. The following examples are excerpted from FD 1996, *passim*:

Și cine sapă groapă altuè, e(l) va cădè într-însa (Ms. 3821, *Codex Neogoeanus*, copied by Ion of Sîmpetru in 1620);
 Și ci(n)(e) sapă groapa a(l)tuia apo(i) cade e(l) într-î(n)sa (Ms. 1436, copied by Costea of Șcheii Brașovului in 1693);
 Cine sa(p)(ă) groapa a(l)tuia însuși va cadè într-însa. (Ms. 550).

The ancient verse from the Book of Proverbs is also found in the newer edition of *Florea darurilor* (*The Flower of Virtue*), translated from Greek by a man of the cloth, the hieromonk Filotei Sfetagorețul (Moraru 1996: 69), and printed in Snagov, near Bucharest, in 1700, with the support of the Orthodox Metropolitan Antim Ivireanul: “Solomon au zis: (...) „Cel ce face groapă ca să bage pre altul, cade el într-însa”.

The biblical proverbial wisdom is also woven into the ancient East Christian narrative of Barlaam and Josaphat (Rom. *Istoria sfinților Varlaam și Iosaf de la India*):

“Auzind Nahor cuvintele acestea, cumplit s-a spăimîntat, văzîndu-se căzut în groapa pe care singur și-o săpase. De va întărita pe fiul împăratului, moartea îl așteaptă la sfîrșitul zilei și nimic nu-l poate scăpa” (CP 1998: 117).

“When Nakhor heard these words of Iodasaph’s he realized that he had fallen into the snare which he himself had dug, and perceived the evil fate and perdition which faced him, now that death threatened him from both sides” (BALA-VARIANI 1966: 139).

Another widely-known literary work, entitled *Esopia* (Engl. *Life of Aesop*), was translated in the early 18th century from Greek and Russian sources, the latter following a Latin prototype. In this context, the biblical proverbial verse is referenced:

“Iar ei să apucară de băură încropul și nu vrea să-și bage degetul în gură. Iar domnul lor îi pripi și încă nu apucară să-și bage degetele în gură și îndată începură a vărsa încropul împreună cu smochinele.

Atuncea căzu Esop la picioarele domnului său și să ruga să răsplătească clevetitorilor lui. Și îndată porunci domnul său de-i dezbrăcară cu pieile goale și-i bătură foarte rău. Și să plini atuncea cuvântul *Scripturii*, unde zice că „*cela ce sapă groapa altuia cade el într-însa*” (E⁷, LMR 2003: 789).

“But they hardly finished drinking the hot water that they became nauseous, and, without further ado, they refused the figs.

Then Aesop fell at his lord’s feet and begged him to repay his knaves. And immediately his lord commanded to strip them naked and beat them very badly. And thus the word of *Scripture* came true, where it says that “*whoever digs another’s grave falls into it*” (our translation).

⁷ The text is excerpted from I. C. Chițimia and Dan Simionescu (editors), *Cărțile populare în literatura românească*, vol. 1, Bucharest, Editura pentru Literatură, 1963, p. 117-160. This edition includes a transcription of Petru Bart’s *Viața și pildele preînțeleptului Esop / The Life and Parables of Aesop*, Sibiu, 1795, translated from a Russian version.

The renowned literary work, *The Story of Ahikar* (Rom. *Archirie și Anadan*), has been preserved in fifty-seven manuscripts, dating between 1708 and 1863. These manuscripts were discovered across all Romanian-speaking territories (Georgescu 1997:136). It seems reasonable to posit that the source of the Romanian translation was a Slavonic edition. Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that copies were widely circulated during the 17th century, and indeed continued to be so thereafter.

Fățul mieu, nici să sapi groapa altuia, că apoi tu ver cădea într-însa (AA 1997: 62^{r/5-6}/158; MS. BAR 577 from 1708⁸; see Georgescu 1997: 125).

Engl.: “Yes, my brethren (...) whoso digs a pit for another shall fall into it himself” (Conybeare et al. 1913: 23).

It is acknowledged that the Romanian translations of the story known as *Archirie și Anadan* include versions with linguistic and stylistic changes adopted under the growing influence of folklore (Chițimia 1972: 409). However, it is important to note that the English renderings of the aforementioned mentioned fragment from older writings in various Eastern languages do not support the existence of a proverbial matrix active in the collective consciousness of the people. Instead, they demonstrate the preservation of the patterns set by the source texts during the act of translation:

Sl.: A eže kto drugu svoemu jamu kopa<eti>, sa<mī> da se vīpadne<tī> vī nju. (*Povest’ ob Akire premudrom* 26^v in Pelusi 1992: 217);

Armenian to English: “and he who digs a pit for others, himself falls into the pit” (Conybeare et al. 1913: 55);

⁸ The Romanian manuscript BAR 577, housed in the Library of the Romanian Academy, contains interlinear comments from an unidentified reviewer from the 18th century. The comments are intended to “improve the text by adding explanations and correcting the fragments deemed erroneous or inadequate from the standpoint of precision and the accuracy of expression” (Georgescu 1997:135). In this context, the proverb is modified as follows: “Nici să sapi groapa altuia, că apoi *bine* tu *poț* cădea într-însa” (MS BAR 577: 62^{r/5-6}) / Engl. transl. “Don’t dig another man’s grave because you might well fall into it”.

Old Turkish to English: “And whoso for another digs, into his pit he falls himself” (Conybeare et al. 1913: 98);

Arabic to English: “For he who digs a pit for his brother shall fall into it; and he who sets up traps shall be caught in them” (Conybeare et al. 1913: 161);

Syriac to English: “Who digs a pit for his neighbour fills it with his (own) stature” (De Blois 1984: 50);

Middle Persian to English: “Whoever digs a pit for his opponents falls in himself” (De Blois 1984:50).

With regard to the translations of the sequences under discussion, three linguistic aspects are noteworthy:

i) The type of discourse most frequently employed is a declarative speech act, as evidenced by the biblical occurrences (b), (c) and (d);

ii) Whether metaphorical or metonymic, the figurative core of the sequence excerpted from various books that illustrate the wisdom literature genre is the Romanian noun *groapă*. This term also serves as the constant marker, as evidenced by the translations of the Scripture;

iii) The syntactic pattern interwoven into the fabric of the literary discourse is similar to that observed in (b) Prov 26:27⁹, a sequence that stands apart from the other biblical loci through the use of Dative, in accordance with the Greek syntax of the Septuagint: ὁ ὀρύσσων βόθρον τῷ πλησίον ἐμπεσεῖται εἰς αὐτόν ὁ.

These facts ultimately lead us to infer that the religious and the literary textual patterns that emerge during the process of translation act as the linguistic and cultural precursors that shape and drive the popular wit to create proverbs with a specific grammar and choice of words.

2.3. *The proverb in use: from translation to creativity*

Among the various means of verbal communication within a given language, the presence of a proverb in the collective con-

⁹ Cf. Septuagint 4/1: “Whoever digs his neighbour’s grave falls into it...”; see also the translators’ note: “his neighbour”: own gloss LXX”, p. 492.

sciousness, symbolizing, in concise form, a particular type of real-life experience, enables the use of that paremiological unit in either previously unfamiliar contexts, that is under new circumstances of the verbal exchange, or in familiar contexts adopted and adapted to accommodate the new functions of the respective proverbial use. In the pre-modern Romanian literary tradition, apart from the long-standing tradition of translating the Bible and the neighbouring wisdom literature, the pathway that led to the autonomous use of proverbial texts emerges at the turn of the 17th and the 18th century. This is evidenced in secular writings devoted to local history, as proven by Zanne (2019/I/767: 112-113):

Nicolae Costin: “Șanț sapa și cadă într’însul cel ce l’au făcut”, and “Groapa aș sapat și aș cadut într’nsă”;

Dimitrie Cantemir: “În grópa care singur aș săpat, într’aceiași singur aș cadut”;

Ion Neculce: „Cine sapa grópa altuia cade el într’nsa”.

In all cases, the syntagmatic variation of the proverb in the making indicates the diversity of the primary sources, whether biblical or secular, as well as the scholars’ preferences for a particular biblical book, in a certain edition, which they imitated or adapted to forge the form and the meaning of a given author’s formula of wisdom. This process of variation is particularly evident in the literary works of Metropolitan Dosoftei, especially when compared with his translations of sacred texts. In the works of this major literary precursor, one can discern that in the verse translation of the Psalter, published in 1673, Dosoftei diverges from the canonical structure of the biblical psalms, by creating the following rhyme: “Cine va sapá grópa altuia să’l surpe / Singur va cădea’n rîpă și viêta sa ș’a rumpe” (DP1673) / Engl.: “He who digs a pit for another to fall / He himself goes down and ends his life of all” (our translation). In consideration of the biblical prototypes in Prov 26:27, Eccl 10:8 and Sir 27:27, the poet may be exonerated for the “betrayal” of the source text when rendering the idea in verse. However, the literary experiment was abandoned in 1680, when the Romanian metropolitan translated the psalms in prose and closely adhered to the canonical structure of

the source text: “groapă scurmă și săpă pre înșa și va cădea în săpătura pre care o lucră” (DP 1680). The lyrical style and prose translation choices evident in Dosoftei’s work allow us to posit that the literary freedom of expression may have been influenced by the already crystallized proverbial form present in the popular wit. The absence of formal and semantic constraints inherent to sacred text enables an artistic interpretation that resonates with the collective consciousness of the people. Thus, the secular wisdom literature enriches the common mind of the folk in the creation of paremiological units.

2.4. *The proverb in use: from the dictionary of proverbs to proverb play*

Proverb collections, dictionaries, and textbooks, such as those by Botezatu & Hincu (2001: 202) and Gheorghe (1986: 143), include the Romanian proverb *Cine sapă groapa altuia cade el/singur în ea/intr-înșa* / Engl. *Whoever digs a pit for others shall fall into it*. Following the proverbialization process during the 16th to 18th centuries, as evidenced by the use of proverbs in the literary works of the era, including popular books and those of Dimitrie Cantemir, the cultural and linguistic history of the proverb has remained unaltered with regard to the consistent deployment of the lexical core *groapă*, as opposed to other potential synonyms or substitutes that might have prompted the emergence of alternative proverbial expressions. Another biblical verse, Ezekiel 18:2, *Părinții mănâncă aguridă și copiilor li se strepezesc dinții* / Engl. *The parents eat sour grapes and the children’s teeth are set on the edge*, varies over time due to lexical substitution: *Părinții mănâncă mere acre și copiilor li se strepezesc dinții* (Golescu, in Zanne 1900/IV/ 10544: 540), *Unii gustă din lămâie ș-altora li se strepezesc dinții* (Eminescu 1963/VI: 367), *Părinții mănâncă plăcinte și la fii li se strepezesc dinții* (Cristea 1901:206). The string of Romanian lexical substitutes, *mere acre* (Engl. sour apples) - *lămâie* (Engl. lemon) – *plăcinte* (Engl. pies), proves that proverbs are flexible miniature texts with a rich cultural and linguistic evolution.

As a consequence of the loss of its biblical roots, the Romanian proverb *Cine sapă groapa altuia cade el/singur în ea/intr-înșa* continues to enjoy great vitality in contemporary use.

As Zanne (2019/I: 113) indicates, the loss of the proverb's Biblical origin was already underway by the end of the 19th century, and the process continued throughout the 20th century and beyond: "this proverb, so widespread among us, [...], is taken from the Bible". The people's grasp of the Bible is largely superficial, leading to a reliance on literary works and school textbooks as the source of many proverbs. The absence of a connection with the source texts gives rise to the formation of antiproverbial cognates (Milică 2013) that primarily reconfigure the literal and empirical contexts of the proverb:

*Cine sapă groapa altuia departe ajunge*¹⁰ / Engl. lit. Whoever digs a pit for another travels far;

*Cine se scoală de dimineată sapă groapa altuia*¹¹ / Engl. Whoever wakes up early digs a pit for another;

*Cine sapă groapa altuia lucrează pentru primărie*¹² / Engl. Whoever digs a pit for another works for the City Hall;

*Cine sapă groapa altuia trebuie să aibă o calificare*¹³ / Engl. Whoever digs a pit for another must have a degree;

*Cine sapă groapa altuia rămâne fără sapă*¹⁴ / Engl. Whoever digs a pit for another is left without the shovel.

3. Concluding remarks

The aforementioned corpus of textual evidence suggests that the earliest documented instance of the spontaneous use of the Romanian proverb sanctioning perfidy and cunning is found in Dosoftei's *Psalter in Verse*, published in 1673: *Cine va sapă grópa altuia să'l surpe* / *Singur va cădea'n rîpă și viêța sa ș'a rumpe* / Engl. *He who digs a pit for another to fall* / *He himself goes*

¹⁰ <https://rightwords.ro/folclor/cine-sapa-groapa-altuia-departe-ajunge--4068>, retrieved on 27 March 2024.

¹¹ <https://rightwords.ro/citate/cine-se-scoala-de-dimineata-sapa-groapa-altuia--211503>, retrieved on 27 March 2024.

¹² <https://roxanamchirila.com/2015/07/06/cine-sapa-groapa-altuia-lucreaza-pentru-primarie/>, retrieved on 27 March 2024.

¹³ <https://rightwords.ro/citate/cine-sapa-groapa-altuia-trebuie-sa-aiba-o-calificare--211631>, retrieved on 27 March 2024.

¹⁴ <https://www.simonatache.ro/2009/06/11/cine-sapa-groapa-altuia-ramane-fara-sapa/>, retrieved on 28 March 2024.

down and ends his life of all (our translation). In this literary context, the translator deviates from the textual archetype of Ps 7:16, allowing himself to be influenced by the proverbial sayings of the people.

The transfer of biblical parables into common use is a phenomenon observed in both ancient and modern times, and has been facilitated by secular literature. Derived from the sacred context of the Bible and adopted by society, proverbs such as Rom. *Cine sapă groapa altuia cade el/singur în ea/intr-însa* / Engl. *Whoever digs a pit for others shall fall into it* are subject to variation, as is often the case with verbal folklore. Despite their conventional status as fixed sayings, the tendency of oral transmission is to explore different linguistic and logical forms. The more frequently a proverb is used, the more susceptible it is to alteration, irrespective of its provenance. Among the various forms that are deemed acceptable and accepted in general usage, anti-proverbs serve to illustrate that the structure of proverbs is not an immutable and inviolable entity.

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<https://doi.org/10.29162/pv.42.1.1077>

Preliminary communication

Received on 15 March 2025

Accepted for publication on 19 May 2025

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THE DICTIONARY OF MODERN PROVERBS: FIFTH SUPPLEMENT

Abstract: This is the fifth supplement to *The Dictionary of Modern Proverbs* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2012), edited by Charles Clay Doyle, Wolfgang Mieder, and Fred R. Shapiro. It registers 49 additional modern Anglo-American proverbs with historical dates and contextualized instances.

Keywords: American, Anglo-American, British, dictionary, modern paremiography, proverbs.

Since the publication of our first, second, third, and fourth supplements to *The Dictionary of Modern Proverbs* (New Haven CT: Yale UP, 2012) in *Proverbium* 33 (2016) 85-120, 35 (2018) 15-44, 37 (2020) 53-86, and 39 (2022) 86-119, we have continued to gather addenda. As before, we must credit a lot of help from our vigilant friends, kinspersons, students, professional acquaintances, and strangers. Among those who have assisted, in direct and indirect ways, two individuals stand out: Fred R. Shapiro, our collaborator on the dictionary itself and author of the magisterial *New Yale Book of Quotations* (2021), and Garson O'Toole, whose "Quote Investigator" website (quoteinvestigator.com) comprises a continually expanding and meticulously researched repository of early datings for fixed expressions, including antedatings for some of our entries in *The Dictionary of Modern Proverbs*.

Of the recent addenda we have on file, the following are among the most prevalently encountered. As in *The Dictionary of Modern Proverbs* itself, we have included only “true proverbs,” as folklorists term them—that is, “propositional” sentences (occasionally, elliptical sentences), not mere phrases or similes or wellerisms or sarcastic interrogatives. A “modern proverb,” for our purposes, means one that originated no earlier than 1900, as far as we have been able to ascertain.

A reminder: The *key word* of a proverb, which governs the alphabetical placement of its entry, does not necessarily point to the “subject” or “theme” of the proverb; it is simply the *first noun* (in its singular form) present in the proverb as most commonly phrased (or, if no noun occurs, then the first *finite verb*).

ADVERSITY brings out the best in us.

1902 D. L. Hill, “Act Well Your Part,” *The Frater* 2, no. 1 (Nov.), 8: “. . . [D]id you ever think that adversity brings out the best in us and makes us try harder? Then a conscientious dentist will investigate, and will not be satisfied until he knows how to remedy his own defects . . .” **1911** E. G. Aaker, “To the Stockholders of the Hatton Farmers Elevator Company,” *American Co-Operative Journal* 6, no. 12 (Aug.), 989: “. . . [A]s adversity brings out the best there is in a man, so does hard competition spur on and bring out the best ability in a business man.” **1960** John F. Kennedy, speech in Manchester, NH, 2 Sep., *The Speeches, Remarks, Press Conferences, and Statements of Senator John F. Kennedy* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office), 82: “There is an old axiom that adversity brings out the best . . . [A]nd because the adversity has dealt hard blows to the Democrats of this State, you have chosen the best possible candidates, and I am delighted and proud to be running with them.” **2005** George W. Bush, “Weekly Compilations of Presidential Documents,” *Washington* (magazine) 41, no. 37 (19 Sep.), 1380: “Hurricane Katrina flattened entire towns Once more, our hearts ache for our fellow citizens Yet we are being reminded that adversity brings out the best in the American spirit.”

AGE is not (is more than) just a number.

1999 Matthew Lippman, *Criminal Procedure* (Thousand Oaks CA: SAGE), 364: “An I. Q. score, like age, is more than just a number.” **2005** *Home News Tribune* (East Brunswick NJ), 27 May: “To the [elliptical trainer] machine, age is not ‘just a number.’ It is an important part of the equation.” **2007** Laurice V. Hunter-Scott, *Inspiration, Reflection, Recollection* (Bloomington IN: Author House), 36 (poem): “Age is not just a number / For at different ages you must pause and wonder.” **2018** *Sunday Nation* (Nairobi), 30 Dec: “. . . [T]he court ruled that amending the age law would result in several undesirable legal and societal implications The court seemed to be saying, age is not just a number.” The proverb probably originated as a counter-proverb in response to the consoling “Age is just a number.”

One rotten (bad) APPLE does not spoil the whole barrel (bushel).

1990 *St. Petersburg (FL) Times*, 7 Sep.: “Good people . . . served to remind me that ‘one rotten apple does not spoil the barrel.’” **1999** *Asbury Park (NJ) Press*, 21 July: “Punish those who err, but one apple does not make an entire bad bushel.” **2002** *Daily Journal* (Vineland NJ), 31 July: “Contrary to popular belief, one rotten apple does not spoil the bunch.” **2012** *The Courier (Brisbane, QLD)*, 15 Nov.: “One rotten apple does not spoil the barrel. It just makes it harder to see the good fruit.” The proverb probably originated as a counter proverb responding to “One rotten apple will spoil the whole barrel.”

You have to take the BAD with the good.

1912 Irving E. Long, letter to the editor, *American Bee Journal* 52, no. 2 (Feb.), 56: We must take the bad with the good in this life, and be thankful [,] for it might be much worse.” **1949** Junius B. Wood, “Cartels Could Strangle America,” *Nation’s Business* 37, no. 5 (May), 67: A buyer must take the bad with the good in a package so the syndicate will not be stuck with inferior stones.” **1980** *New York Times*, 21 Aug.: “But these are difficult times for America and we must be prepared to take the bad with the good.”

1986 *Toronto Star*, 18 May: “In a larger context, a moral one, we might learn the lesson that one must take the bad with the good.”

Kill the BODY, and the head will die.

1971 Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (New York: Random House), 22: “‘KILL THE BODY AND THE HEAD WILL DIE’ This line appears in my notebook, for some reason. Perhaps some connection with Joe Frazier. Is he still alive?” (capitalization as shown). **1982** *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), 16 Nov.: “The old sages of boxing will nod wisely and say: ‘You kill the body, and the head will die.’” **1992** *San Diego Union-Tribune*, 12 Sep.: “One of the oldest axioms in the fight game is kill the body and the head will die.” **2006** Kevin Chong, “Pursuing Structure in Boxing and Architecture,” *Books in Canada* 35, no. 2 (Mar.), 13: “. . . ‘Kill the body and the head will die.’ This is an admonition against the very common beginner practice of focusing the assault only on the opponent’s head.”

No BODY (No corpse), no murder.

1925 Mary Roberts Rinehart, *The Red Lamp* (New York: A. L. Burt), 233: “Then—he simply got into the car and drove away. Cool and crafty to the last. No body, no murder.” **1931** Erle Stanley Gardner, “The Vanishing Corpse,” *Detective Fiction Weekly*, 15 Aug.; Quoted from Gardner, *The Case of the Crying Swallow, A Perry Mason Novelette and Other Stories* (New York: William Morrow, 1971), 136: “Happened to read a detective story a few days ago that mentioned the point. I asked a lawyer friend about it He said it was so. No corpse, no murder, no murder, no conviction. That’s the law.” **2014** *Daily Telegraph* (London), 9 Feb.: “‘Perhaps familiar with the old mafia adage “no body, no murder,” the woman began frantically eating the rolls,’ the newspaper reported.” **2020** Rey Elbo, “Sexual Harassment Exposed in a Poison-Pen Letter,” *Business World* (online), 27 Nov.: “The principle in law, justice, and fair play is that if there’s no victim, no offense was committed. In other words, no corpse, no murder.”

CAREGIVERS need care (too).

1987 *St. Petersburg (FL) Times*, 20 Oct.: “[section heading and opening sentence] Caregivers need care, too [.] Caring for an elderly person—especially an Alzheimer’s or memory loss victim—only gets harder if you are doing it in isolation.” **1988** Lynn Osterkamp, “Family Caregivers,” *Aging* [magazine; U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, no. 358], 3: “‘Caregivers need care too!’ Such familiar slogans reflect the recent emphasis on the needs of American families caring for elderly relatives.” **1992** *Boston Globe*, 31 Mar.: “Some suggestions and resources are found in ‘Caregivers Need Care Too,’ a free consumer information booklet.” **2022** *This Day* (Lagos, Nigeria), 9 Oct.: “According to him [Jehovah’s Witness spokesman Olusegun Eroyemi], there is a lack of awareness about mental health Mental health can be managed, and caregivers need care.”

In CHAOS (there) is opportunity.

1987 *Los Angeles Times*, 24 May: “The anticipated problems [of the University of California’s acquiring a new telescope] seemed overwhelming. On the other hand, in chaos there is opportunity.” **2001** *Wall Street Journal*, Eastern Edition [New York], 13 Apr.: “Art buyers and sellers need to remember the old saying: In chaos, there is opportunity.” **2004** *Atlanta Journal*, 17 Jun.: “If [civil rights leader] Joe Beasley could pick a motto, it might be this: In chaos, there is opportunity.” **2021** Carole L. Worthington, “Stronger Together,” *Experience: The Magazine of the Senior Lawyers Division, American Bar Association* 32, no. 1 (Sep./Oct.), 3: “It’s important to remember that in chaos is opportunity. Our recent experiences with COVID-19 forced us to move rapidly ahead to working effectively on a remote basis.”

Let your CONSCIENCE be your guide.

1923 First Lieut. Henry F. Adams . . . to Marine Barracks, San Diego, “Some Observations on Kissing a Girl,” *Leatherneck* (Quantico VA) 6, no. 12 (24 Mar.), 7: “. . . Use your own judgment and let your conscience be your guide.” **1940** *Pinocchio*

(Disney motion picture; the Blue Fairy speaks): “Now remember, Pinocchio: be a good boy. And always let your conscience be your guide.” **1952** *Changing Times* (magazine) (Washington) 6, no. 5 (May), 2 (anonymous front matter): “The trouble with letting your conscience be your guide is that the darned thing knows only the dull places.” **2018** *Herald Sun* (Melbourne, Australia), 19 Dec.: “The proverb ‘Let your conscience be your guide’ seems almost to be non-existent in this day and age.”

CONTROL what you can control.

1992 John E. Newman, *How to Stay Cool, Calm, and Collected When the Pressure Is On* (New York: Amacom), 23: “The guiding principle of this ‘make choices and take action’ approach to dealing with problems and stress is: *control what you can control*” (italics as shown). **1997** *Star Tribune* (Minneapolis), 7 Dec.: “There’s an old saying, ‘Control what you can control.’ That’s hard work and effort.” **2017** Roberet Pawlicki, *Control What You Can Control: A Path to Happiness* (Scotts Valley CA: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform). **2021** *Des Moines Register*, 7 June: “. . . [Coach Matt Pries] offered up a time-honored coaching adage: ‘Control what you can control.’”

The COST (price) of freedom is high (Freedom does not come cheap).

1957 *Marine Corps Gazette* (Quantico VA) 41, no. 8 (Aug), 15: (Congressman Carl Vinson, Democrat of Georgia, speaks) “The price of freedom is high, but the cost of defeat is beyond description.” **1960** *Life* (magazine) 48, no. 9 (7 Mar.), 8: “An open letter to John Wayne on the occasion of the 124th Anniversary of the Alamo; 6 March 1969. We believe with you that the world—and our own nation—needs [sic] to be reminded that freedom does not come cheap and easy.” **1961** John F. Kennedy, speech in Chapel Hill NC, 22 Oct., *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: John F. Kennedy* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1962), 1:668: “Peace and freedom do not come cheap, and we are destined . . . to live out most if not all our lives in uncertainty and challenge and peril.” **2019** *Sunday Independ-*

ent (Dublin), 11 Aug.: “The cost of freedom is always high but Irish people have always paid it. One path we never choose is the path of surrender and submission, and we are not going to do so now, Brexit or no Brexit.”

Keep your EYE on the ball.

1921 *Baron's* (Boston) 1, no. 24 (17 Oct.), 11: “He [Eugene G. Grace] plays [golf] close to par and never has to be reminded no [sic, for *to*] ‘Keep his eye on the ball’” **1926** Arthur Royce MacDonald, “Opportunity Comes to Getsital,” *Nation's Business* (Washington) 14, no. 4 (Apr.) 20: “‘Keep your eye on the ball! Play your [golf] shots!’ . . . Apply that to business.” **1997** *Daily News* (Los Angeles), 15 Apr.: “There’s an old baseball adage, ‘Keep your eye on the ball.’ Chaminade’s Tyler Dersom and Burroughs’ Anthony Fabrizio won’t ever forget it after escaping serious injury when each lost sight of the ball during practice last week.” **2015** *Limerick Leader* (Ireland), 12 Apr.: “[Golfer] Bob Jones’s wisdom is fit for the ages ‘I have found little value in the maxim “keep your eye on the ball.” Think of staying down to the ball.’”

FAILURE is the best teacher.

1990 *San Diego Tribune*, 19 Nov.: “Maybe failure is the best teacher I was lucky enough to meet people who taught me to rebuild my life.” **2006** *Knight Ridder Tribune Business News* (Washington), 11 Apr.: “They say failure is the best teacher Failure brings to light things that are overlooked if you are succeeding.” **2012** *Times-Transcript* (Moncton NB), 13 Oct.: “It makes me wonder: If failure is the best teacher, then why are we pressured to succeed?” **2017** *Jordan Times* (Amman), 28 Feb.: “For his part, Marwan Juma, chairman of start-up incubator Oasis 500, said failure is the best teacher for entrepreneurs”

Not all GIFTS (presents) are (come) wrapped (in shiny paper).

2000 *Daily Breeze* (Torrance CA), 25 Dec.: “Not all gifts are wrapped up nicely under the Christmas Tree. Some gifts are

always there, right in front of us.” **2004** *Daytona Beach [FL] News-Journal*, 26 Dec.: “Not all gifts come wrapped in colored paper and ribbons. Gifts come in all sizes from many sources.” **2009** *Stuart [FL] News*, 29 Dec.: “This holiday season let’s remember that not all gifts are wrapped in shiny paper and decorated with ribbon and bows. There are many intangible gifts” **2012** *Daily News* [Bowling Green KY], 18 Dec.: “Not all presents come wrapped. Help people you love discover the towns they love.”

The hurrier (hurrieder) you GO, the behinder you get.

1962 “What They’re Saying,” *Advertising Age* 33, no. 21 (21 May), 20: “The cleaning woman quit. She said, ‘The hurrier you go, the behinder you get.’” **1998** *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 4 Feb.: “Mrs. [June Christman] Santmyer was remembered for making pronouncements that sometimes sounded odd, reflecting her Pennsylvania Dutch roots, such as . . . ‘The hurrier you go, the behinder you get.’” **2000** “Money: Strategies for Putting Your Plan on Course,” *Consumer Reports* 65, no. 2 (Feb.), 56: “Even parents who set their sights on a lower-cost state school can barely manage to save enough to keep pace with college-cost inflation. As they say, ‘The hurrieder you go, the behinder you get.’” **2021** *The Gleaner* (Henderson KY), 9 June: “Then I heard Grandma speak, ‘The hurrieder you go, the behinder you get.’ Take a breath and stay calm.”

When (If) they GO low, go high.

2016 *Targeted News Service* (Washington DC) 27 July (U.S. Department of State Foreign Press Center briefing, Brian Fallon speaking): “She [Michelle Obama] described the approach that she and President Obama take as when they go low, go high. And that’s for the most part the approach we’ve taken.” **2020** Susanne Tedrick, *Women of Color in Tech* (Indianapolis: Wiley), xiii: “When they go low, go high. . . . [D]on’t match a bully’s bad actions with your own bad actions. Engaging in bad behavior of your own may only lead to you being disciplined.” **2020** *Green Bay Press Gazette*, 13 Aug.: “So maybe the next step for

[basketball player Giannis] Antetokounmpo—forget the 3-pointers, stop worrying about the free throws—is to channel that fury. Ignore all the admonishing. And then, in the game, and always in life, when they go low . . . Go high” (ellipsis dots and capitalization as shown). **2016** *Canberra Times*, 15 Nov. (column by Jenna Price): “I’m taking the advice of both Michelle Obama and Hillary Clinton. When they go low, go high. In other words, turn the other cheek.”

When (If) they go low, go lower.

2017 *Star-Phoenix* (Saskatoon), 17 June: “He [Gavin McInnes, head of the right-wing Proud Boys militia organization] has pledged to fight back against violence from leftist activists . . . ‘When they go low, go lower. Mace ’em back. Throw bricks at their head. Let’s destroy them.’” **2019** *Herald Sun* (Melbourne, Australia), 7 Apr.: “Barnaby [Joyce] went low and Natalie [Joyce] went high. Inspiring, especially as my own approach is ‘When they go low, go lower’ and this usually involves bad-mouthing exes and late-night drive bys of their homes.” **2019** *South Florida Sun-Sentinel* (Fort Lauderdale), 30 Sep.: “It’s not the players [sic] or coaches [sic] fault for what’s happening It’s part of the tanking plan. Motto: ‘If they go low, we go lower.’” **2020** *Irish Independent* (Dublin), 26 June (summarizing the plot of an American TV movie): “Faith Brewster . . . has a history with Gary [Zimmer] . . . , but she’s a remorseless campaigner whose motto seems to be: if they go low, we go lower.” “When they go low, go lower” probably originated as an anti-proverb responding to “When they go low, we go high.”

God gives the hardest (toughest) battles to the strongest (bravest) soldiers.

2013 *Ashville [NC] Citizen-Times*, 8 Sep.: “As Jeff’s mother puts it, ‘God gives the hardest battles to the bravest soldiers.’ They are called heroes.” **2013** Courtney Lynne, *In the Nick of Time* (Bloomington IN: Author House), 115: “A friend of mine passed a little saying on to me, . . . and it said, ‘God gives his toughest battles to his strongest soldiers.’” **2015** *Messenger-In-*

quirer (Owensboro KY), 28 Feb.: “It takes time, but you will get through it I also remembered that God gives the hardest battles to his strongest soldiers.” **2021** *Times of India* (New Delhi), 23 July: “But like they say, God gives the hardest battles to his strongest soldiers.”

You can’t HIT what you can’t see.

1925 Philo Sopher, “You Can’t Hit What You Can’t See: Another One of the Practical Talks,” *Popular Health Dental Supplement* 1, no. 8 (Dec.), 9: “In the first game of the World Series, [the pitcher] Walter Johnson showed that he still had plenty of that terrific speed which caused the Pirates to say as they went back to the bench after taking three healthy swings at the ball—‘Well, you can’t hit what you can’t see.’” **1993** Dennis Margheim, “Set Your Sights for the New Year,” *USAREC Recruiter Journal* (Public Affairs Office, U.S. Army Recruiting Command) 46, no. 9 (Sep.), 4: “Your experience should tell you that you can’t hit what you can’t see. Unless you know what your goals are . . . , you’ll never be able to achieve them.” **2005** *Daily Herald* (Arlington Heights IL), 13 June: “There’s an old baseball adage that goes, ‘you can’t hit what you can’t see,’ or for the Cubs, you can’t hit what you’ve never seen before.” **2012** *San Francisco Chronicle*, 6 July: “As they say in baseball, you can’t hit what you can’t see. [Tennis star Serena] Williams’ 6-3, 7-6 (6) win was punctuated by 24 Aces. . . .”

You can’t ride two HORSES with one behind (butt, ass).

1984 *Philadelphia Daily News*, 14 Feb.: “Take my aunt Rose. . . . [S]he always said, ‘You can’t ride two horses with one behind.’” **1988** *Sun Sentinel* (Ft. Lauderdale), 15 Mar.: “‘A friend told me that you can’t ride two horses with one butt,’ [Jakey] Winters said. ‘But I feel that . . . I never had a fair shot to become a successful fighter.’” **2000** *The Scotsman* (Edinburgh), 20 Jan.: . . . [T]he MP elegantly states: ‘Last May at Nottingham I reminded you of the old political advice that it is not possible to ride two horses with one arse in a three ring circus.’” **2014** *Statesman Journal* (Salem OR), 23 Jan.: “I originally balked at the idea of

using two [fishing] rods under the old maxim that ‘you can’t ride two horses with one butt.’”

First IMPRESSIONS are (often) fleeting.

1926 *Pioneer Mail and Indian Weekly News* (Allahabad, India), 23 Apr.: “First impressions are fleeting and therefore precious.”

1988 *Chicago Tribune*, 6 Nov.: “But first impressions are fleeting. On the second date she stopped seeing the outside of the package and started seeing the inside.” **1999** *Sunday Gazette Mail* (Charleston WV), 24 Jan.: “But first impressions are often fleeting, says [Cindy] Adams, a senior squad leader The ones who struggle at first sometimes blossom.” **2011** *Journal News* (White Plains NY), 11 Dec.: “His varsity debut arrived last season First impressions are often fleeting. Not this one.” The proverb probably originated as a counter-proverb responding to “First impressions are (the most) lasting.”

The INTERNET is forever.

1997 Jeffrey P. Zeleski, *The Soul of Cyberspace: How New Technology Is Changing Our Spiritual Lives* (New York: Harper), 112: “. . . [T]he Internet is forever—or at least for as long as humanity rides the technological juggernaut.” **2008** Andrew Whelan, *Breakcore: Identity and Interaction on Peer-to-Peer* (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars), 320: “People are now beginning to realize that all the chat room and email play that they engage in . . . is archived and retrievable. ‘The internet is forever,’ and so is whatever you do on or through it.”

2015 *Western Star* (Corner Brook NL), 29 May: “The last straw . . . was a comment from [Deborah] Drever’s deactivated Instagram account Proof positive that the saying ‘The Internet is forever’ holds true.” **2018** Kahyun Yoon-Flannery et al., *A Surgeon’s Path: What to Expect after a General Surgery Residency* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer), 288: “The recurring theme of this chapter, and the major warning regarding the use of the Internet for professional activity (or any activity), is *the Internet is forever*. ¶ Forever. ¶ No, really, FOREVER” (uppercase and italics and as shown).

LIFE is (about) context (Everything in life is about context).

1986 Kenneth L. Pike, “On the Value of Local Languages,” in *Languages in the International Perspective*, edited by Nancy Schweda Nicholson, (Norwood NJ: Ablex), 13 (section heading): “Life Is Context; Autonomy Is Death.” **1990** Carl Bernstein, “And What about the Truth?” [that is, the truth regarding Donald Trump’s accomplishments], *Time* (magazine) 135, no. 10 (5 Mar.) 52: “Real life is about context. So is real journalism.” **2007** Sarah Ruhl, *The Clean House*, in *The Clean House and Other Plays* (New York: Samuel French), 12: “You sound like an interesting woman. But life is about context. And I have . . . hired you to clean my house. And I don’t want an interesting person to clean my house.” **2013** *Nelson Mail* (New Zealand), 12 July: “. . . I would argue that all in life is about context, and that most individuals draw on their past experiences automatically when they read or listen.”

Don’t LOOK, won’t find.

1987 Dean R. Koontz, “Twilight of the Dawn,” in *Night Visions 4*, edited by Clive Barker (Arlington Heights IL: Dark Harvest), 95-96: “‘Daddy . . . if only . . . you’d look for us? . . . just look for us . . . you’ll find us . . .’ . . . ‘Don’t look . . . won’t find . . .’” (the ellipsis dots are as shown). **2011** *Townsville Bulletin* (Queensland, Australia) 11 Aug.: “. . . [W]hen the National Party in late 2009 alerted [Prime Minister Julia] Gillard to the dying at sea then thought to be just 25 and blamed in part the policies she’s personally helped, she accused it of a ‘vile slur’ and snapped ‘There is no evidence to support this figure,’ [¶] Course not. Don’t look, won’t find.” **2015** *Daily Mirror* (London), 29 Dec.: “Money laundering rules are weak and there is a lack of awareness of how to prevent it, according to Transparency International UK’s ‘Don’t Look, Won’t Find’ report.” **2022** David Quammen, *Breathless: The Scientific Race to Defeat a Deadly Virus* (New York: Simon & Schuster), 143: “‘We couldn’t test [for the Covid virus]! Don’t look, won’t find.’ Venting frustrations, she repeated the axiom: ‘*Don’t look, won’t find*’” (italics as shown).

A MAN is not a plan.

1999 *Los Angeles Times*, 13 July: “‘A man is not a plan,’ [Victoria] Collins affirmed. [Joanne] Baker, who frequently relies on her fiancé for financial advice, agreed.” **2003** *New York Times*, 4 May: “. . . [E]xperts advise women to take a more active role in family financial matters. ‘A man is not a plan’ Ms. [Ginita] Wall said.” **2019** Jeanette Marais, “Does Finance Have a Woman Problem?” *Investment Week* (London), 2 Dec., 22: “To my mind ‘a man is not a plan’—women need plans of their own.” **2024** *Washington Post*, 16 Feb. (title of the article): “‘A Man Is Not a Plan’: Fani Willis on Dating and Money.”

MAN plans, God laughs.

1975 John F. Kantner and Lee McCaffrey, editors, *Population and Development in Southeast Asia* (Lexington MA: Heath), x: “There is no need to confine this generalization to efforts concerned with public weal. As the saying has it generally ‘Man plans, God laughs.’” **2002** *South Bend [IN] Tribune*, 8 May: “They . . . planned on having four children We plan, God laughs Now . . . they are thrilled with their seven daughters and have stopped thinking about sons.” **2017** *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 31 Dec.: “If you believe the adage, ‘Man plans, God laughs,’ then waiting to see how everything unfolds might be the most tempting path.” **2024** *Jerusalem Post*, 31 Mar.: “But the old adage ‘Man plans, God laughs,’ could be recorded as ‘Man plans, Supernova has poor timing,’ because it came at a very inconvenient moment.” The saying in English is a calque of an equivalent Yiddish expression.

A bad (loveless, broken) MARRIAGE is still a marriage.

1996 Ryan Mathews, “The High Cost of Discarded Dreams,” *Progressive Grocer* 75, no. 11 (Nov.), 23: “A loveless marriage is still a marriage, but it’s a terrible place for a romantic to live.” **1999** Christopher Berry Gray, *The Philosophy of Law* (New York: Garland) 2:827: “A bad marriage is still a marriage, and a broken promise is still a promise.” **2006** Leo Zaibert, *Punish-*

ment and Retribution (Aldershot UK: Ashgate), 144: “Similarly for countless other things: a malfunctioning liver is still a liver, an unjustified claim is still a claim, a bad marriage is still a marriage . . . and so on.” **2023** Karin Slaughter, *After That Night* (New York: HarperCollins), 8: “Obviously, Mom was no help . . . All she said was ‘A bad marriage is still a marriage.’ What does that even mean?”

The MIND goes (will go) where it goes.

2012 *News Gazette* (Champaign IL), 1 Mar.: “I start cranking out the chords. I’ve felt pressure to stay within Celtic bounds, but it doesn’t always work out that way. Try as you might, your mind goes where it goes.” **2013** Harlan Coben, *Six Years* (New York: Dutton), 34: “Why does everyone make pouty lips and hand gestures in photographs nowadays? . . . Dumb thought, but the mind goes where it goes.” **2014** Lisa Winning and Carrie Henderson McDermott, *He Texted Me: The Ultimate Guide to Decoding Guys* (New York: Simon and Schuster), 33: “I . . . made a lot of sweeping assumptions about her that might not have been true, but the mind goes where it goes.” **2019** *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 30 June: “In its own way it [distance running] is a spiritual experience, he [Father Lawrence Schottelkatte] said. ‘The mind will go where it goes. In my situation, sometimes it will go to prayer.’”

“*NO*” means (stands for) “*New Opportunity*”.

2008 Herbert C. Long, *Built Stronger* (Maitland FL: Xulon), xiii: “Ten Power Quotes of Encouragement . . . ‘NO’ stands for New Opportunity.” **2013** *Derry Journal* (UK), 3 Jan.: “My husband thinks that the word ‘no’ means ‘new opportunity’, [Roma] Downy outlined what she said was [her husband Mark] Burnett’s perseverance to raise money” **2016** *TCA Regional News* (Chicago), 13 Apr.: “For her generation, which is commonly defined as those with birth years from the early 1980s to early 2000s, Lindsey Lerner states, ‘NO stands for New Opportunity.’” **2019** *Business World* (New Delhi), 31 Jan.: “Annurag Batra further added, ‘I myself have been trying hard to raise funds and what I’ve learned is that no means new opportunity and rejection

means redirection.” “*NO* means ‘New Opportunity’” probably originated as an anti-proverb responding to “*No* means *no*.”

NUT Up or Shut Up.

2009 *Toronto Star*, 2 Oct.: “‘Nut up or shut up’ is the most quotable of Woody Harrelson’s cowboy maxims in the [2009] genre mash-up *Zombieland*.” **2010** *Gold Coast Bulletin* (Southport QLD), 28 Oct.: “Nut up or shut up, pay your child support and stop crying that you don’t see your kids.” **2015** *Daily Beast* (New York), 2 Apr.: “[P]aul Walker explained . . . that he started participating in disaster-relief shortly after a friend essentially told him to nut up or shut up.” **2025** *University Wire* (Carlsbad NM), 18 Apr.: “Amateur hour is over, and it’s time, as the proverbial saying goes, to nut up or shut up.”

Let the PAST (what happened in the past) stay in the past.

1915 George Frederic Stratton, “Bobby Junior,” *The Bellman* (magazine), 14 Apr.: “My dear Rob: Let the past stay in the past. Come to me at once.” **1936** Chang Tien-Yi, “In Our Time,” *Living Age* (magazine) 351 (Dec.): 292: “And claiming she got her husband through such an idea as that! ‘But I don’t like to talk about it. Let the past stay in the past.’” **1985** *New York Times*, 2 May: “The impulse behind President Reagan’s planned visit to the cemetery . . ., his plea to let the past stay in the past, is not extraordinary . . .” **1985** *Globe and Mail* [Toronto], 11 Sep. (review of a TV series about the mistreatment of Japanese-Canadians During World War II): “Observations such as ‘Let the past stay in the past’ reduce the proceedings to soap opera.”

The PHONE works both ways.

1961 Clayton C. Barbeau, *The Ikon: A Novel* (New York: Coward-McCann), 29: “The phone works both ways. Come up and see me sometime.” **1977** Earl Mac Rauch, *New York, New York* (New York: Simon and Schuster), 222: “The phone works both ways, you know. I’m in the book.” **1985** William Diehl, *Hooligans* (New York: Random House), 167: “‘You just stopped writ-

ing and calling, like you died.’ [¶] ‘The phone works both ways,’ I heard myself say” **2008** *Charleston [WV] Gazette*, 25 Dec.: “I feel terrible that you waited by the phone all day, . . . but for goodness’ sake—the telephone works both ways.”

You are what you **PRETEND** to be.

1961 Kurt Vonnegut, *Mother Night* (Greenwood CT: Fawcett), v: “Introduction. This is the only story of mine whose moral I know . . . : We are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful about what we pretend to be.” **1993** *Washington Post*, 31 Oct.: “Plastic hardly pushes back. Therefore it is hardly real. The next step is virtual reality At last, you are what you pretend to be. In a way, you have become a sort of plastic yourself.” **2014** Douglas Haugen, *Tales Told by an Idiot*, “Short Pants” (on-line): “There’s an idea in Existentialism that ‘you are what you pretend to be.’ It stems from the related idea that we are what we do.” **2014** *DailyTelegraph* (London), 21 July: “Since it’s a central truth of modern life that you are what you pretend to be, Ed [Miliband] needs to raise his game in matter of pretense.”

The **PROBLEM** with doing nothing is (not) knowing when you’re finished (when to stop).

1991 Wilt Chamberlain, *A View from Above* (New York: Random House), 57: “The problem with doing nothing is that you never know when you are through. That’s why it’s so easy to keep doing nothing” (Chamberlain refers to the saying as a “Wiltism”). **1997** Nelson DeMille, *Plum Island* (New York: Warner), 1: “I was sitting on my uncle’s back porch, deep in a wicker chair with shallow thoughts running through my mind. It occurred to me that the problem with doing nothing is not knowing when you’re finished.” **1999** *Irish Times* (Dublin), 9 Sep.: “But how do you get six people to agree on anything? . . . [T]hey . . . feel that they’re doing nothing. And the problem is you never know when you’re finished.” **2011** *Asbury Park [NJ] Press*, 1 May: “The problem with doing nothing, the old saying goes, is that you never know when you’re finished.” The saying is sometimes attributed to Benjamin Franklin or Groucho Marx.

Stay (Be) READY so you won't (don't) have to get ready.

2002 *News Tribune* (Tacoma), 17 Oct.: "My dad always told me, 'Stay ready so you don't have to get ready.'" **2007** *Honolulu Advertiser*, 4 Aug.: "But why not practice? Why not be ready so you don't have to get ready?" **2008** *News & Observer* (Raleigh NC), 21 May: "That could change quickly . . . , but as the old saying goes, stay ready so you don't have to get ready." **2018** *Telegraph-Journal* (Saint John N.B.), 21 Jul.: "Stay ready so you won't have to get ready. The generosity, affection and attention you give to others will be returned with interest."

It is not what you SAY but how you say it.

1939 Bruce Robertson, "Writing Called Key to Better Programs," *Broadcasting* 16, no. 12 (5 June), 24: (Quoting radio writer Arch Oboler) "In my plays . . . I have discussed the most controversial subjects without raising the slightest objections . . . On the air, it is not what you say, it's how you say it that matters." **1949** Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman* (*Collected Plays*, 1944-1961. New York: Library of America, 2006) 201 (Willy addresses Biff): "Don't look worried. Start off with a couple of your good stories to lighten things up. It's not what you say, it's how you say it—because personality always wins the day." **1986** *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 3 Mar.: "'Dr. Ruth [Siegel] is more graphic than I am,' she [Carol Coda] says. 'It's not what you say, it's how you say it.'" **1988** *New York Times*, 6 Jul.: "In black culture, it's not what you say, it's how you say it, Dr. [Janice] Hale-Benson said. We value charismatic and stylistic use of language rather than fluency and vocabulary breadth."

SAY it, don't spray it.

1977 Eric Partridge, *Dictionary of Catch Phrases* (Briarcliff Manor NY: Stein and Day), 186: "Say it, don't spray it," glossed as "Don't spit while you're talking: Aus[tralian]: since the late 1940s." **1988** Louise Bates Ames, Frances L. Ilg, and Sidney M. Baker, *Your Ten- to Fourteen-Year-Old* (New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell), 47: "An eleven-year-old can actually be

mildly amusing, especially when insulting classmates: ‘Say it, don’t spray it.’” **2000** Song from a made-for-TV movie *2gether* (Keystone/MTV): “Girl you got to say it, don’t spray it. / I want the news, not the weather.” **2020** *Sunday Independent* (Johannesburg), 26 Apr. (headline): “Spray it, don’t say it: Kenya graffiti artists spread health message.” (In this anti-proverb the word *spray* is perhaps a pun: a graffiti message is *sprayed*—that is, spray-painted—onto a surface, and the messages often advise the wearing of masks to prevent the exhaling—the spraying—of Covid virus by sneezing or coughing or even *saying*.)

If you SEE it high, let it fly; if you see it low, let it go.

1993 *Philadelphia Daily News*, 26 Apr.: “Hitting a pitch is tough, like trying to catch a butterfly, [Pete] Incaviglia said. But it’s like (knuckleballer) Charlie Hough always told me. If it’s high, let it fly. If it’s low, let it go” (parenthesis as shown). **2005** *Daily Herald* (Arlington Park IL), 13 June: “The general rule of thumb . . . is if it’s high let it fly, if it’s low you’ve got to let it go. . . . [Tim] Wakefield agreed that keeping the ball down was crucial to his performance.” **2016** *Gulf Times* (Qatar), 6 Aug.: “I think you have to take an old-school approach, [Dave] Roberts said. ‘If you see it high, let it fly.’ The other half of the adage is ‘if it’s low, let it go,’ but it didn’t really matter that Roberts omitted it.” **2024** *Denver Post*, 21 Apr.: “. . . [O]ur motto all week was ‘If it’s low, let it go, and if it’s high, let it fly.’ And that’s what we did. We waited for the pitches up in the zone.” (The baseball adage, in a literal sense, offers advice to a batter endeavoring to hit a knuckleball pitched to him.)

You can judge someone by the SHINE of his shoes.

1913 “Rubber Goods,” *Chicago Commerce* 9, no. 25 (24 Oct.) 41: “It is said that . . . you can tell a Chicago man by the shine of his shoes.” **1987** Jane Rule, *Memory Board* (Tallahassee FL: Naiad) 93: “Well, your mother thought she could spot an embezzler by the color of his tie and a lecher by the shine of his shoes. I hate to admit to you how often she was right.” **2010** Mary E. DeMuth, *Life in Defiance* (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan.com):

“Mama always said you could tell the value of a man by the shine of his shoes.” **2014** Harlan Coben, *Missing You* (New York: Dutton), 52: “Chaz wore . . . Ferragano shoes that brought to mind the old adage about judging a man by the shine of his shoes. The adage was crap.”

Don’t squat with (your) SPURS on.

1992 Bix Bender, *Don’t Squat with Your Spurs on: A Cowboy’s Guide to Life* (Layton UT: Gibbs Smith). **2003** *Ottawa Citizen*, 13 June: “To the high school graduating classes of 2003: . . . I’ve put together a list of old sayings, maxims and proverbs . . . So, always remember: . . . ‘Never squat with your spurs on.’” **2006** *Post and Courier* (Charleston SC), 11 Nov.: “. . . [T]hose interested in taking up cowboy action shooting are offered some sage advice: Don’t burn daylight, keep your powder dry and never squat with spurs on.” **2007** *Lakes District News* (Burns Lake BC), 14 Mar.: “An old cowboy saying: Don’t squat with your spurs on as you might leave tacks on parts of your anatomy that you can’t show to anybody”

You don’t have to see the whole STAIRCASE to take the first step.

2002 *Boston Globe*, 28 July: “. . . [S]tudents . . . can’t help but glance at the name card in front of them and the words on the back of each: ‘Take the first step in faith. You don’t have to see the whole staircase, just to take the first step.’” **2003** *Record* (Sherbrooke, QC) 23 May: “Take the first step of faith. You don’t have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step.” **2015** *Weekend Australian* (Canberra), May 2: “Martin Luther King Jr. once said that we don’t have to see the entire staircase, all that we need to do to progress is to take the first step.” **2023** Joel Puthoff, *Capability Fuel* (Charlotte NC: Fortune 5 Consulting), 105: “So, don’t assume you have to see the entire staircase to take the first step.”

Don’t STOP when you’re tired, stop when you’re done (through).

2012 *Public Opinion* (Chambersburg PA), 17 Nov.: “This is where mothering is like running. Keep your eye on the finish

line. Don't stop when you're tired, stop when you're done." **2018** *Lansing [MI] State Journal*, 13 May: "Favorite quote [of a high-school student]: 'Don't stop when you're tired; stop when you're done.'" **2019** *The Guardian* (London), 29 Jan.: "They drink from water coolers containing floating cucumbers carved with pro-work slogans, such as 'Don't stop when you're tired, stop when you're done.'" **2024** *Straits Times* (Singapore), 23 June: "She can't stop because there's a saying she heard once which she holds close like a sporting prayer. 'Don't stop when you're tired. Stop when you're finished.'"

Think (Visualize) SUCCESS and you will succeed.

1904 "Think Just a Minute," *Underwriters Review* 13, no. 3 (Feb.), 55: "Keep to the Broad highway of Hope and Cheerfulness. Expect to succeed. Think success and you will succeed." **1984** Morten Lund, "Mind over Matter," *Ski* 49 (Nov.), 186: "Think failure and you fail. Think success and you succeed. Visualization is that powerful." **2006** Ed Horrell, *The Kindness Revolution* (New York: Amacom), 111: "Think success, and you will succeed. Think of the reasons why you will fail, and you will fail." **2014** Nelson DeMille, *Night Fall* (New York: Warner), 183: "I flashed forward to a scene where I actually broke this case open—visualize success as they say, and you will succeed."

Have no SYMPATHY for the devil.

1971 Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (New York: Random House), 89: "This is the moment of truth, that fine and fateful line between control and disaster . . . No sympathy for the devil; keep that in mind . . ." **1990** *Newsweek* 115, no. 1 (1 Jan.), 19: "No Sympathy for the Devil," title of an article about Manuel Noriega. **1990** *Time* (magazine) 135, no. 12 (19 Mar.), 55: "No Sympathy for the Devil," title of an article about John Cardinal O'Connor's attack on heavy-metal music. **1998** *Hartford Courant*, 23 Oct.: "Bianca Jagger's message at Trinity College . . . , as she talked about Yugoslavia, was that the family of nations must have no sympathy for the devil."

You are what you THINK.

1982 *New York Times*, 10 Oct.: “Following my own principle that you are what you think, I conclude that at this stage of life I am pure confusion.” **2013** *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 14 Feb.: “I am a big proponent of this philosophy [i.e. ‘You are what you eat’], and an even bigger one of another saying: You are what you think.” **2014** *Christian Science Monitor* (Boston), 6 June: “We have all heard the adage ‘You are what you think.’ But that opens a real can of worms.” **2022** Carlton N. Young, *Achieving What You Want* (Pittsburgh: Dorrance), xxii: “Understand this—you are what you think! Think of failure, and you will fail; think success, and you WILL SUCCEED!” (capitalization as shown). The saying, with the clause “So think big” appended, is sometimes attributed to Andrew Carnegie.

You buy (bought) the TICKET, you take the ride.

1971 Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (New York: Random House), 89: “Buy the ticket, take the ride . . . and if it occasionally gets a little heavier than what you had in mind, well . . . chalk it up to forced *consciousness expansion*” (ellipsis dots and italics as shown). **1989** *Sun Sentinel* (Fort Lauderdale), 18 July: “[Michael] Pasano prosecuted several lawyers drawn into dirty deeds. He harbored little sympathy for the tainted attorneys. ‘You buy the ticket, you take the ride,’ Pasano said.” **2001** Margaret Mosely, *Milicent Leseur* (Dallas: Three Forks) 136: “I decided to follow another piece of Ethel’s advice, ‘You bought the ticket, you take the ride.’” **2011** *Battle Creek [MI] Enquirer*, 30 Jan.: “. . . ‘[T]here’s no way out,’ John Kaski said before comparing it to being in line—with no escape—for a thrill ride at a theme park. ‘You bought the ticket. Take the ride.’” In 2006 a documentary film about Hunter S. Thompson (starring Nick Nolte, Bill Murray, Johnny Depp, and Gary Bussey) appeared with title *Buy the Ticket, Take the Ride*.

TRASH takes itself out.

2019 *Ahmedabad [India] Mirror*, 26 Jan.: “The festival of literature and books sadly is not having a great run this year . . . [A] lot

of prominent men are missing . . . The Insider handle writes about it as ‘sometimes the trash takes itself out.’” **2023** *News Journal* (Wilmington DE), 2 July: [spoken by a gay man after an altercation with other bar patrons] “I feel really proud of our friends, family, and community . . . You like to see when trash takes itself out.” **2023** *Toronto Sun*, 6 Dec.: [quoting Taylor Swift] “But I’ve also learned there’s no point in actively trying to quote-unquote defeat your enemies. Trash takes itself out every single time.” **2023** *Mail on Sunday* (London), 17 Dec. “And while [Kanye] West’s star has faded, hers [Taylor Swift’s] continues to shine like a diamond. ‘Trash takes itself out every time,’ is how she puts it.”

Don’t trouble TROUBLE till trouble troubles you.

1903 “The Older and Better Music Hall,” *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science, and Art* 96, no. 2507 (11 Nov.), 611: “As of yore, he [Harry Freeman] is overwhelmed with misfortune. Fate smites him hip and thigh. He has just been robbed by one man and knocked down by another. His home has been broken up. He has recently been in prison. But / ‘If you don’t trouble trouble, / Trouble doesn’t trouble *you*’, and no sympathy is craved by this joyous dancer” (italics as shown; the proverb itself is set as verse). **1913** Herford Lennox Gordon, *Laconics*, “24 edition” (Los Angeles, self-published), 300: “Don’t trouble trouble till trouble troubles you. No man gets into trouble without his own help. **1989** *Gazette* (Montreal), 10 Sep.: “Doctors have varying opinions about the timing of [prostate] surgery . . . Other surgeons advise waiting until the symptoms are causing a significant amount of annoyance. They follow the Arabic dictum, ‘Never trouble trouble until trouble troubles you.’” **2022** *Observer* (Kampala, Uganda), 14 Aug.: “My mother often said, ‘Don’t trouble trouble, until trouble troubles you,’ and Kenneth was trouble with a capital T.”

Every WAR is a war against children. (All wars are wars against children.)

2001 *M2 Presswire* (Coventry UK), 11 July: “At the UN conference on small arms, UNICEF reminded delegates that children and young people are the principal victims . . . ‘All wars are wars against children,’ UNICEF said, urging strong measures

to curtail illicit arms trading.” **2002** Howard Zinn, “Our Job Is a Simple One: Stop Them,” *Progressive* (magazine) 66, no. 12 (Dec), 17: “. . . [W]ars are always wars against children. In every war unforgivable numbers of children die.” **2022** Patrick B. Reyes, “Advent of the Ministry of the Future,” *Presbyterian Outlook* 204, no. 16 (14 Nov.), 13: “Future generations are being marked for death. Every war is a war on children, and we have found new forms of warfare.” **2023** Ayesha Kadir and Vinay Kampalath, “Children Pay the Price for Our Silence, Again,” *The Lancet* 402, no. 10414 (30 Oct.), 1745: “As humanitarians, we know that every war is a war on children. The destructive legacy of war . . . does not consider sides or intentions.”

The only (best) way to fight an idea is with a better idea.

1926 “A Quarantine Against Ideas” (editorial), *Christian Century* 43, no. 52 (30 Dec.), 1623: “False and dangerous social and economic doctrines . . . are not disease germs to be combatted by antiseptics They are ideas, and the only way to fight an idea is with a better idea.” **1949** “Communism in the United States,” *Armed Forces Talk* 301 (Washington DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense), 9: “The best way to fight any idea is with a better idea. The most effective defense against communism in the United States is the constant development of a strong, working democracy.” **2002** *Jerusalem Post*, 16 May: “. . . [W]ell educated people are less easily fooled by dictators and demagogues. The only way to fight an idea is with a better idea.” **2014** *Daily Telegraph* (London), 23 Aug.: “You cannot lock up an idea in Belmarsh or turn it back at Heathrow. The only way to defeat a bad idea is with a better idea.”

If there is no WIND, row.

1938 Selwyn Gurney Champion, *Racial Proverbs* (New York: Macmillan), 247 (in a section listing Polish proverbs): “If there is no wind, row.” **1964** *Reader’s Digest* 84, no. 3 (March), 47 (filler item): “If there is no wind, row.—Polish proverb.” **1989** *St. Petersburg [Florida] Times*, 23 Aug. (letter-to-the-editor): “I am equally confident that the Polish people, facing great obstacles, will overcome and prevail by adhering steadfastly to their own

proverb, ‘If there is no wind, row.’” **2012** *Korea Times (Seoul)*, 22 June: “. . . [T]he breakout nations of the new era will take their mantra from a Latin proverb “If there is no wind, row.” Not infrequently, in context, the English expression is identified as a Polish proverb though sometimes as a Roman (or “Latin”) proverb.

WOMEN: You can’t live with them and can’t live without them.

1919 “In the Experience Exchange,” *The Editor* 51, no. 1 (10 July), xii: Damn the women! You can’t live with ’em and you can’t live without ’em.” **1928** Eugene O’Neill, *Strange Interlude* (New York: Boni & Liveright) 94: “All I meant was that Ghosts remind me of men’s smart crack about women, you can’t live with them and can’t live without them.” **1989** *The Province* (Vancouver), 26 Mar.: “A woman assaulted and threatened at gunpoint . . . will file a complaint . . . for the judge’s comment in sentencing: ‘Somebody once said to me: “Women—you can’t live with them; you can’t live without them.”’” **2021** *Orlando [FL] Sentinel*, 6 Mar.: “The adage goes something like this: ‘Women: You can’t live with them, you can’t live without them.’ Though that statement has its merits, I actually feel a better phrase would be; ‘Women: you can’t live with them, and they can’t live with each other.’”

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[https://doi.org/ 10.29162/pv.42.1.1060](https://doi.org/10.29162/pv.42.1.1060)

Origineller Forschungsbeitrag

erhalten am 27. Februar 2025

angenommen am 1. Mai 2025

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DIE GROSSEN FISCHE FRESSEN DIE KLEINEN? KÜNSTLICHE INTELLIGENZ KONTRA MENSCH BEI DER ÜBERSETZUNG VON SPRICHWÖRTERN

Abstract: Dieser Aufsatz mit dem provokativen Titel versteht sich als ein kleines Experiment, als eine Fallstudie, die eine weitere wissenschaftliche Diskussion anzuregen beabsichtigt. Die zentrale Frage ist: Wer kommt mit der Übersetzung von Sprichwörtern erfolgreicher zurecht: die professionellen ÜbersetzerInnen oder der ChatGPT? Die Verfasserin vergleicht Textausschnitte aus ungarischen literarischen Werken mit ihren deutschen und englischen Übersetzungen. Es werden jeweils die menschlichen Übersetzungen und diejenigen der generativen künstlichen Intelligenz kritisch analysiert. Für die Untersuchung wurden solche ausgangssprachlichen Texte ausgewählt, die ein Sprichwort enthalten, das textkonstitutiv ist, d. h. über eine Art Übersetzungsrelevanz verfügt. Als Bewertungskriterien bei der Analyse der Übersetzungen gelten vor allem die Fragen: Kann der Mensch oder der ChatGPT die Art der Übersetzungsrelevanz des jeweiligen Sprichwortes „besser“ beurteilen? Wer kann – auf Grundlage der Übersetzungsrelevanz – ein adäquates Übersetzungsverfahren wählen? Überspitzt formuliert geht es um die Frage, wofür oder ob überhaupt bzw. wie lange man ÜbersetzerInnen, d. h. den Menschen, bei der Übersetzung literarischer Werke noch braucht.

Schlüsselwörter: menschliche Übersetzung, generative künstliche Intelligenz, ChatGPT, Sprichwörter, phraseologische Übersetzungsrelevanz, Äquivalenz auf Systemebene und auf Diskursebene, Kreativität

1. Einleitung

1.1. Thema und Ziele

Unser Alltag wird mittlerweile von der künstlichen Intelligenz (dt. KI, engl. AI) geprägt.¹ Die künstliche Intelligenz bietet zweifelsohne viele Möglichkeiten auch in der wissenschaftlichen Forschung, doch sie birgt auch viele Gefahren. Es ist noch nicht eindeutig geklärt, wann und auf welche Art und Weise die Verwendung der künstlichen Intelligenz erlaubt ist, wann VerfasserInnen wissenschaftlicher Publikation gegen die ethischen Regeln verstoßen, was bereits als Plagiat gilt usw. Da es heute schon mehrere Übersetzungsprogramme gibt (z. B. Google Translate oder DeepL Translate), stellt sich die berechtigte Frage, ob man menschliche Übersetzung überhaupt noch braucht.

Dieser Aufsatz versteht sich als eine kleine Fallstudie, deren Ergebnisse nicht verallgemeinert werden dürfen. Es wird der Frage nachgegangen, wer bei der Übertragung der Sprichwörter zurzeit „besser“ ist: der Mensch oder der ChatGPT. Zur Beantwortung dieser Frage werden Übersetzungsanalysen durchgeführt. Den ausgangssprachlichen Text bilden jeweils Textausschnitte aus ungarischen literarischen Werken, genauer aus Romanen. Die offiziell publizierten deutschen und englischen Übersetzungen werden mit denen vom ChatGPT verglichen.

Unter den KI-Übersetzungstechnologien fiel meine Wahl deshalb auf den ChatGPT, weil er nicht nur übersetzt: Man kann mit ihm blitzschnell kommunizieren – das ist eben ein Chatbot (ChatGPT = Chatbot Generative Pre-trained Transformer, d. h. 'generativer vortrainierter Transformer').² Man kann Erwartun-

¹ Zur Definition und zu den Arten der künstlichen Intelligenz siehe Rajki et al. 2024.

² Das Wort *GPT* ist also ein Akronym. *ChatGPT* hat im Deutschen noch kein festgelegtes Genus, deshalb steht das Wort üblicherweise ohne Artikel. Manche verwenden allerdings den Artikel *die* (analog zu *die KI-Plattform*, *die Technologie*, *die Software* usw.); andere wiederum den Artikel *das* (analog zu *das KI-System*, *das Modell*, *das Tool* usw.). Ich habe mich nicht deshalb für das grammatische Geschlecht Maskulinum entschieden, weil ich den ChatGPT als männliche Entität betrachte, sondern einfach aus dem Grunde, weil er ein *Transformer* ist. (Vgl. z. B. <https://ki-god.com/der-die-oder-das-gpt-welches-geschlecht-hat-gpt-im-deutschen/>, abgerufen am 27. Februar 2025; <https://bm-experts.de/expertenwissen/chatgpt-fuer-manager-1/>, abgerufen am 27. Februar 2025.)

gen in Bezug auf die Übersetzung formulieren; man kann dieses Programm darum bitten, seine Übersetzung zu überarbeiten; der ChatGPT kann zu seinen Übersetzungen auch Erklärungen, eine Argumentation hinzufügen.

1.2. Aufbau und Methode

Zu Beginn wird kontrolliert, was für theoretische Kenntnisse der ChatGPT in Bezug auf Sprichwörter bzw. deren Übersetzungsrelevanz hat. Darauf folgend werden insgesamt sechs ungarische Textausschnitte mit ihren deutschen und englischen Übersetzungen verglichen. Auf Grundlage von fünf Texten mit Sprichwörtern kann man – auch wenn vorsichtige – Schlussfolgerungen ziehen, und der zuletzt analysierte, sechste Text ermöglicht, das Blickfeld in Richtung Übersetzung von Phraseologismen allgemein zu erweitern. Die Kapitel im praktischen Teil folgen nicht immer demselben Aufbau: Die Reihenfolge der Textbelege bzw. deren Analyse wird vor allem dadurch bestimmt, welche Übersetzungen Ähnlichkeiten in den eingesetzten Verfahren zeigen.

Unter Übersetzungsanalyse wird hier zugleich auch Übersetzungskritik verstanden, die bekanntlich auch subjektive Elemente enthält, da die ÜbersetzungskritikerInnen ihre eigenen Sprachkenntnisse, ihr Sprachgefühl, ihre „Textsensibilität“ in die Untersuchung mit einbeziehen (s. Drahota-Szabó 2021: 206).

Ein weiterer Umstand ist, dass bei der Übersetzung literarischer Werke eine Äquivalenz auf Makroebene erzielt werden soll, hier kann allerdings nur eine Untersuchung auf Mikroebene durchgeführt werden. Auch deshalb dürfen die hier gewonnenen Ergebnisse auf keinen Fall verallgemeinert werden.

Um entscheiden zu können, wer bei der Übersetzung von Texten mit Sprichwörtern „besser“ ist, muss man – mehr oder weniger objektivierbare – Bewertungskriterien aufstellen. Die Bewertungskriterien, die ich im Allgemeinen für die Übersetzung von Phraseologismen aufgestellt habe (s. Drahota-Szabó 2021: 206–208), werden hier für die Übersetzung von Sprichwörtern wie folgt adaptiert:

- Wird das Sprichwort 1.) mit einem Sprichwort oder 2.) mit einer freien Wortverbindung übersetzt oder 3.) wird es ausgelassen?

- Wenn das ausgangssprachliche Sprichwort (AS-Sprichwort) mit einem zielsprachlichen Sprichwort (ZS-Sprichwort) übersetzt wird: 1.) Sind sie semantisch kompatibel? 2.) Stimmen sie stilistisch überein? 3.) Ist ihr pragmatischer Wert weitgehend ähnlich?
- Wenn das AS-Sprichwort mit einer freien Wortverbindung übersetzt wird: 1.) Auch wenn auf Systemebene kein ZS-Sprichwort als Äquivalent vorhanden ist, hätte es auf Textebene doch ein ZS-Äquivalent gegeben? 2.) Ist die semantische, stilistische und pragmatische Adäquatheit gesichert?
- Wenn auf die Wiedergabe des Sprichwortes im Zieltext verzichtet wird, sollte überprüft werden, ob dadurch Verluste entstanden sind. (In dieser Untersuchung können die eventuellen Verluste nur auf der Mikroebene erschlossen werden, auf der Makroebene des Textes allerdings nicht.) Im Idealfall sollte auch überprüft werden, ob diese Verluste an anderen Textstellen kompensiert werden, d. h. ob freie Wortverbindungen des AS-Textes mit Sprichwörtern übertragen werden, damit eine Äquivalenz auf Textebene erreicht wird. Dieser Aspekt kann aber im vorliegenden Beitrag nicht beachtet werden.

Die Kriterien für die kritische Übersetzungsanalyse können kompakt so zusammengefasst werden: Kann der Mensch oder der ChatGPT (besser) erkennen, über was für eine Übersetzungsrelevanz das Sprichwort im jeweiligen Kontext verfügt? Wer kann auf dieser Grundlage ein adäquat(er)es Übersetzungsverfahren wählen?

1.3. Zu den theoretischen Kenntnissen des ChatGPT

Es soll im ersten Schritt überprüft werden, ob mein Verständnis vom Sprichwort und das vom ChatGPT übereinstimmen. Zum Sprichwort gibt es bekanntlich viele Definitionen (vgl. Drahotá-Szabó 2021: 135–138 mit vielen Verweisen auf die einschlägige Fachliteratur). Ich arbeite nach wie vor mit der alten – allerdings nicht veralteten, sondern m. E. auch heute noch gültigen – Definition von O. Nagy (1976: 12). Demnach ist das Sprichwort

ein „Prinzip“, eine mit dem Anspruch der Allgemeingültigkeit verwendete „Lebensweisheit“, ein Rat oder ein Urteil, aber auf jeden Fall ein Satz, wobei im Zusammenhang mit seiner Bedeutung die Frage „wahr oder nicht wahr“ gestellt werden kann, und welcher immer mehr oder weniger geschichtlich gebunden ist und deshalb auch eine gesellschaftlich determinierte Weltsicht widerspiegelt. (Übersetzung von mir – E. D.-Sz.)

Auf meine Frage („Wie würdest du das „Sprichwort“ definieren?“) hat der ChatGPT diese Antwort gegeben:³

Ein **Spruchwort** ist eine feste, allgemein bekannte und überlieferte Redewendung, die in der Regel eine allgemeine Wahrheit, Weisheit oder Lebenserfahrung ausdrückt. Sprichwörter sind meist kurz und prägnant, oft in metaphorischer Form, und ihre Bedeutung ist über die Kulturgrenzen hinweg erkennbar. Sie sind in der Sprache fest verankert und stammen häufig aus der Folklore oder der Tradition.

Beispiele für Sprichwörter:

- „Wer den Pfennig nicht ehrt, ist des Talers nicht wert.“
- „Aller guten Dinge sind drei.“
- „Der Apfel fällt nicht weit vom Stamm.“

³ Ich zitiere den ChatGPT immer wörtlich, ich habe an manchen Stellen nur die Formatierung ein wenig modifiziert, um die formale Einheitlichkeit des Aufsatzes zu gewährleisten (z. B. Blockschrift; die Hervorhebungen durch Fettschrift stammen vom ChatGPT). Bei den hier analysierten Textbelegen lautete meine Anweisung immer wie folgt: „Lefordítanád a következő magyar szépirodalmi szövegrészletet németre és angolra?“ [Würdest du die nächste ungarische literarische Textpassage ins Deutsche und ins Englische übersetzen?]

Ich habe mit GPT-4-Turbo gearbeitet. Das ist eine optimierte Variante von GPT-4 und hat – laut Informationen des ChatGPT – „feinabgestimmte Fähigkeiten (fine-tuning)“: „GPT4-Turbo ist besonders gut darin, sich auf Stil, Ton und Struktur einzustellen. Es eignet sich hervorragend für kreative Aufgaben, z. B. das Nachbilden von Stilregistern, Ironie, Sprachspiel und literarischen Besonderheiten.“

Es gibt noch keine einheitlichen Regeln in Bezug auf die korrekten Verweise auf den ChatGPT und generell auf die künstliche Intelligenz (vgl. z. B. McAdoo 2023), deshalb gebe ich hier den Zeitraum der Kommunikation mit dem ChatGPT an: 3. Januar – 27. Februar 2025. Nach dem Zitierstandard MLA kann der Verweis so angegeben werden: OpenAI. ChatGPT (GPT-4). Januar, Februar 2025.

Diese Sprichwörter vermitteln eine moralische oder praktische Lehre und werden in der Regel in einem allgemeineren Kontext verwendet.

Der Definition des ChatGPT könnte man im Großen und Ganzen zustimmen, aber die Verwendung des Terminus „Redewendung“ ist ein wenig irreführend, zumal das formale Hauptmerkmal der Sprichwörter, nämlich die Satzwertigkeit, vom ChatGPT nicht erwähnt wird. Ich stimme Burger (2010: 36-42) zu, nach dem Sprichwörter innerhalb der referentiellen Phraseologismen zu den propositionalen Phraseologismen gehören, da sie semantisch eine Aussagefunktion, syntaktisch eine Satz- bzw. Textfunktion haben. Unter den propositionalen Phraseologismen werden sie als *Topoi*, d. h. topische Formeln, betrachtet: Sprichwörter sind soz. geschlossene Texte, die sich ohne weitere lexikalische Elemente in den Kontext einfügen.

Auch an einem weiteren Punkt soll die Definition des ChatGPT relativiert werden: Die Bedeutung mancher Sprichwörter ist nämlich „über die Kulturgrenzen hinweg“ nicht erkennbar. Das sind sog. Realien-Sprichwörter, z. B. ung. *Egyszer volt Budán kutyavásár*. [Es gab in Buda nur einmal Hundemarkt.] (‘man hat nur einmal außergewöhnliches Glück; wenn einem etw. erlaubt oder verziehen wurde, bedeutet das noch lange nicht, dass es sich wiederholen darf’; s. Forgács 2003: 88); *Meghalt Mátyás király, oda az igazság*. [König Mátyás ist tot, die Gerechtigkeit ist hin.] (scherzh.; ‘man kann sich bezüglich Gerechtigkeit oder Wiedergutmachung an niemanden mehr wenden’; s. Forgács 2003: 481).⁴

Schaut man in einem Lexikon nach, was unter „Sprichwort“ zu verstehen ist, so findet man heute denselben Eintrag, den man auch gestern gefunden hat. Der ChatGPT wird aber fortwährend weiterentwickelt, so ändern sich seine Antworten je nach dem Abfragezeitpunkt. Das ist ein relevanter Umstand, auf den hier explizit verwiesen werden soll. Zur Kontrolle habe ich den ChatGPT am 22. April 2025 erneut um eine Definition gebeten („Kannst du mir eine präzise Definition zum „Sprichwort“ geben?“). Diesmal habe ich eine treffende, korrekte Definition erhalten:

⁴ Zu den Realien-Phraseologismen s. ausführlich Drahota-Szabó 2013: 171–263.

Sprichwort (Substantiv, n.):

Ein Sprichwort ist ein kurzer, allgemein bekannter und fest formulierter Satz, der eine Lebensweisheit, Erfahrung oder moralische Regel ausdrückt. Es ist oft bildhaft und überliefert kulturelles Wissen in knapper, einprägsamer Form.

Beispiel: *Morgenstund hat Gold im Mund.*

Des Weiteren ging ich davon aus, dass man Texte mit Sprichwörtern – und im Allgemeinen mit Phraseologismen – gut übersetzen kann, wenn man über entsprechende übersetzungstheoretische Kenntnisse verfügt. Deshalb wollte ich wissen, was der ChatGPT über die Übersetzung von Sprichwörtern weiß. Er weiß – nach seinen Angaben –, was unter Übersetzungsrelevanz zu verstehen ist:

Übersetzungsrelevanz: Die Relevanz von Sprichwörtern in einer Übersetzung hängt oft davon ab, wie zentral das Sprichwort für den Text ist. Sprichwörter tragen oft eine starke kulturelle Bedeutung und sind eng mit der Weltanschauung der Sprecher der Ursprungssprache verbunden. Sie sind nicht nur sprachlich relevant, sondern auch ein Ausdruck von Traditionen und Werten. Bei der Übersetzung von Sprichwörtern ist es wichtig, die Relevanz der Bedeutung und nicht nur der Wörtlichkeit zu bewahren.

Meine nächste Frage lautete: „Im Zusammenhang mit der Übertragung der Phraseologismen gibt es bekanntlich mehrere Arten der Übersetzungsrelevanz. Kannst du mir diese auflisten und erläutern?“ Seine Antwort lautet:

Ja, gerne! Im Bereich der Übersetzung und der Übertragung von Phraseologismen gibt es tatsächlich mehrere Arten der Übersetzungsrelevanz. Die verschiedenen Ansätze hängen davon ab, wie eng der Übersetzer den Sinn und die kulturellen Aspekte des Originaltextes beibehalten möchte und welche Rolle die Zielkultur in der Übersetzung spielt.

Der ChatGPT kann folgende Arten der Übersetzungsrelevanz unterscheiden:

1. Formale Relevanz

- **Erläuterung:** Bei der formalen Relevanz geht es darum, die Struktur und den Wortlaut des Originalphraseologismus mög-

lichst genau in der Zielsprache zu übernehmen. Der Fokus liegt hier darauf, den Ausdruck so nah wie möglich am Original zu halten, auch wenn die Bedeutung oder der kulturelle Kontext sich etwas verändert.

- **Beispiel:** Ein direkt übersetzter Phraseologismus, der in der Zielsprache zwar grammatikalisch korrekt, aber möglicherweise nicht idiomatisch ist.

2. Funktionale Relevanz

- **Erläuterung:** Hier geht es darum, den Zweck und die Funktion des Phraseologismus zu bewahren. Es wird versucht, eine ähnliche Wirkung oder Bedeutung in der Zielsprache zu erzielen, auch wenn die Formulierung ganz anders sein kann.
- **Beispiel:** Ein französischer Phraseologismus wie „avoir un chat dans la gorge“ (wörtlich „eine Katze im Hals haben“) könnte in der deutschen Übersetzung als „ein Frosch im Hals haben“ übertragen werden, um die gleiche Bedeutung zu vermitteln.

3. Kulturelle Relevanz

- **Erläuterung:** Diese Art der Relevanz bezieht sich auf die Anpassung des Phraseologismus an die kulturellen Gegebenheiten der Zielkultur. Der Übersetzer berücksichtigt, dass bestimmte Ausdrücke in einer Kultur bekannt sind, in einer anderen jedoch nicht verstanden werden könnten.
- **Beispiel:** Ein Phraseologismus aus einer spezifischen Kultur könnte durch einen ähnlichen Ausdruck in der Zielkultur ersetzt werden, der dort eine vergleichbare Bedeutung hat, aber kulturell relevanter ist.

4. Semantische Relevanz

- **Erläuterung:** Hier steht die Bedeutung des Phraseologismus im Vordergrund. Der Übersetzer versucht, die gleiche Bedeutung zu vermitteln, ohne auf die Wortwahl oder den Wortlaut des Originals Rücksicht zu nehmen. Der Ausdruck kann daher völlig unterschiedlich sein, solange die zugrunde liegende Bedeutung erhalten bleibt.
- **Beispiel:** Ein englischer Phraseologismus wie „to be on cloud nine“ (wörtlich „auf Wolke neun sein“, was „sehr glücklich sein“ bedeutet) könnte im Deutschen einfach als „im siebten Himmel sein“ übersetzt werden, was die gleiche Bedeutung hat, aber ein anderes Bild verwendet.

5. Pragmatische Relevanz

- **Erläuterung:** Hier wird die Wirkung des Phraseologismus auf den Leser oder Zuhörer berücksichtigt. Es geht darum, wie der Ausdruck in der Zielkultur wirkt und wie er beim Empfänger ankommt. Der Übersetzer muss eventuell Anpassungen vornehmen, um sicherzustellen, dass der Ausdruck in der Zielsprache genauso effektiv oder passend ist wie im Original.
- **Beispiel:** Wenn ein humorvoller Ausdruck in einer Sprache gut funktioniert, der in einer anderen jedoch nicht denselben Effekt hat, könnte der Übersetzer einen anderen humorvollen Ausdruck wählen, um die gleiche Reaktion zu erzielen.

6. Pragmatisch-kulturelle Relevanz

- **Erläuterung:** Diese Art kombiniert pragmatische und kulturelle Relevanz und berücksichtigt sowohl die Wirkung des Ausdrucks als auch die kulturellen Aspekte der Zielkultur. Der Übersetzer muss hier die Funktion des Phraseologismus sowie seine kulturellen Nuancen beibehalten.
- **Beispiel:** Ein humorvoller Phraseologismus, der tief in einer bestimmten Kultur verwurzelt ist, könnte in der Zielkultur umformuliert werden, sodass der Humor und die kulturelle Bedeutung erhalten bleiben, ohne dass der Leser sich entfremdet fühlt.

Fazit:

Je nach Kontext und Zielsetzung der Übersetzung kann der Übersetzer eine oder mehrere dieser Relevanzarten in seiner Arbeit kombinieren, um sicherzustellen, dass der Phraseologismus in der Zielsprache sowohl verständlich als auch wirksam ist. Die Wahl der Art der Relevanz hängt oft von der Zielgruppe, dem Zweck der Übersetzung und den kulturellen Gegebenheiten ab.

Da es m. E. drei Hauptarten der qualitativen phraseologischen Übersetzungsrelevanz gibt, nämlich stilistische, pragmatische und textlinguistische Übersetzungsrelevanz (s. Drahota-Szabó 2021: 207–208, 2010–223), habe ich nachgefragt, ob der ChatGPT diese drei Typen kennt. Er hat jeweils eine Erläuterung geliefert wie auch Beispiele für die Sprachenpaare Ungarisch-Deutsch und Ungarisch-Englisch. Auf das Zitieren der Beispiele muss hier aus Platzgründen verzichtet werden, umso mehr, als die Kritik zu umfangreich wäre. Der ChatGPT hat nämlich unter

den ungarischen Beispielen auch solche Phraseologismen angegeben, die zwar überaus witzig sind, die es aber meines Wissens nicht gibt, z. B. „Tegnap annyira eltévedtem, hogy a kutyám se talál meg.“ [Gestern habe ich mich dermaßen verirrt, dass nicht einmal mein Hund mich gefunden hat.]. Hier werden nur die Erläuterungen des ChatGPT zu den drei Relevanztypen zitiert:

1. Stilistische Übersetzungsrelevanz

- **Erläuterung:** Bei der stilistischen Übersetzungsrelevanz geht es darum, den **Stil** des Originaltextes zu wahren. Der Übersetzer bemüht sich, die Ausdrucksweise, die Tonalität und die sprachliche Färbung des Originals zu erhalten. Dies betrifft vor allem die Wahl von Phraseologismen, die eine ähnliche stilistische Wirkung in der Zielkultur haben.

2. Pragmatische Übersetzungsrelevanz

- **Erläuterung:** Diese Art der Übersetzungsrelevanz bezieht sich darauf, dass der Übersetzer die **kommunikative Funktion** des Phraseologismus berücksichtigt. Der Ausdruck muss in der Zielsprache die gleiche Wirkung auf den Leser oder Hörer haben wie im Original, selbst wenn dies bedeutet, dass der Ausdruck im Wortlaut geändert wird.

3. Textlinguistische Übersetzungsrelevanz

- **Erläuterung:** Hier geht es um die **Textkohärenz** und die Anpassung des Phraseologismus in den gesamten Textkontext. Der Übersetzer sorgt dafür, dass der Phraseologismus nicht nur isoliert übersetzt wird, sondern dass er harmonisch in den Textfluss passt und mit anderen sprachlichen und stilistischen Elementen des Textes übereinstimmt.

Fazit:

Die **stilistische Relevanz** sorgt dafür, dass der Ausdruck dem gleichen stilistischen Rahmen entspricht, der **pragmatische Aspekt** sichert die kommunikative Funktion des Phraseologismus, und die **textlinguistische Relevanz** sorgt dafür, dass der Ausdruck in den Textfluss integriert ist und zu anderen sprachlichen Elementen passt. In der Praxis müssen Übersetzer diese drei Relevanzen oft kombinieren, um den richtigen Ausdruck zu finden, der sowohl die Bedeutung als auch die Form des Originals in der Zielkultur angemessen wiedergibt.

Ich habe den ChatGPT auch nach der Literatur gefragt, die als Quelle für seine obige Antwort gedient hat. In seiner Antwort hieß es allerdings:

Die Grundlage meiner gegebenen Antworten bildet das allgemeine Wissen über textliche und sprachliche Elemente sowie der Fachwortschatz aus dem Bereich der Übersetzungswissenschaft, den das OpenAI-Modell während seiner Trainingsphase erlernt hat. Die Beispiele, Erklärungen und der theoretische Hintergrund in meiner Antwort stammen nicht aus einer spezifischen Quelle, sondern basieren auf allgemeinen Konzepten der Linguistik, Übersetzungswissenschaft und kulturellen Übersetzungen.

Da die Informationen nicht aus bestimmten Büchern oder Artikeln stammen, kann ich keine genauen bibliografischen Angaben machen, die auf ein bestimmtes Werk oder einen bestimmten Autor verweisen. Falls du jedoch nach konkreten Quellen zu den Themen phraseologische Übersetzung, stilistische Relevanz, pragmatische Relevanz und textlinguistische Relevanz suchst, kann ich einige allgemein anerkannte Werke aus der Übersetzungswissenschaft und -praxis empfehlen, die dir helfen können, das Thema tiefer zu verstehen.

Auf meine erneute Bitte hin hat mir der ChatGPT diese Bücher empfohlen, mit bibliographischen Angaben:

1. Venuti, Lawrence – *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (1995). Routledge, London & New York.
2. Baker, Mona – *In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation* (1992). Routledge, London & New York.
3. House, Juliane – *Translation: A Conceptual Framework* (2015). Routledge, London & New York.
4. Newmark, Peter – *A Textbook of Translation* (1988). Prentice Hall, Hertfordshire.

Die Konversation mit dem ChatGPT hätte noch z. B. mit der Diskussion über den idiomtranslatorischen Dogmatismus, Skeptizismus, Nihilismus und Pragmatismus fortgesetzt werden können (s. Drahota-Szabó 2015: 258–260; 2021: 207, mit Verweis auf Farø 2006). Es kann aber auch schon auf Grundlage seiner

Antworten festgestellt werden: Die übersetzungstheoretischen Kenntnisse des ChatGPT in Bezug auf die Sprichwörter – bzw. Phraseologismen und ihre Übersetzungen – sind zwar nicht immer ganz genau, doch scheinen sie ausreichend zu sein. Theoretisch kennt er auch die meisten Verfahren, unter denen die ÜbersetzerInnen – je nach Art der Übersetzungsrelevanz – wählen können. Nun soll kontrolliert werden, ob der ChatGPT diese theoretischen Kenntnisse in die Übersetzungspraxis umsetzen kann.

2. *Wie du mir, so ich dir.*

Der ungarische Originaltext stammt von Péter Esterházy (2001: I/345):⁵

A kérdés tehát az volt, hogy miként alakították ki édesapámék az együttműködés szellemét. **Aki megdobj kövel, dobd vissza kenyérrel** – hogy talán e szerint. De amikor édesapámat hókon nyomták kövel, egyszerűen, puff, elájult. **Meg a pékség is be volt zárva.** [...] Az derült ki, hogy édesapámék többé-kevésbé pontosan követték az ún. **Tit for Tat stratégiát**, melyet egy amcsi szociálpszichológus eszelt ki, Anatol Rapoport, pofonegyszerű, az ember jóindulatúan nyit, kooperál, és aztán azt lépi, amit a barátja (vagy általánosabban: „a barátja”) lépett az előző menetben, **kölcsönkenyér visszajár**. Kivételek is előfordultak: volt, hogy apám a barátja árulása ellenére elment földéríteni **a nagy halat**, igen, barátságosság és megbocsátás vezette édesapámat. Édesapám jó ember. Na még érdekes verzió, amikor apám **a nagy hal**.

In der zitierten Textpassage verfügen die Sprichwörter erstens über eine quantitative Übersetzungsrelevanz, denn es sind drei Sprichwörter zu identifizieren. Das erste Sprichwort ist: *Ha megdobnak kövel, dobd vissza kenyérrel!* [Wenn du mit Stein beworfen wirst, wirf mit Brot zurück!] = 'wenn einem Unrecht widerfährt, so erwidert ein guter Mensch sogar dies mit guten Taten' (s. Bárdosi 2015: 303; Forgács 2003: 398). Das Sprichwort ist

⁵ Das Werk besteht aus zwei Büchern. In den Quellenangaben bezieht sich die I auf das erste Buch („Nummerierte Sätze aus dem Leben der Familie Esterházy“), die II auf das zweite Buch („Bekenntnisse einer Familie Esterházy“); die zweite Ziffer gibt jeweils das Kapitel und nicht die Seitenzahl an.

biblischen Ursprungs, damit ist zu erklären, dass es weitgehende Äquivalente in den Kontrastsprachen gibt (s. Bárdosi ebenda). (Mittlerweile gibt es auch schon ein durch Expansion entstandenes Antisprichwort dazu: *Ha megdobnak követ, dobd vissza kenyérrel, de az legyen kemény!* [Wenn du mit Stein beworfen wirst, wirf mit Brot zurück, aber das soll hart sein!]; s. Bárdosi 2015 ebenda.) Im Text wird das Sprichwort auch literalisiert.

Zweitens wird auf eine englische Wendung angespielt: „Tit for Tat stratégia“ [Tit for Tat Strategie] impliziert: *to give someone tit for tat* = 'to take revenge on someone; to match someone eye for eye/tooth for tooth/blow for blow' (s. Nagy 1996: 473). Damit ist das ungarische Sprichwort semantisch äquivalent: *Kölcsönkenyér visszajár.* [Geliehenes Brot gilt es zurückzugeben.] = 'die von anderen zugefügten Beleidigungen/Kränkungen/Verletzungen soll man mit den gleichen Mitteln zurückzahlen' (s. Forgács 2003: 400).

Schließlich impliziert „a nagy hal“ [der große Fisch] im Kontextzusammenhang dieses Sprichwort: *A nagy halak bekapják/megeszik/lenyelik/felfalják a kis halakat.* [Die großen Fische verschlingen/verschlucken/essen/fressen die kleinen Fische.] = 'die Stärkeren besiegen die Schwächeren, die großen Firmen verschlingen die kleineren' (s. Forgács 2003: 247). Das deutsche Sprichwort ist sowohl formal als auch semantisch weitgehend äquivalent: *Die großen Fische fressen die kleinen.* (s. Duden 2013: 222). Die deutsche Übersetzung vom ChatGPT:

Die Frage war also, wie mein Vater und seine Leute den Geist der Zusammenarbeit geschaffen haben. **Wer mit einem Stein wirft, werfe mit Brot zurück** – vielleicht so nach diesem Prinzip. Aber als mein Vater mit einem Stein ins Gesicht getroffen wurde, fiel er einfach um, puff, und fiel in Ohnmacht. **Und die Bäckerei war auch geschlossen.** [...] Es stellte sich heraus, dass mein Vater und seine Leute mehr oder weniger genau die sogenannte „**Tit for Tat**“-Strategie befolgten, die ein amerikanischer Sozialpsychologe, Anatol Rapoport, erfunden hat, ganz einfach: Der Mensch handelt gutmütig, kooperiert, und dann tut er das, was sein Freund (oder allgemeiner gesagt: „sein Freund“) im vorherigen Schritt getan hat, **ein Freundschaftsdienst kommt zurück.** Es gab auch Ausnahmen: Es gab Momente, in denen mein Vater trotz des Verrats seines Freundes losging, um **den großen Fisch** zu fangen, ja,

Freundlichkeit und Vergebung führten meinen Vater. Mein Vater ist ein guter Mensch. Und noch eine interessante Version, als mein Vater **der große Fisch** war.

Die deutsche Übersetzung von Terézia Mora (Esterházy 2004a: 410–411):

Die Frage war also, wie mein Vater und seine Leute den Geist der Zusammenarbeit herausbildeten. **Wer dich mit Steinen bewirft, den bewerfe mit Brot** – so in der Art vielleicht. Als allerdings mein Vater einen Stein vor den Latz bekam, fiel er, wumms, einfach in Ohnmacht. **Und die Bäckerei war auch zu.** [...] Es stellte sich heraus, daß mein Vater und seine Leute mehr oder weniger genau die sog. **tit for tat-Strategie** verfolgten, die sich ein Ami Sozialpsychologe, Anatol Rapaport, ausgedacht hat, kinderleicht, man eröffnet wohlwollend, kooperiert und macht dann in Folge dieselben Schritte, die der Freund (oder allgemeiner: »ein Freund«) im Zug davor gemacht hat, **wie du mir, so ich dir**. Es gab auch Ausnahmen: Es kam vor, daß mein Vater trotz des Verrats des Freundes mit dem Auskundschaften **des großen Fisches** fortfuhr, jawohl, Freundlichkeit und Nachsicht waren die Triebfeder meines Vaters. Mein Vater ist ein guter Mensch. Eine interessante Version ist noch, wenn mein Vater **der große Fisch** ist.

Die Übertragung der Sprichwörter ist beim ChatGPT und bei Terézia Mora weitgehend ähnlich, nur in einem Punkt unterscheiden sie sich voneinander. Im Kontext ist sowohl *Ein Freundschaftsdienst kommt zurück*, als auch das Sprichwort *Wie du mir, so ich dir*: ('so schlecht, wie du dich mir gegenüber verhältst/verhalten hast, so verhalte ich mich auch dir gegenüber'; s. Duden 2013: 842) adäquat.

Die englische Übersetzung vom ChatGPT:

So the question was, how my father and his people shaped the spirit of cooperation. **If someone throws a stone at you, throw back bread** – maybe something like that. But when my father was hit in the face **with a stone**, he just, puff, passed out. **And the bakery was closed too.** [...] It turned out that my father and his people

more or less exactly followed the so-called ‘**Tit for Tat**’ strategy, invented by an American social psychologist, Anatol Rapoport, really simple: the person acts with good intentions, cooperates, and then does what their friend (or more generally: ‘their friend’) did in the previous round, **a kindness returns**. There were exceptions too: there were times when my father went to catch **the big fish** despite his friend’s betrayal, yes, friendliness and forgiveness guided my father. My father is a good man. Now, here’s another interesting version, when my father was **the big fish**.

In der Übersetzung von Judith Sollosy (Esterházy 2004b: I/345):

The question thus became how my father and the others should elaborate the spirit of cooperation. **If someone casts a stone at you, pay back with bread**—would this be it? But when my father was hit **with a stone** in the middle of the forehead, pow!, he was out cold. Besides, **the bakery was closed** for the day. [...] It turned out that my father and co. were following the so-called **tit-for-tat-strategy** that a Yankee social psychologist, Anatol Rapoport, had come up with. It’s real simple. You make your opening move with the best of intentions, you cooperate. But your next move will depend on your friend’s (or generally, a friend’s) next move. **Tit for tat**. There are exceptions: Despite his friend’s betrayal, my father would at times go to reconnoitre **the big fish** on his own. Yes: my father was motivated by the spirit of brotherhood and forgiveness. My father is a good man. Another interesting version is when my father is **the big fish**.

Die Übersetzungen ins Englische sind ebenfalls ähnlich. Da es im Text darum geht, dass man sich anderen gegenüber abhängig davon benimmt, wie sich die anderen benehmen, d. h. soz. nach dem Motto *der Ton macht die Musik*, ist sowohl die Übersetzung mit „a kindness returns“ als auch die mit „Tit for tat“ passend.

Der ChatGPT hat in beiden Sprachen adäquate Übersetzungen geliefert.

3. Ist es an Josephus klar, wird es ein gesegnet’ Jahr.

Der Textausschnitt stammt wieder aus dem Roman von Péter Esterházy (2001: II/43):

Kiskorunkban **magáztuk a szüleinket**, papi, kérem, mami, kérem. **Tetszikezni nem volt szabad**. Cselédtempó, világosított föl anyánk, nem gőgösen, inkább magyarázva, leíron, didaktikusan. [...]

A gimnáziumi időkben hagytuk abba magázást, vagy hát hagytuk is meg nem is, mert ebből nem lett, nem tudott lenni valódi tegezés; a tegezésünket úgy halljuk, mint valami tréfát, mintha szüleink újra és újra, kivételesen, játékból erre engedélyt adnának. A tegezéssel, édesanyánk minden tiltakozása ellenére (contra lingua non est pis), rájuk ragadt a muter és a **fater**, de ez sem egészen a közkeletű használatban, mondjuk, ahogy a csapos odalöki, na, ezt még döntse be, **fater**, hanem..., nem is tudom, tiszteletteljesebb?, vagy mintha több köze maradt volna a német eredetihez? Mindenképp erősen és állandóan éreztük e szavak személyességét, igen, mintha személynévként használtuk volna. **Fater, József, Benedek, zsákba** (sic!) **hozzák a meleget**.

Im zitierten Text finden wir ein Sprachspiel, dessen Grundlage ein Sprichwort ist. Die kodifizierte Form und Bedeutung des ungarischen Sprichwortes ist: *Sándor, József, Benedek zsákban hoznak meleget*. [Sándor, József, Benedek bringen im Sack die Wärme.] = 'um Mitte März ist das Wetter bereits milder, frühlingshaft' (s. Bárdosi 2015: 460; Forgács 2003: 614). Sowohl nach formalen als auch nach semantischen Kriterien handelt es sich um ein Sprichwort, genauer um eine Bauernregel. Im Hintergrund der Wendung steht die Beobachtung, nach der es um Mitte März tagsüber immer wärmer wird. Im Phraseologismus kommen drei Vornamen vor: Der Namenstag Sándor ist am 18. März, József am 19. März und Benedek am 21. März. Die erste Komponente des Sprichwortes, nämlich *Sándor* wird durch *Fater* substituiert, und so entsteht eine Sprichwort-Persiflage. Unter Sprichwort-Persiflagen werden „durch kreative Sprachspiele, durch Verdrehung, Parodie von Sprichwörtern entstandene neue Lebensweisheiten (vgl. dt. Antispruchwort, Sprichwortverfremdung; engl. anti-proverb)“ verstanden (Drahota-Szabó 2021: 144).⁶ Dem Sprachspiel liegen die Höflichkeitsformen im Ungarischen zugrunde. Was Siezen und Duzen betrifft, weist das

⁶ Vgl. dazu noch Hrisztova-Gotthardt et al. 2018; Mieder und Tóthné Litovkina 1999.

Ungarische im Vergleich zum Deutschen – und besonders zum Englischen – deutliche Divergenzen auf. Im Englischen steht bei der Anrede nur das Pronomen *you* zur Verfügung, sowohl in der informellen als auch in der formellen Kommunikation. Im Deutschen haben wir für das Duzen das Pronomen *du* (im Plural *ihr*), für das Siezen das Pronomen *Sie*. Im Ungarischen hat man allerdings beim Siezen die Wahl zwischen zwei Pronomina. Das Pronomen *Ön* (im Plural *Önök*) wird in der formell-höflichen Rede verwendet, z. B. wenn Vorgesetzte angesprochen werden, das Publikum bei einem offiziellen Auftritt usw. Das Pronomen *Maga* (im Plural *Maguk*) wird ebenfalls beim Siezen verwendet, allerdings ist es nicht so hochachtungsvoll und es klingt weniger distanziert (so werden z. B. ältere/alte Nachbarn angesprochen). Schließlich gibt es noch eine weitere Art der verbalen Höflichkeit, das sog. „tetszikezés“: Dabei wird das Verb *tetszik* mit dem Infinitiv des Vollverbs (Inhaltsverbs) kombiniert. Das ist ebenfalls eine höfliche Siezform, die weniger Distanz als *Sie* ausdrückt, deutlich vertrauter klingt und in der mündlichen Kommunikation gebraucht wird. Die Frage „Wie geht es Ihnen?“ kann man also im Ungarischen – vor allem abhängig von der Art der Beziehung zur angesprochenen Person – wie folgt stellen: *Ön hogy vagy?*; *Maga hogy van?*; *Hogy tetszik lenni?* [wörtl. etwa: Wie gefällt es Ihnen zu sein?]. Das sog. „tetszikezés“ ist sprachenspezifisch, ist eine ungarische sprachliche Realie, daher – im engeren Sinne – unübersetzbar, doch adaptierbar.⁷ Die deutsche Übersetzung vom ChatGPT:

Als wir klein waren, **sprachen wir unsere Eltern mit „Sie“ an**, „Herr Papa“, „Frau Mama“, bitte. **Es war nicht erlaubt, sich zu duzen.** „Dienermodus“, erklärte uns unsere Mutter, nicht hochmütig, eher erklärend, in einem schlichten, didaktischen Ton. [...] In den Jahren der Gymnasialzeit hörten wir auf, unsere Eltern zu siezen, oder besser gesagt, wir hörten auf, aber auch nicht ganz, denn es wurde kein echtes Duzen daraus; unser Duzen hörten wir wie einen Scherz, als ob unsere Eltern uns immer wieder, ausnahmsweise, im Spaß diese Erlaubnis geben würden. Trotz aller Proteste unserer Mutter (contra lingua non est pis) blieb der „Mutti“ und „Vati“ an ihnen haften, aber auch dies war nicht ganz in der allge-

⁷ Zur Übersetzung des sog. „tetszikezés“ s. Drahota-Szabó 2014: 49–50.

meinen Gebrauchspraxis, sagen wir, so wie der Wirt es sagt: „Na, das trink noch mal, **Vati**“, sondern... ich weiß nicht, respektvoller?, oder als ob es noch mehr mit dem deutschen Original zu tun gehabt hätte? Auf jeden Fall spürten wir immer sehr stark und ständig die Persönlichkeit dieser Wörter, ja, als hätten wir sie wie einen Eigennamen verwendet. **Vati, Josef, Benedikt, sie bringen die Wärme in den (sic!) Sack.**

Die Übersetzung zeigt eindeutig, dass der ChatGPT die theoretischen Kenntnisse, über die es angeblich verfügt, in die Praxis nicht umsetzen konnte: Er hat das Sprichwort wörtlich übersetzt. Darüber hinaus ist auch die Übertragung des sog. „tetszikezés“ eindeutig falsch, denn es ist keine Duzform, eben im Gegenteil. Das Sprichwort wird im ungarischen Text spielerisch verdreht, wie auch in der Übersetzung des ChatGPT, allerdings ist hier die Verwendung des Wortes *Vati* nicht adäquat. In einer Kneipenszene würde man das Wort *Alter* gebrauchen.

Vergleichen wir die Übersetzung des ChatGPT mit der von Terézia Mora (Esterházy 2004a: II/43):

Als wir klein waren, siezten wir unsere Eltern, der Herr Papi, die Frau Mami. **Tun zu sagen war nicht erlaubt.** Dienstbotentempo, klarte uns unsere Mutter auf, nicht überheblich, eher erklärend, beschreibend, didaktisch. [...]

Im Gymnasium **haben wir dann mit dem Siezen aufgehört**, das heißt, so mehr oder weniger, denn so ein richtiges Duzen wurde daraus nicht, konnte es nicht werden, unser Duzen klang wie ein Scherz in unseren Ohren, als hätten unsere Eltern wieder und wieder ausnahmsweise, spielerisch ihre Erlaubnis dazu erteilt. Mit dem Duzen hielten, trotz aller Proteste meiner Mutter (contra linguam non est piss), auch die Ausdrücke Alte und **Alter** Einzug, aber auch das nicht in der allgemein üblichen Art der Benutzung, wie, sagen wir mal, der Wirt einem das Glas hinknallt, hier, kipp das noch hinter, **Alter**, sondern ... ich weiß auch nicht, respektvoller?, als hätte es noch mehr mit dem Alter zu tun? Jedenfalls spürten wir intensiv und permanent das Persönliche dieser Worte, ja, als würden wir sie als Personennamen benutzen, **Alter, Joseph, Benedikt klar, wird es ein gesegnet Jahr.**

Die Übersetzung des Sprichwortes ist sehr gut: Terézia Mora hat das funktionale Äquivalent in den Text eingebettet, d. h. sie hat mit diesem interlingualen Synonym adaptiert: *Ist es an Josephus klar, wird es ein gesegnet' Jahr.* Diese Bauernregel existiert auch in folgenden Varianten: *Ist's am Josephstag klar, folgt ein fruchtbar Jahr.;* *Hat der Matthias endlich seine Hack' verloren, wird der Joseph schon das Eis durchbohren.;* *Wenn einmal Josephi ist, endet der Winter ganz gewiss.;* *Josephi klar, ein gutes Jahr.*⁸ Die Übersetzerin hat das Sprichwort kreativ verdreht, indem sie den ersten Vornamen (*Sándor*) mit *Alter* ausgetauscht hat. So ist das Sprichwort zum textstrukturierenden Element geworden, genauso wie im ungarischen Originaltext. Die Wirkungsgleichheit ist also – seitens der Übersetzerin – gesichert. Die adaptierende Übersetzung des ung. „tetszikezés“ kann pragmatisch deshalb als weitgehend adäquat bewertet werden, weil die *tun*-Konstruktion, d. h. die Verbindung von *tun* mit einem Infinitiv (z. B. **er tut gerade lesen;* **er tut einkaufen*) ebenfalls umgangssprachlich ist. In der Standardsprache gilt diese Konstruktion als nicht korrekt (vgl. Duden 2005: 835). Die Übersetzung vom ChatGPT ins Englische:

When we were little, **we used formal address with our parents**, 'Father, please,' 'Mother, please.' **We weren't allowed to be familiar.** 'Servant mode,' our mother would explain, not arrogantly, but rather as an explanation, simply, didactically. [...] In our high school years, we stopped using formal address, or rather, we kind of stopped but didn't, because it didn't become true familiarity; our familiar address sounded like a joke, as if our parents were giving us permission, repeatedly and exceptionally, to do so in a playful manner. Despite all of our mother's protests (contra lingua non est pis), 'Mutti' and '**Vati**' stuck with them, but this wasn't quite in the common usage, say, like how the bartender might say, 'Now drink this up, **Vati**,' but... I don't know, more respectful?, or as if it had remained more connected to the German original? In any case, we always strongly and constantly felt the personal nature of these words, yes, as if we were using them like proper names. **Vati, Josef, Benedek, they're bringing the warmth in the sack.**

⁸ Vgl. https://www.gutzitiert.de/bauernregeln_maerz.html; <https://stuecken.de/wetterstation/bauernregeln/>, abgerufen am 15. Februar 2025.

Bei der Übertragung des Sprichwortes ins Englische hat der ChatGPT den gleichen Fehler begangen wie auch in der deutschen Übersetzung: Er hat das Sprichwort wörtlich übersetzt. Die adaptierende Übertragung des sog. „tetszikezés“ ist allerdings adäquat.

Die professionelle englische Übersetzung stammt von Judith Sollosy (Esterházy 2004b: II/43):

When we were young, we addressed our parents **in the formal mode**, Papi, if you please, Mami, if you please. **But overdoing the respect with linguistics was generally not acceptable.** It's for servants, our mother informed us, nor arrogantly, just by way of explanation, matter-of-factly, her purpose purely didactic. [...] **We stopped using the formal mode of address** in high school, though not entirely, as it could never turn into real familiarity. We heard ourselves use the informal as if it were a joke, as if our parents, exceptionally, again and again, had given us permission for the fun of it. Along with the use of the familiar, and despite our mother's vehement protest (*contra lingua non est piss*), we called them Mutter and **Vater**, though not quite the way it was commonly used, the way the bartender, let's say, would inquire, how 'bout another shot, **Vater old man** but ..., I don't know, more respectfully?, or as if it had more in common with the German original? We felt the subjective character of these words keenly, constantly, yes, as if we were using them as first names, **Vater, Mátyás, Luke and John, bless the bed that I lie on.**

Die Übertragung des Sprichwortes ist überaus kreativ. Judith Sollosy hat nicht einen entsprechenden Phraseologismus, d. h. eine Bauernregel in den Text eingebettet, sondern ein Abendgebet für Kinder. Das Gebet lautet: *Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, / Bless the bed that I lie on. / Four corners to my bed, / Four angels 'round my head. / One to watch and one to pray / And two to guide me through the day.*⁹ Der Anfang dieses Gebets wird von Judith Sollosy spielerisch modifiziert, indem der Name von *Matthew* mit *Vater* ausgetauscht wird, denn das Wort *Vater* wird

⁹ Vgl. z. B. allnurseryrhymes.com/matthew-mark-luke-and-john, abgerufen am 15. Februar 2025.

im Text thematisiert. So wird also das intertextuelle Element – auf kreative Weise – textkonstitutiv. Es ist ebenfalls eine glückliche Entscheidung, dass das Wort *Vater* in seiner deutschen Form beibehalten wird, denn es geht im Text gerade darum, dass das Wort deutscher Herkunft ist („German original“). Diese Lösung ist auch deshalb zu begrüßen, weil es im Englischen sehr kompliziert wäre, die semantischen, genauer konnotativen Unterschiede zu erläutern, die zwischen dem deutschen *Vater* [ung. *apa, édesapa*] und dem – aus dem Deutschen übernommenen – *fater* zweifelsohne existieren. *Fater* drückt nämlich im Ungarischen in der Bedeutung von 'Mann, der ein oder mehrere Kinder gezeugt hat' (DUW 2023: 1914) – abhängig von der konkreten Kommunikationssituation – Vertrautheit aus oder hat meistens eine scherzhafte Färbung. Darüber hinaus kann *fater* im ungarischen Slang auch als Anrede für alte/ältere Männer verwendet werden, dann ist aber dieses Wort eher grob, herablassend (vgl. Pusztai 2003: 346). Die Übertragung der Höflichkeitsformen ist ebenfalls adäquat, d. h. „magázás“ [Siezen] mit „formal mode“; das sog. „tetszikezés“ ist tatsächlich ein wenig weitschweifig, so dass die Übersetzung „overdoing the respect with linguistics“ treffend ist.

Zusammenfassend kann festgestellt werden, dass die menschlichen Übersetzungen, d. h. die Übersetzung von Terézia Mora und Judith Sollosy das textkonstitutive Sprichwort kreativ übertragen haben, d. h. das Sprachspiel nachgestaltet haben. Sie waren auch in der Übertragung der für das Ungarische charakteristischen Höflichkeitsform erfolgreich, denn sie haben pragmatisch adäquate Lösungen geliefert. Der ChatGPT hat die Übersetzungsaufgabe nicht erfolgreich bewältigen können.

4. Lump bleibt Lump.

Der Textabschnitt stammt aus dem Roman von Szilárd Borbély (2013: 171):

»Na, mondjon már valamit, Popescu. Elvezeti ezt a falut a római pápa nyájába, ugye? Mert azok követni fogják magát, az már biztos«, mondta.

A követ azonnal letorkolta.

»Szó sem lehet róla! Popescu magát bűnében megmakacsolt eretnek. Belőle sose lesz a pápának, sem a tisztelendő hercegprimás urunknak igaz híve. **Kutyából nem lesz szalonna.** Tudnod kellene neked, bíró, hogy **régi tömlőbe nem töltenek újbort.** Popescunak gyalázatos szavai miatt a börtönben a helye«, mondta.

Die deutsche Übersetzung vom ChatGPT:

„Na, sagen Sie schon etwas, Popescu. Führen Sie dieses Dorf in die Herde des römischen Papstes, oder? Denn die werden Ihnen folgen, das ist sicher“, sagte er.

Der Gesandte unterbrach ihn sofort.

„Davon kann keine Rede sein! Popescu ist ein hartnäckiger Ketzer in seinen Sünden. Aus ihm wird nie ein wahrer Anhänger des Papstes oder unseres ehrwürdigen Erzbischofs. **Aus einem Hund wird kein Speck.** Du solltest wissen, Richter, dass **in alten Schläuchen kein neuer Wein gegossen wird.** Wegen seiner schändlichen Worte gehört Popescu ins Gefängnis“, sagte er.

Der ChatGPT hat den Text wie folgt ins Englische übertragen:

“Well, say something, Popescu. You will lead this village into the flock of the Roman pope, right? Because they will follow you, that’s for sure,” he said.

The messenger immediately rebuked him.

“Not a chance! Popescu is a stubborn heretic in his sins. He will never be a true follower of the pope or our honorable archbishop. **You can’t turn a dog into bacon.** You should know, Judge, that **new wine doesn’t go into old wineskins.** Because of his disgraceful words, Popescu belongs in prison,” he said.

Zuerst kann dieses ungarische Sprichwort identifiziert werden: *Kutyából nem lesz szalonna*. [Aus (einem) Hund wird kein Speck.] = ‘die schlechten Eigenschaften ändern sich nicht leicht; ein Mensch, der von Natur aus schlecht, böse ist, bleibt auch so’ (vgl. Forgács 2003: 418–419; Bárdosi 2015: 318). Dies wird vom ChatGPT in beiden Fällen wörtlich übersetzt. Das zweite Sprichwort lautet: *Régi tömlőbe nem töltenek újbort*. [In alten Schlauch wird kein neuer Wein gegossen.]. Es existiert auch in

anderen Varianten, z. B.: *Nem jó ó hordóba új bort tölteni. / Nem jó ó bort új hordóba tölteni, mert két kár lesz benne.* [Es ist nicht gut, in altes Fass neuen Wein zu füllen. / Es ist nicht gut, alten Wein in neues Fass zu füllen, denn es werden zwei Schäden daraus.] (s. Margalits 1896: 591). Es handelt sich um ein Zitat aus der Bibel (s. Matthäus 9,17): „Niemand setzt ein Stück neuen Stoff auf ein altes Kleid, denn der neue Stoff reißt doch wieder ab und es entsteht ein noch größerer Riss. Auch füllt man nicht neuen Wein in alte Schläuche. Sonst reißen die Schläuche, der Wein läuft aus und die Schläuche sind unbrauchbar. Neuen Wein füllt man in neue Schläuche, dann bleibt beides erhalten.“¹⁰ Auf Grundlage dieser Bibelstelle entwickelte sich im Deutschen der Phraseologismus *junger/neuer Wein in alten Schläuchen* in der Bedeutung 'etwas nicht grundlegend Erneuerstes, nur halbherzig Umgestaltetes' (s. Duden 2013: 831). Da die Herkunft also die Bibel ist, resultiert aus der wortgetreuen Übersetzung eine adäquate Übersetzung.

In der Übersetzung von Heike Flemming und Lacy Kornitzer (Borbély 2014: 162–163) lautet die Textstelle wie folgt:

Na, sagen Sie doch schon was, Popescu. Sie werden dieses Dorf der Herde des römischen Papstes zuführen, nicht wahr? Denn das Volk folgt ihnen, soviel ist sicher, sagte er.

Der Abgesandte fuhr ihm sofort über den Mund.

Davon kann keine Rede sein! Popescu ist ein in Sünde starrköpfiger Ketzer. Aus ihm wird niemals ein wahrer Anhänger des Papstes oder unseres ehrwürdigen Herrn Fürstprimas. **Lump bleibt Lump.**

Du solltest wissen, Richter, dass **wir keinen neuen Wein in alte Schläuche füllen.** Für seine schändlichen Worte gehört Popescu in den Kerker, sagte er.

Das biblische Sprichwort wird auch hier mit dem ZS-Äquivalent übersetzt. Die Adaptation mit *Lump bleibt Lump.* ist in jeder Hinsicht treffend.

Ottilie Mulzet (Borbély 2016: 147) hat bei der Übertragung des biblischen Sprichwortes genauso verfahren wie Heike Flem-

¹⁰ Quelle: <https://www.uibk.ac.at/theol/leseraum/bibel/mt9.html>, abgerufen am 25. Februar 2025.

ming und Lacy Kornitzer. Beim ersten Sprichwort hat sie nicht adaptiert, sondern wörtlich übersetzt. Aus dem Kontext – besonders aus dem weiteren Kontext des Romans – kann aber die Bedeutung mühelos erschlossen werden.

‘Well, say something already, Popescu. You will lead this village into the fold of the Roman priesthood, will you not? Because then the village will surely follow you, that much is certain,’ he said.

The envoy immediately shouted him down.

“‘Impossible! In his sin, Popescu himself is an unrepentant heretic. Never shall he be true a believer of the supreme pontiff, let alone of our reverend lord prince primate. **You can’t get bacon out of a dog.** You should also know, Chronicler, that **new wine is never poured into old goatskins.** Popescu’s place—thanks to his abominable words—is in jail,’ he said.

Auf Systemebene hätte sie das folgende Äquivalent wählen können: *A leopard can’t change its spots.; The leopard cannot change his spots.* (= ‘people cannot change their character/nature’; s. Longman 2001: 808; Nagy 1996: 272). Doch ist die wörtliche Übersetzung des ungarischen Sprichwortes adäquater, da es nicht nur semantisch, sondern auch stilistisch besser in den Text passt, und zwar auf Grund seiner Grobheit.

Zusammenfassend kann festgestellt werden, dass der ChatGPT bei der Übersetzung des Textes genauso erfolgreich war wie die professionellen ÜbersetzerInnen. Es ist allerdings fraglich, wie bewusst die Wahl des Übersetzungsverfahrens getroffen wurde bzw. ob das Verfahren der wörtlichen Übersetzung mechanisch eingesetzt wurde.

5. Messer, Gabel, Schere, Licht sind für kleine Kinder nicht.

Der ungarische Text stammt aus dem Roman von Szilárd Borbély (2013: 10):

Összel el szoktunk szökni az egyetlen gesztenyefához a Kepecgyepjén túlra. A kertek alatt lopakodunk. A hatalmas fa ötujjú levelei nyár végén száradtan hullnak le. Mintha óriások levágott kézfejei hevernének az avarban. Tavasszal virága fehér gyertya. Zöld

kopáncsa sündisznó. Gyufaszálból csinálunk neki lábat. Anyámtól elkérjük az elgyújtott gyufaszálakat. Csak anyánk nyúlhat a gyufához, mert az pulyának nem való.

„Kés, villa, olló, pulya kezébe nem való”, kántálja anyám.

Die kodifizierte Form und Bedeutung des Sprichwortes ist: *Kés, villa, olló, gyerek kezébe nem való.*; *Kés, villa, olló nem gyerek kezébe való.* [Messer, Gabel, Schere sind nicht in die Hände des Kindes.] = 'man sollte nicht zulassen, dass Kinder mit solchen Gegenständen spielen, mit denen sie sich verletzen können' (s. Forgács 2003: 367). Die deutsche Übersetzung vom ChatGPT:

Im Herbst fliehen wir oft zu dem einzigen Kastanienbaum hinter dem Kepecgyepjén. Wir schleichen unter den Gärten hindurch. Der riesige Baum verliert Ende des Sommers seine fünfzackigen Blätter, die vertrocknet auf dem Boden liegen. Es sieht aus, als ob riesige, abgetrennte Handflächen der Riesen im Laub liegen. Im Frühling blüht der Baum mit weißen Kerzenblumen. Der grüne Stachel ist ein Igel. Wir basteln ihm Beine aus Streichhölzern. Wir bitten unsere Mutter um die verbrannten Streichhölzer. Nur unsere Mutter darf an die Streichhölzer, denn sie sind nicht für uns Kinder gedacht.

„Messer, Gabel, Schere, das sind keine Spielzeuge für Kinder“, singt unsere Mutter.

Die Übersetzung vom ChatGPT ins Englische:

In autumn, we usually escape to the only chestnut tree beyond Kepecgyepje. We sneak under the gardens. The massive tree's five-fingered leaves fall dry at the end of summer. It looks as if giant severed hands are lying in the fallen leaves. In spring, its flowers are white candles. Its green spiky fruit is like a hedgehog. We make it legs from matchsticks. We ask our mother for the burnt matchsticks. Only our mother can touch the matches, because they are not for children.

‘Knife, fork, scissors, not for children’s hands,’ sings our mother.

Beide Übersetzungen sind weitgehend wortgetreu, und sie reimen nicht. Der ChatGPT baut das Äquivalent, das es auf Systemebene gibt, in seine deutsche Übersetzung nicht ein.

Die englische Übersetzung von Otilie Mulzet (Borbély 2016: 2) ist eine weitgehend wörtliche und enthält keinen Reim, somit ist diese Übersetzung mit der vom ChatGPT vergleichbar:

In the autumn, we escape to the only chestnut tree on the other side of Kepec Meadow. We sneak away behind the gardens. The enormous tree's five-pointed leaves dry out toward the end of summer and begin to fall. It's as if there are huge cut-off hands lying around amid the dead leaves. In the spring, the blossoms of the chestnut tree are white candles. Its green burr is like a hedgehog. We make legs for the chestnuts out of matchsticks. We ask my mother for the burned-out matchsticks. Only our mother can touch matches; they're not for kids.

“Scissors, knives, forks—not for little brats,” chants my mother.

Die Übersetzung von Heike Flemming und Lacy Kornitzer (2014: 10):

Im Herbst büchsen wir immer aus, zum Kastanienbaum hinter der Kepecwiese. Unten an den Gärten vorbei. Ende des Sommers fallen die fünffingrigen trockenen Blätter des riesigen Baums. Es ist, als lägen abgeschnittene Hände von Riesen im Laub. Ihre Blüte im Frühling ist eine weiße Kerze. Die grüne Schale ein Igel. Aus Streichhölzern machen wir für sie Beine. Wir bitten meine Mutter um die verbrauchten. Nur unsere Mutter darf Streichhölzer anfassen, sie sind nicht für Kinder.

»Messer, Gabel, Schere, Licht sind für kleine Kinder nicht«, wiederholt sie ständig.

Hier wird nicht formale, sondern dynamische Äquivalenz erzielt, d. h. es wird adaptiert. Die erste Zeile des allgemein bekannten Kinderreims ist zum Sprichwort geworden: *Messer, Gabel, Schere, Licht dürfen kleine Kinder nicht.* / *Ich sag' es dir ganz ehrlich: Das ist zu gefährlich!* / *Ohne Mama, ohne Papa ist das nicht erlaubt,* / *Darum singen wir den Reim zusammen, alle noch mal laut* usw. Es gibt auch eine Melodie dazu, d. h. man kann es

auch singen. Den Kinderreim könnte man nicht nur als Sprichwort auffassen, sondern auch als Zitat, als intertextuelles Element im Roman, denn es geht vermutlich auf das deutsche Kinderbuch „Der Struwwelpeter“ von Heinrich Hoffmann (1845) zurück. An diese Herkunft denkt man allerdings heute kaum.

6. Die Geschichte ist eine wechselvolle Reihe von Regen und Traufen.

Der nächste Text stammt von Péter Esterházy (2001: I/20):

A történelem csöbrök és vödörök váltakozó sora, ez a természetes, vallotta édesapám, amivel nem kívánta a szabadság lehetőségét eleve kétségbe vonni, annál is kevésbé, mert arról egyáltalán nem volt hajlandó nyilatkozni, **ki vagy mi volna a csöbör meg a vödör, és ki vagy mi esnék oda bele**. Ónkupáját magasra emelvén selmán mosolygott. Mert másfelől, bólogatott kapatosan, **minde-nik kutya olyan, mindenik**, vágta hátba Zichy komáját, **hogy jön még dér rá**.

Hier wird der folgende Phraseologismus zum textstrukturierenden Element: *csöbörből vödörbe* (oder: *cseberből vederbe*) *kerül/esik/jut valaki* [aus dem Zuber/Bottich in den Eimer geraten/fallen] = 'aus einer Schwierigkeit/aus einer unangenehmen Lage in eine andere – ebenfalls unangenehme – geraten' (s. Forgács 2003: 104). Auf Grundlage dieser Wendung entsteht im Text okkasionell ein Sprichwort: „A történelem csöbrök és vödörök váltakozó sora“ [Die Geschichte ist eine wechselvolle Reihe von Zubern und Eimern.].

Der andere Phraseologismus drückt Warnung, Drohung aus: *Jön/Lesz még kutyára dér!* [Es kommt noch Reif/Frost auf den Hund!] = 'Du wirst noch in Schwierigkeiten geraten! Deine Lage wird sich noch ungünstig ändern! Du wirst noch den Kürzeren ziehen!' (s. Forgács 2003: 417; zur Herkunft s. Bárdosi 2015: 317).

Der ChatGPT stellte fest, dass es ein „interessanter Textausschnitt“ ist, und lieferte die folgende deutsche Übersetzung:

Die Geschichte ist eine wechselnde Reihe von Eimern und Kannen, das ist ihre Natur, sagte mein Vater, der nicht die Freiheit der

Möglichkeit von vornherein in Zweifel ziehen wollte, noch weniger, weil er sich überhaupt nicht bereit erklärte, zu erklären, **wer oder was der Eimer und die Kanne wären und wer oder was hineinfällt**. Mit erhobenem Zinnbecher lächelte er schelmisch. Denn auf der anderen Seite, nickte er betrunken, **jeder Hund ist so, jeder**, schlug dann Zichy, seinem Kumpan auf den Rücken, **dass noch Frost darauf kommen würde**.

In der englischen Übersetzung setzte der ChatGPT die gleichen Übersetzungsverfahren ein:

History is a shifting series of buckets and pails, this is its nature, my father claimed, and he did not wish to doubt the possibility of freedom from the outset, even less so because he refused to comment on **who or what would be the bucket and the pail, and who or what would fall into them**. Raising his tin cup high, he smiled mischievously. On the other hand, he nodded drunkenly, **every dog is like that, every one of them**, and then slapped Zichy, his companion, on the back, **that frost would come upon it**.

In beiden Fällen hat der ChatGPT die ungarischen Phraseologismen wörtlich übersetzt, sodass sie für deutsch- und englischsprachige LeserInnen wahrscheinlich fremd klingen und schwer nachvollziehbar sind.

Schauen wir uns auch die Texte der professionellen ÜbersetzerInnen an! Die deutsche Übersetzung von Terézia Mora (Esterházy 2004a: I/20):

Die Geschichte ist eine wechselvolle Reihe von Regen und Traufen, das liegt in ihrer Natur, so die Überzeugung meines Vaters, womit er nicht grundsätzlich die Möglichkeit von Freiheit anzweifeln wollte, um so weniger, als er überhaupt nicht bereit war, sich darüber zu äußern, **was der Regen und was die Traufe sei, und wer oder was da hineingeraten sollte**. Er hob seinen Zinnhumpen hoch über seinen Kopf und lächelte schelmisch. Denn andererseits, nickte er feuchtfröhlich, ist **jeder Pelz so, jeder**, und er schlug seinem Freund Zichy auf den Rücken, **daß er mal die Motten kriegt**. [...]

Die Übersetzerin setzt die funktionalen Äquivalente in den Text ein, erstens die Wendung *vom Regen in die Traufe kommen*, deren Bedeutung mit der der ungarischen Wendung identisch ist: 'aus einer unangenehmen Lage in eine noch unangenehmere geraten' (s. Duden 2013: 611). Auf dieser Basis entsteht das okkasionelle Sprichwort: *Die Geschichte ist eine wechselvolle Reihe von Regen und Traufen*. Im Hintergrund der Wendung steht (Duden 2013 ebenda): „Aus der Dachtraufe läuft das vom Dach abfließende Regenwasser gesammelt nach unten. Wer also beim Unterstellen unter ein Dach nicht aufpasst und sich genau unter die Traufe stellt, wird recht nass.“ Die zwei Schlüsselwörter der Wendung, nämlich *Regen* und *Traufe* werden zu textstrukturierenden Elementen, wodurch der Phraseologismus – auf kreative Weise – literalisiert wird, genauer: Es wird mit der doppelten Lesart der idiomatischen Wendung gespielt.

Das andere okkasionelle Sprichwort im Text ist: *Jeder Pelz ist so, dass er mal die Motten kriegt*. Die Grundlage dafür ist der umgangssprachliche Phraseologismus *in etw. sind die Motten (hinein)gekommen* = 'etw. kommt nicht mehr voran, ist nicht mehr so schön, so gut, wie es war' (s. Duden 2013: 512).¹¹

Die englische Übersetzung von Judith Sollosy ist ebenfalls überaus kreativ (Esterházy 2004b: I/20):

History is an alternating series of frying pans and fires, my father announced, that's the nature of history. He did not mean to dismiss the theoretical possibility of freedom offhand, especially because he refused to comment on who or what **the frying pan and the fire** might be, and who or what was about to fall from one into the other. Raising his pewter cup, he smiled cunningly and slapped his old pal Zichy on the back. The point is, ha said with a drunken nod, that **you shouldn't count your chickens before they hatch**.

Dem okkasionellen Sprichwort dient die folgende phraseologische Wendung als Grundlage: *out of the frying-pan into the fire* (= 'out of one predicament and into an even bigger one'; s. Nagy 1996: 186). Das ist das interlinguale Synonym der unga-

¹¹ Vgl. noch die Verwünschungen: *Dass du die Motten kriegst!*; *Dass du die Motten in den Pelz kriegst!* (s. Röhrich 1988: 658).

rischen Wendung. Zweitens integriert die Übersetzerin dieses Sprichwort in den Text: *Don't count your chickens before they are hatched!* (s. Nagy 1996: 102). Somit wird in der Übersetzung sowohl die qualitative als auch die quantitative phraseologische Relevanz gesichert.

Es kann geschlussfolgert werden, dass die menschlichen Übersetzungen die Übersetzungen des ChatGPT weit übertreffen.

7. Wir sind herausgeputzt wie Pfingstochsen.

Im letzten Textabschnitt (Borbély 2013: 238) ist der Phraseologismus kein Sprichwort, sondern eine Redewendung. Der ungarische phraseologische Vergleich hat weder im Deutschen noch im Englischen weitgehende Äquivalente. Das Ziel besteht hier darin, zum Schluss „den Verdacht“ zu überprüfen, ob der ChatGPT tatsächlich zu wörtlichen Übersetzungen neigt. Die kodifizierte Form und Bedeutung des hervorgehobenen Phraseologismus ist: *kiöltözik/kicsípi/kinyalja magát valaki, mint szaros Pista/Pesta Jézus/Krisztus nevenapján* [sich herausputzen wie dreckiger (eigentl. etwa beschissener) Pista (Koseform von Stefan/Stephan, d. h. Steffen/Steffel/Steffler) am Namenstag von Jesus/Christus] = 'sich auffallend (evtl. auch geschmacklos) herausputzen; jmd. ist allzu elegant, d. h. auf eine ungewöhnliche Art und Weise, die man von dieser Person nicht erwartet hätte' (vgl. Forgács 2003: 582).

Ülünk Pinkák udvarán. Tavasz van, süt a nap. Mindenki ünnepölt vett ma. **Kicsíptük magunkat, mint Szaros Pista Jézus neve napján.** Feszengünk benne, mert kényelmetlen. A lócákat meg a székeket kivitték az udvarra. A férfiak röhécselnek, ugratják egymást. De most halkabban, mint a kocsmában. Az apám is itt van. Most nem részeg. Sokat veszekedtek a napokban anyámmal. Apám sokszor maradt este a kocsmában. Büdös és részeg, amikor éjszaka megjön. Nincs munka, nincs pénz. Anyám süt kenyeret, a búzát a téesz adta. A zárszámadáson a munkaegységek havi papírcsíkjai kívül a papírzacskóban apám csak aprót talál. A tombolán se nyert semmit.

Die deutsche Übersetzung vom ChatGPT:

Wir sitzen im Hof von Pinká. Es ist Frühling, die Sonne scheint. Heute hat jeder seine Sonntagskleider an. **Wir haben uns herausgeputzt wie der „Schmutzige Pista“ am Namenstag von Jesus.** Wir fühlen uns unwohl darin, weil sie unbequem sind. Die Bänke und Stühle wurden in den Hof getragen. Die Männer kichern und sticheln sich gegenseitig. Aber leiser als in der Kneipe. Mein Vater ist auch hier. Er ist heute nicht betrunken. In den letzten Tagen hat er sich oft mit meiner Mutter gestritten. Er blieb oft abends in der Kneipe. Wenn er nachts nach Hause kam, war er betrunken und roch übel. Es gibt keine Arbeit, kein Geld. Meine Mutter backt Brot, das Korn hat die LPG gegeben. Beim Jahresabschluss fand mein Vater in der Papiertüte neben den monatlichen Streifen der Arbeitseinheiten nur Kleingeld. Auch bei der Tombola hat er nichts gewonnen.

Der englische Text vom ChatGPT:

We're sitting in Pinka's yard. It's spring, the sun is shining. Everyone bought new clothes today. **We dressed up, just like Pista the Smelly on Jesus' Name Day.** We feel awkward in it because it's uncomfortable. The benches and chairs have been brought out to the yard. The men are laughing and teasing each other, but now it's quieter than in the pub. My dad is here too. He's not drunk right now. He and my mom have been arguing a lot these days. My dad often stayed at the pub in the evenings. He's stinky and drunk when he comes home at night. There's no work, no money. My mom is baking bread, the wheat came from the collective farm. At the annual accounting, besides the monthly paper strips for work units, my dad only finds change in the paper bag. He didn't win anything in the raffle either.

Die Übersetzungen vom ChatGPT und all das, was er vorhin über die Übertragung von Phraseologismen, d. h. über die phraseologische Übersetzungsrelevanz und über die Übersetzungsverfahren gesagt hat, sind überhaupt nicht im Einklang miteinander. Der ChatGPT hat das Wissen, das er nach seiner Behauptung hat, nicht angewendet. Seine Übersetzungen sind nämlich weit-

gehend wörtlich. Man hat sogar den Eindruck, dass der ChatGPT gar nicht erkannt hat, dass es im Text einen Phraseologismus gibt. Auf meine Nachfrage hin hat er empfohlen, evtl. den Vergleich *like a peacock* zu verwenden, obwohl er selbst diese Möglichkeit nicht in Anspruch genommen hat. Diesen Vergleich gibt es auch im Ungarischen (z. B. *úgy jár-kel/hiú/büszke mint a páva* [jmd. marschiert so/ist so eitel, stolz wie ein Pfau]), und kann ebenfalls die Bedeutung haben: 'jmd. trägt ein auffallend verziertes, geschmücktes Kleid' (s. Forgács 2003: 572). Dieser Phraseologismus würde allerdings in den Text stilistisch nicht passen.

Schauen wir uns zuerst die englische Übersetzung von Ottolie Mulzet an (Borbély 2016: 163):

We're sitting in the courtyard of the Pinka family's house. It's springtime, the sun is shining. **We're dressed up like fattened pigs.** We fidget in our Sunday best, because it's uncomfortable. Chairs and benches have been put out in the courtyard. The men, snickering, tease each other. But more quietly now than when they're in the tavern. My father's also here. Now he is not drunk. Lately he's been fighting with my mother a lot. He's been staying at the tavern late into the evening. When he comes home at night, he stinks and he's drunk. He has no work and no money. My mother bakes bread; the collective gives her the wheat. In the envelope, in addition to a slip of paper enumerating the work brigade's monthly accounts, my father found just a bit of small change. He didn't win anything in the raffle.

Der Ausdruck *to dress up* ('to wear clothes that are more formal than you would usually wear'; s. Longman 2001: 421) passt semantisch vollkommen. Die Verbindung mit *like fattened pigs* ist ebenfalls treffend, zumal die Kinder die Sonntagskleider jahrelang tragen mussten, so dass diese mittlerweile bereits zu klein, zu unbequem waren.

Heike Flemming und Lacy Kornitzer integrieren ein funktionales Äquivalent des ungarischen Phraseologismus in den Text. Dieses interlinguale Synonym passt auch stilistisch kohärent in den Text (Borbély 2014: 225):

Wir sitzen auf dem Hof der Pinkas. Es ist Frühling, die Sonne scheint. Heute hat jeder den Sonntagsstaat angezogen. **Wir sind**

herausgeputzt wie Pfingstochsen. Wir können nicht stillsitzen, weil es unbequem ist. Bänke und Stühle wurden auf den Hof hinausgetragen. Die Männer kichern, foppen einander. Doch leiser als in der Kneipe. Mein Vater ist auch da. Jetzt ist er nicht betrunken. Er und meine Mutter haben sich in den letzten Tagen viel gestritten. Vater blieb abends oft in der Kneipe. Er stinkt, wenn er in der Nacht besoffen nach Hause kommt. Keine Arbeit, kein Geld. Mutter bäckt Brot, den Weizen hat die LPG gegeben. Bei der Endabrechnung findet mein Vater außer den monatlichen Papierstreifen der Arbeitseinheiten nur Kleingeld in der Papiertüte. Auch bei der Tombola hat er nichts gewonnen.

Der deutsche Phraseologismus hat – wie auch der ungarische Phraseologismus – eine ironische Färbung, er wird in der gesprochenen Umgangssprache verwendet. Die kodifizierte Form ist: *geschmückt wie ein Pfingstochse*. Die Bedeutung stimmt mit der der ungarischen Wendung überein: 'übertrieben aufgeputzt'. Im Hintergrund der Wendung steht der alte süddeutsche Brauch, nach dem man zur Pfingstzeit, wenn man das Vieh auf die Sommerweide ausgetrieben hat, einen der Ochsen besonders geschmückt hat (vgl. Duden 2013: 659).

Es kann auch bei diesem Beleg festgestellt werden, dass die professionellen ÜbersetzerInnen wesentlich besser waren als der ChatGPT, da sie nicht wörtlich übersetzt haben.

8. Fazit und Ausblick

Bevor die Ergebnisse dieser kleinen Fallstudie zusammengefasst werden, soll die Meinung des ChatGPT zitiert werden. Ich habe ihm diese Frage gestellt: „Was meinst du: Kannst du oder kann der Mensch besser solche literarischen Texte aus dem Ungarischen ins Deutsche und ins Englische übersetzen, die ein Sprichwort enthalten?“ Der ChatGPT hat wie folgt geantwortet:

Die Frage, ob der Mensch oder ein KI-System wie ich besser solche Texte übersetzen kann, hängt von mehreren Faktoren ab. Ein Mensch, der mit den jeweiligen Kulturen vertraut ist, hat einen Vorteil in Bezug auf das Verständnis der kulturellen Nuancen und der Bedeutung hinter einem Sprichwort. Viele Sprichwörter sind tief in der Kultur verwurzelt und ihre genaue Bedeutung kann sich

nur schwer in eine andere Sprache übertragen lassen, ohne dass etwas von der ursprünglichen Tiefe verloren geht. Menschen haben die Fähigkeit, alternative Redewendungen zu finden, die dieselbe Bedeutung im Zielkulturraum vermitteln.

Auf der anderen Seite kann ich als KI sehr schnell verschiedene Varianten von Übersetzungen generieren und verschiedene Ansätze ausprobieren. Dabei kann es jedoch sein, dass ich nicht immer den kulturellen Kontext oder die tiefere Bedeutung eines Sprichworts vollständig erfassen kann. Eine Maschine kann in der Regel die grammatikalische Struktur und Wortwahl gut bewerkstelligen, jedoch die feineren kulturellen Aspekte oder kontextabhängigen Bedeutungen möglicherweise nicht immer perfekt wiedergeben.

Dieser Antwort kann man zustimmen, da die untersuchten Texte auch dies untermauert haben. Der ChatGPT kommt mit der Übersetzung von Texten, die ein Sprichwort – oder im Allgemeinen einen Phraseologismus – enthalten, gut zurecht, wenn die vorgefertigten sprachlichen Bauteile in der Zielsprache bzw. in den Zielsprachen über weitgehende Äquivalente verfügen. Wenn also der ChatGPT texttreu übersetzt, so gelangt er sozusagen automatisch zu den formal (und in den meisten Fällen auch semantisch, stilistisch und pragmatisch) nahezu gleichwertigen zielsprachlichen Phraseologismen. Wenn allerdings das ausgangssprachliche Sprichwort, der ausgangssprachliche Phraseologismus in den Zielsprachen auf Systemebene ein funktionales Äquivalent hat, oder wenn auf Diskursebene zwischen mehreren potentiellen Entsprechungen gewählt werden kann bzw. soll, so ist der Mensch eindeutig „besser“, d. h. der Mensch kann (ohne Anführungszeichen) besser eine passende Wahl treffen, mit der Sprache kreativer umgehen und auch Sprachspiele nachgestalten. Die professionellen ÜbersetzerInnen sind eben professioneller. Inwieweit aber diese Bewertung zutrifft, d. h. ob sie verallgemeinert werden darf, und wie lange der Mensch noch den Vorrang hat, soll durch weitere Übersetzungsanalysen überprüft werden. Man darf nicht vergessen, dass der ChatGPT kontinuierlich weiterentwickelt wird, wie auch die Übersetzungsprogramme allgemein Tag zu Tag besser werden. Würde man die hier analysierten Texte vom ChatGPT heute oder morgen übersetzen lassen und die Analyse demnach durchführen, so würde man ganz andere

Ergebnisse bekommen.¹² Eine genaue Voraussage der künftigen Entwicklung zu formulieren, erscheint somit als schwer. Jedoch kann man m. E. generell die Prognose stellen, dass man auf die Übersetzungsprogramme – besonders wegen ihrer Schnelligkeit – nicht verzichten wird. Der Zeitfaktor spielt nämlich zu unserer Zeit – und in der Zukunft voraussichtlich noch mehr – eine entscheidende Rolle. Man kann nur hoffen, dass zumindest auf die menschliche Übersetzungskontrolle nicht verzichtet wird. – All diese Fragen werden hiermit zur Diskussion gestellt.

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¹² Ich habe das selbst überprüft, zumal der ChatGPT angeboten hat, seine im Januar und Februar 2025 bereits übersetzten Texte (am 23. April 2025) erneut zu übersetzen, um zu zeigen, wo die Unterschiede zwischen den Übersetzungen liegen und auf welche Faktoren sie zurückgeführt werden können. Darauf kann aber hier – aus Platzgründen – nicht eingegangen werden: Das soll das Thema eines weiteren Aufsatzes sein.

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DO THE BIG FISH EAT THE LITTLE ONES? ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE VS. HUMANS IN TRANSLATING PROVERBS

Abstract: This paper, with its provocative title, serves as a small experiment, a case study intended to spark further scholarly discussion. The central question is: Who handles the translation of proverbs more successfully – professional translators or ChatGPT? The author compares excerpts from Hungarian literary works with their German and English translations. Both human translations and those of generative artificial intelligence are critically analyzed. The source texts selected for the study contain proverbs that are constitutive of the text, i.e., they have a particular translation relevance. The primary evaluation criteria for analyzing the translations are: Who, the human or ChatGPT, can better assess the translation relevance of the respective proverb? Who can – based on translation relevance – choose an adequate translation procedure? In an exaggerated form, the question is whether or for how long translators (humans) are still needed when translating literary works.

Keywords: human translation, generative artificial intelligence, ChatGPT, proverbs, phraseological translation relevance, equivalence on the system level and discourse level, creativity

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<https://doi.org/10.29162/pv.42.1.1057>

Original scientific paper

Received on 16 February 2025

Accepted for publication on 4 May 2025

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PROVERBS IN THE PHRASEOLOGICAL DICTIONARY FROM THE WORKS OF CORNELIUS TACITUS¹

Abstract: Based on 128 proverbs and sayings attributed to the Roman historian Cornelius Tacitus, as listed in the *Latinum in aeternum* collection (Marević 2002), this paper explores the connection between the semantic categories of the quoted phrases and their syntactic structures and aims to prove that, despite the possibility of learning Latin sayings formulaically without surface understanding of Latin grammar, their acceptance and reproduction by Croatian speakers are influenced not only by their semantics but also by their deep structural clarity. For this purpose, all the quoted phrases were subjected to an extensive search for their occurrence in the corpus of the *Croatian Language Repository* (HJR) of the Institute of Croatian Language and Linguistics. The study tested the representation of various Latin surface structures in the HJR corpus, including accusative with infinitive (ACI), nominative with infinitive (NCI), ablative absolute (ABL.APS.), independent finite sentences in the indicative and subjunctive moods, various nominal and verbal collocations or syntagms and the so-called historical infinitives. The paper has established that phrases from Cornelius Tacitus and other Roman and Latin authors with an indisputable depth structure are accepted and present in the HJR corpus, while those with an unclear depth structure, such as the so-called historical infinitives, are completely absent.

Keywords: Cornelius Tacitus, historical infinitive, type of phraseological unit, deep structure of phraseological unit, syntax of phraseological unit

¹ The paper was translated from Croatian to English by Blaženka Šoštarić.

1. Introduction

The indisputable fame of the Roman historian Cornelius Tacitus is usually viewed in the world of historiography through the lens of the significance and prominence of the events he described in his seminal works such as the *Annals*, the *Histories*, or the monumental *Germania*. Since there was no institutional standardization of language in Greek and Roman antiquity as we know it today, the standard as a specific linguistic canon for a particular literary field was established by the best writers in each field, who enjoyed widespread popularity among readers, and, from a linguistic point of view, served as a model for subsequent generations of writers within the same literary field (Vratović 1977). Considering that Tacitus was preceded by eminent historiographers such as Herodotus, Xenophon the Athenian, or Thucydides in Greek literature, and Gaius Sallust Crispus, Cornelius Nepos, and Gaius Julius Caesar in Roman literature, it is assumed that Tacitus could have followed a pre-established path within historiography as a prose and discursive literary form. However, even if Cornelius Tacitus did not introduce any stylistic or linguistic novelty into the historiographical style of antiquity, his widespread acclaim inevitably influenced the phraseological framework of the Latin language across antiquity, the Latin language of the Middle Ages and the Modern Era, and consequently the phraseological thesaurus of primarily European languages that developed under the strong influence of Latin. The Latin language has so far proven to be a linguistic phenomenon that, despite the absence of living native speakers and its fossilized grammatical structure, continues to experience intensive development in two linguistic areas: vocabulary and phraseology. The latter is particularly popular in higher registers of communication, often functioning as a linguistic hallmark of the language of the highly educated classes (Zorić 2024). This perspective, combined with the rich legacy of the written Latin corpus, allows for new quotations of existing ancient and later Latin literature and the creation of new proverbs through a process in which a new quote from ancient literature first becomes popular, then undergoes the process of figurative usage and fossilization (Omazić 2015). Traditionally, famous phrases from the Latin (though not exclusively Roman) literary corpus are referred to as *Dicta*

et sententiae (D&S) or sayings and thoughts (Zorić 2024) and are generally perceived as complete sentences. Since, in modern categorizations, a phraseological unit (PU) does not necessarily have to be a full sentence, and many linguists (Omazić 2015; Grudeva 2014; Andrić 2023) accept even monolexical phrases as phraseological units, it is important to consider the entire phraseological thesaurus derived from Tacitus' works—in particular the phrases that cannot be traced back to older writers and, in other words, the phraseological thesaurus that Tacitus himself popularized. Furthermore, as stated by Shirley L. Arora (1984) "...the most consistently accepted generalization concerning proverbs, in virtually any language, is that their traditionality – the sense of historical-derived authority or of community-sanctioned wisdom that they convey – that makes them "work", makes justified the analysis of proverbs attributed to Tacitus even if he only used them because of their semantics traditionally fitted the context and they weren't the product of his own intellectual effort and in time accepted by the speakers as proverbs. In this sense it is necessary to mention the term "traditionality" as discussed by Wolfgang Mieder. Mieder (1989) stated that "The term "traditionality" includes both aspects of age and currency which a statement must have in order to be considered a proverb." There are proverbs known only in some regions, and there are those used internationally, so it is possible that proverbs used by Tacitus were just popularized by him and that they do not originate from him. However, this won't affect the applicability level of the proverbs seen in Tacitus's work. It will only increase their proverbial nature and make them a quality source for this work. Therefore, the matter of authorship of the analysed proverbs in this sense is irrelevant. Starting from the assumption that Tacitus' phraseological impact on Latin, as well as other European languages, is significant, which will be verified by searching the collection of Tacitus' phraseological thesaurus in the Croatian language, but also by corpus searches of the Croatian language, this paper will also syntactically analyse Tacitus' phraseological thesaurus to determine which type of PU from Tacitus is most often fossilized and whether there are internal or deep linguistic reasons for this.

2. *Methods*

2.1 *Sources and corpus*

The primary source for the D&S originating from the work of Cornelius Tacitus is the extensive collection *Latinum in aeternum* (LIA), Marević (2002), which contains 18,632 entries. The large number of entries, their alphabetical order, the sequential numbering assigned to each phrase, and the highly precise data on the origin of individual phrases, which record not only the writer to whom the authorship is attributed, but also the specific work from which the phrase originates, make this collection a perfect source for compiling a catalogue of phrases attributed to the works of Cornelius Tacitus. All phrases attributed to Tacitus from the LIA have been transcribed into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet with eight vertical columns. The first column records the number assigned to the phrase in the LIA; the second column contains the original Latin phrase; the third column contains the preferred translation of the phrase into Croatian according to the LIA; the fourth column indicates the source of the phrase; the fifth column includes various notes; and the sixth column categorizes the type of phrase according to the categories proposed by Omazić (2015). The seventh column records the frequency of the Latin phrase per million words in the Croatian Language Repository of the Institute of Croatian Language and Linguistics (HJR), while the eighth column indicates the frequency of the preferred Croatian equivalents of each Latin phrase in the HJR. The HJR corpus was selected because previous research on the frequency of Latin sayings has already been carried out using this resource (Zorić 2024), which revealed that, in the case of reversible binomials within this corpus, it is necessary to enter a two-part phrase in reverse word order and that possible modifications of the same phrase should also be entered into the corpus to achieve more comprehensive results.

2.2 *Catalogue of phrases attributed to Cornelius Tacitus according to LIA*

In the *Latinum in aeternum* (LIA) collection, 128 phrases attributed to Cornelius Tacitus were identified and listed in alphabetical order in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, accompanied by

relevant data: the sequential number in the LIA, the Latin phrase quote, the preferred translation quote, and the reference to the origin of the phrase within Tacitus' literary works. A separate column was designated for the categorization of each phrase, based on the classification proposed by Omazić (2015). According to this categorization, the extracted catalogue contains 67 thoughts and proverbs, as illustrated in example (1), which represent the largest group. The second most numerous category consists of nominal collocations, with 30 examples, as shown in example (2). Verbal collocations occupy the third position, with a total of 17 examples, as demonstrated in example (3), while the least frequent are simple quotations, with only 14 instances, which, intuitively, have not yet undergone the full transformation into proverbs, as seen in example (4):

- (1) *Honesta mors turpi vita potior.*/Časna je smrt bolja nego sramotan život. (An honourable death is better than a shameful life.)
- (2) *Secreta pectoris.*/Intimne tajne. (Intimate secrets.)
- (3) *Praestare terga.*/Okrenuti leđa. (To turn one's back.)
- (4) *Ut quisque flagitium navaverat.*/Kako je i koliko tko doprinio ovom zlu. (How and how much anyone has contributed to this evil.)

In the syntactic categorization, 71 catalogued phrases are full sentences in the strict sense of the term, containing an explicit predicate, as in example (5), or featuring an ellipsis in which the predicate *est/sunt* is implied, as in examples (1) and (6):

- (5) *Exercitatio artem parat.*/Vježba stvara vještinu. (Practice makes perfect.)
- (6) *Breves et infausti populi amores.*/Kratka je i zlokobna ljubav naroda. (The love of the people is short and sinister.)

Furthermore, 31 phrases are nominal phrases (7), while 26 phrases can be characterized as infinitive complements or infinitive phrases, which are ready to form predicates as required, or simply serve as quotation forms in the infinitive (8):

- (7) *Egregium publicum./Visok standard u državi.* (High standard in the state.)
- (8) *Alieno more vivere./Živjeti po željama drugih.* (To live according to the wishes of others.)

The comparison between the syntactic categorization of Tacitus' phrases and their phraseological classifications revealed that all 67 sayings and proverbs (*Dicta et Sententiae*, D&S) are clear sentences containing a predicate in the present indicative tense. Additionally, 27 out of 30 collocations are nominal syntagmas, while all verbal collocations are, in fact, infinitive complements or quotation infinitives of phrases. Only those quotations that have not yet evolved into sayings or proverbs exhibit a more diverse syntactic structure: four are clear sentences, six are quotation infinitive phrases, and four are nominal syntagmas.

2.3 Findings of the Croatian Language Repository corpus search

A search of the Croatian Language Repository (HJR) corpus, maintained by the Institute of the Croatian Language and Linguistics, identified occurrences in the original Latin form for only five phrases from those listed in *Latinum in aeternum* (LIA). These are: *Dictum sapienti sat (est)*, predominantly in its elliptical form as *Sapienti sat*, with 25 occurrences; *Sine ira et studio*, with 16 occurrences; *In vino veritas*, with 7 occurrences, *Corruptissima re publica plurimae leges*, with 1 occurrence, and *Ex tempore dicere*, also with only one occurrence. Possible phraseological modifications exemplified in (9), (10), (11), and (12), were tested in the HJR corpus search engine, and the number of their occurrences was added to the total number of occurrences of the parent phrase (9).

- (9) *Dictum sapienti sat.*
- (10) *Dictum sapienti sat est.*
- (11) *Sapienti sat est.*
- (12) *Sapienti sat.*

In either its full or elliptical form, *Dictum sapienti sat*, *In vino veritas*, and *Corruptissima re publica plurimae leges* are classified syntactically as clear sentences. *Sine ira et studio* is cat-

egorized as a prepositional phrase, while *Ex tempore dicere*, functioning as an adverbial phrase, is considered an infinitive complement or an infinitive phrase. A review of Croatian equivalents of these phrases in the same Croatian Language Repository (HJR) corpus identified occurrences for 14 equivalents of Latin phrases attributed to Cornelius Tacitus in *Latinitas in aeternum* (LIA). These are: *Tijekom vremena* (Over time) – 146 occurrences; *Okrenuti leđa* (Turn one's back) – 69 occurrences; *Posljednja bitka* (The final battle) – 19 occurrences; *Za pametnoga je dosta kazano* (Enough has been said for the wise) – 14 occurrences; *Sklopiti mir* (Make peace) – 13 occurrences; *Otkriti tajne* (Uncover secrets) – 12 occurrences; *Bez mržnje i sklonosti* (Without hatred and bias) – 9 occurrences; *Dragovoljna smrt* (Voluntary death) – 4 occurrences; *U vinu je istina* (In wine, there is truth) – 3 occurrences; *Pokazati svoju hrabrost* (Show one's courage) – 3 occurrences; *Intimne tajne* (Intimate secrets) – 2 occurrences; *Pojaviti se u javnosti* (Appear in public) – 1 occurrence; *Trenutačna smrt* (Instant death) – 1 occurrence; *Oplakivati smrt* (Mourn death) – 1 occurrence. During the search for Croatian examples, the number of occurrences of phraseological modifications was also examined. The method applied in the search for Latin examples (9), (10), (11), and (12) was similarly applied to the Croatian variants, as demonstrated in examples (13), (14), and (15), by adding the occurrence count of phraseological modifications (14) and (15) to the original example (13):

- (13) *Za pametnoga je dosta kazano*. (Enough has been said for the wise.)
- (14) *Pametnome dosta*. (Enough for the wise.)
- (15) *Pametnomu dosta*. (Enough for the wise.)

Since only three of the corpus-confirmed Croatian phrases can be directly linked to their Latin counterparts as sources—*Za pametnoga je dosta kazano* (Enough has been said for the wise), *U vinu je istina* (In wine, there is truth), and *Bez mržnje i sklonosti* (Without hatred and bias)—while all other phrases may have developed independently of the Latin language or the specific Latin phraseological thesaurus, particularly in the case of collocations and verbal collocations, conducting exhaustive searches in the

HJR corpus for all possible modifications of Croatian examples loses its meaning. This applies especially when dealing with non-citational cases in nominal collocations or non-citational verb forms, tenses, and moods in verbal collocations, as neither the quotation occurrence nor the total potential number of occurrences can be definitively associated with the influence of the Latin phraseological thesaurus, including the one originating from Cornelius Tacitus. For example, it would be meaningless to investigate all case forms (17) or modifications (18), (19) of a phrase such as *Dragovoljna smrt* (Voluntary death) (16), whose origin from a Latin phrase cannot be established and which could have arisen independently of the Latin language. In such cases, the search is limited to the basic example in its quotation form, and the phrase is marked as “not necessarily influenced by the Latin language.”

(16) *Dragovoljna smrt*

(17) *Dragovoljn* smrt**

(18) *Dobrovoljn* smrt**

(19) *Svojevoljn* smrt**

On the other hand, for the preferred Croatian variant of the Latin phrase *Sine ira et studio*, which is *Bez mržnje i sklonosti* (Without hatred and bias) (20), and which can be confidently traced to the works of Cornelius Tacitus, it is entirely appropriate to examine the occurrence of all modifications. For such a search in the HJR corpus, it is most effective to input the beginning of the phrase *Bez mržnje i* and manually review each occurrence. This approach reveals occurrences of modifications (21), (22), (23), and (24).

(20) *Bez mržnje i sklonosti.* (Without hatred and bias.)

(21) *Bez mržnje i naklonosti.* (Without hatred and favor.)

(22) *Bez mržnje i želje za osvetom.* (Without hatred and desire for revenge.)

(23) *Bez mržnje i (namjerne) sklonosti.* (Without hatred and (deliberate) bias.)

(24) *Bez mržnje i suda.* (Without hatred and judgment.)

By making a different lexical choice in the initial part of the phrase, i.e. replacing the word *mržnja* (hate) with the word *srdžba* (anger) and entering a partial phrase, i.e. its beginning as *Bez srdžbe* (Without anger), followed by repeated manual search, another occurrence is distinguished that can be considered a modification of the same phrase originating from *Sine ira et studio* (25).

- (25) *Bez srdžbe i bez svake pristranosti.* (Without anger and without any bias.)

This results in the number of occurrences for the Croatian example *Bez mržnje i sklonosti* being not 2, but 9, when the occurrences of its modifications are included. A precise count of the occurrences of all modifications of both Latin and Croatian phrases can indicate the syntactic acceptability of Latin phrases or their Croatian variants among speakers of the Croatian language. This is because, within the strict syntactic structure of an expression or sentence—whether in its phrasal or formal structure—a phrase borrowed from one language is typically used as an equivalent phrase in the sentence of another language, maintaining the same syntactic role, regardless of the fact whether it is borrowed in its original form or translated.

Since the HJR corpus consists of 90 million words (i.e., occurrences), the total frequency per million occurrences for relevant Latin and Croatian examples is calculated by dividing the number of occurrences by 90, as presented in the following table:

Table 1. The total frequency per million occurrences for relevant Latin and Croatian examples

LIA serial number	Proverb	Number of Latin phrase occurrences per million words in HJR	Preferred translation	Number of preferred Croatian equivalent occurrences of Latin phrase per million words in HJR	Derived from Latin
16724	<i>Tempore progrediente.</i>	0.00	<i>Tijekom vremena.</i>	1.62	not necessarily from Latin
12683	<i>Praestare terga.</i>	0.00	<i>Okrenuti leđa.</i>	0.77	not necessarily from Latin
16503	<i>Supremum certamen.</i>	0.00	<i>Posljednja bitka.</i>	0.21	not necessarily from Latin
3024	<i>Dictum sapienti sat (est).</i>	0.28	<i>Za pametnoga je dosta kazano.</i>	0.16	
11231	<i>Pacem componere.</i>	0.00	<i>Sklopiti mir.</i>	0.14	not necessarily from Latin
1025	<i>Arcana revelare.</i>	0.00	<i>Otkriti tajne.</i>	0.13	not necessarily from Latin
15663	<i>Sine ira et studio.</i>	0.18	<i>Bez mržnje i sklonosti</i>	0.10	
13411	<i>Quaesita mors.</i>	0.00	<i>Dragovoljna smrt.</i>	0.04	not necessarily from Latin
6643	<i>In vino veritas.</i>	0.08	<i>U vinu je istina.</i>	0.03	
18318	<i>Virtutem praestare.</i>	0.00	<i>Pokazati svoju hrabrost.</i>	0.03	not necessarily from Latin
15110	<i>Secreta pectoris.</i>	0.00	<i>Intimne tajne.</i>	0.02	not necessarily from Latin
6302	<i>In publicum egredi.</i>	0.00	<i>Pojaviti se u javnosti.</i>	0.01	not necessarily from Latin

8747	<i>Mors praesens.</i>	0.00	<i>Trenutačna smrt.</i>	0.01	not necessarily from Latin
16493	<i>Suprema deflere.</i>	0.00	<i>Oplakivati smrt.</i>	0.01	not necessarily from Latin
2336	<i>Corruptissima re publica plurimae leges.</i>	0.01	<i>Kad je država najpokvarenija, ima najviše zakona.</i>	0.00	
4174	<i>Ex tempore dicere.</i>	0.01	<i>Govoriti bez priprave.</i>	0.00	not necessarily from Latin

The statistics obtained for the HJR corpus indicate that Tacitus is most frequently quoted in written Croatian through three original Latin phrases: *Dictum sapienti sat (est)*—primarily in its elliptical form *Sapienti sat*—followed by *Sine ira et studio* and *In vino veritas est*, also predominantly in its elliptical form *In vino veritas*. Of the three phrases mentioned, two are undoubtedly sentences in the present active indicative. On the other hand, if Croatian phrases that do not necessarily originate from Tacitus' Latin expressions are excluded from the focus, the most prevalent Croatian variants of Tacitus' phrases are: *Za pametnoga je dosta kazano* (Enough has been said for the wise), commonly in its elliptical forms *Pametnome dosta* or *Pametnomu dosta*; *Bez mržnje i sklonosti* (Without hatred and bias); and *U vinu je istina* (In wine, there is truth), often in the elliptical form *U vinu istina*.

2.4 Other relevant premises

The Latin language uses a range of syntactic constructions that are either unused in contemporary Croatian or absent altogether throughout the recorded history of the Croatian language. Among these, *Exceptional Case Marking* (ECM) constructions, particularly the accusative with infinitive (*accusativus cum infinitivo*, ACI), occupy a prominent position. While their existence in the Croatian language has been documented, they are considered marginal and certainly outside the linguistic standard (Zorić 2019). Due to this marginality, such constructions may be regarded as unacceptable to the average Croatian speaker (Zorić 2019). Nevertheless, Latin phrases containing accusatives with

infinitives are still accepted, regardless of whether they originate from Horace (26), Suetonius, are attributed to Emperor Vespasian (27), or derive from unknown sources (28).

- (26) *Caelo tonantem credidimus Iovem regnare./Vjerovali smo da Jupiter vlada nebom kad smo čuli gdje grmi.* (We believed that Jupiter ruled the sky when we heard the thunder.)
- (27) *Decet imperatorem stantem mori./Caru priliči da umre stojeći.* (It is advantageous that the emperor dies standing.)
- (28) *Decet regem discere legem./Dolično je da i kralj izučava zakone.* (It befits the king to learn the law.)

Although examples of accusatives with infinitives such as (26), (27), and (28) can be found in *Latinum in aeternum* (LIA), they do not appear in the HJR corpus. However, it is important to highlight instances of accusatives with infinitives that are well represented in their original form and structure within the same HJR corpus. A notable example is provided by Lucius Annaeus Florus in his work *Epitome rerum Romanarum*, a phrase allegedly used by Cato the Elder to conclude his speeches in the Roman Senate (29). This phrase is not only structured as an accusative with an infinitive, which is quite foreign to the Croatian language, but it is also a periphrastic conjugation, which the Croatian language does not recognize either. The presence of such a phrase in the HJR corpus, with 13 occurrences (equal to 0.14 per million words), demonstrates that it is deeply acceptable and understandable to the speakers of the Croatian language, indicating that it belongs to a deeply attested syntactic structure.

- (29) *Ceterum censeo Carthaginem esse delendam./Uostalom mislim da Kartagu valja razoriti.* (Moreover, I am of the opinion that Carthage must be destroyed.)

The accusative with an infinitive construction is not only deeply understood and accepted by Croatian speakers, despite not being actively used in the language—which typically prefers explicit object clauses with the conjunction *da*—but the dependent part

of the construction is even modified through a syncretism of the Latin and Croatian languages. In this adaptation, the main clause *Ceterum censeo* remains in Latin, while the phrase continues with a Croatian explicit object clause introduced by *da*, containing content that deviates from the original, as seen in example (30)

- (30) *Ceterum censeo, (da) treba naplatiti porez na miraz.*
(Moreover, I am of the opinion that a tax should be imposed on the dowry.)

The situation is similar in the case of the nominative with infinitive (NCI) constructions, which are not used in the Croatian language, as exemplified by the saying (31) attributed to Pope Boniface VIII:

- (31) *Qui tacet, consentire videtur./Tko šuti, čini se da pristaje (odobrava).* (Those who are silent seem to agree (consent)).

Since the nominative with an infinitive is fundamentally a control construction or a sentence with implicit subject control (Zorić 2019), its acceptance in the original Latin presents no difficulty for Croatian speakers familiar with Latin or those who, through formulaic repetition, understand the approximate meaning of its components. Consequently, this saying appears not only in *Lat-inum in aeternum* (LIA) but also in the HJR corpus, with four Latin occurrences, equivalent to 0.04 per million words. One of these occurrences is modified in Latin to reflect Croatian syntax by transforming the main clause from a nominative with infinitive construction into a simple present indicative, using the same verb that originally served as the dependent infinitive complement (32). This modified form clearly does not originate from Latin, as it is not listed as a modification in LIA:

- (32) *Qui tacet, consentit./Tko šuti, slaže se.* (Those who are silent, consent.)

In the HJR corpus, we also find three Croatian occurrences of this saying (33), (34), and (35), with example (35) representing

a syntactic modification in which a relative clause avoids translating the nominative with infinitive construction as an agentless (though not subjectless) main clause:

- (33) *Tko šuti, čini se da odobrava.* (Those who are silent, seem to approve.)
- (34) *Tko šuti, znači da se slaže.* (Those who are silent, mean to approve.)
- (35) *Tko šuti, taj i odobrava.* (Those who are silent, approve.)

Regarding the Latin ablative absolute construction (ABL.ABS), it is present in both LIA and the HJR corpus (36), (37), (38), and (39):

- (36) *Re bene cognita./Upoznavši dobro stvar.* (Having thoroughly understood the matter.)
- (37) *O fortunatam natam, me consule, Romam./Sretna li Rima koji se rodio za moga konzulata!* (O fortunate Rome, born during my consulship!)
- (38) *Ab Urbe condita/Od osnutka Rima.* (From the founding of the City (Rome)).
- (39) *Signo dato./Na dani znak.* (At the given signal.)

Since neither the ablative absolute construction exists in Croatian, its acceptance among Croatian speakers can be explained through deep universal syntax. The ablative absolute usually stands in the place of an adverbial marker of time or cause in a sentence, meaning it expresses a deep temporal or causative relationship. This can also be expressed on the surface level through dependent temporal or causal clauses or prepositional phrases. While Latin prefers the use of ablative absolutes, the Croatian language uses subordinate clauses or prepositional phrases with the same deep meaning. Thus, quoting original Latin ablative absolutes is entirely appropriate when expressing a deep temporal or causal relationship in a Croatian sentence, where it would otherwise appear as a subordinate temporal or causal clause or simply an adverbial phrase. It appears that the syntactic use of the subjunctive as the predicate of an independent Latin sentence

does not pose an obstacle to the understanding, acceptance, or quoting of any Latin saying in the HJR corpus, such as in example (40), which appears in five Latin and eight Croatian occurrences, corresponding to 0.05 per million words for the Latin variant and 0.09 for the Croatian variant.

- (40) *Sit venia verbo./Neka (mi) bude dopušteno reći.* (May it be permitted (for me) to say.)

In Latin, the independently used subjunctive can function as a deep adhortative, jussive, prohibitive, dubitative, deliberative, or optative mood. In the cited example (40), it serves as a jussive, as its surface means of expression, and in Croatian, the imperative is used as the surface expression.

3. Discussion

The main question of this study is whether phraseological corpus research can provide valuable syntactic insights that may serve as evidence or at least provide guidance on the syntax in a writer's works, or highlight specific syntactic findings and understandings of the source language. There are several reasons suggesting this possibility. Tacitus' language and style encompass indicative sentences, independent subjunctive sentences, and sentences with specific case markings (the so-called ECM constructions) where, according to some linguists within the generative framework (Chomsky 1981; Birtić and Brač 2016: 314), elements are raised from the infinitive clause to the object position in the main clause. These constructions are traditionally known as accusative with infinitive (ACI) constructions, control sentences with infinitive complements, or the so-called sentences with implicit subject control (Gnjatović and Matasović 2013; Zorić 2019). Among these are also the nominative with infinitive constructions (NCI) and other non-clausal phrases without predicates. Cornelius Tacitus is also traditionally associated with the use of historical infinitives, or sentences that contain verbs solely in the infinitive form (Andresen 1874; Appelmann 1888; Carstensen 1962; Gortan et alii 1982; Huebenthal 1881; Lasnik and Mamoru 1991; Laws 1864; Maixner 1877; Mohr 1878; Nikolaeva 2014; Nurmela

1944; Rosén 1995). While the status of all these sentence types and non-clausal phrases has been studied and confirmed in Latin as well as in many global languages—including recent studies (Nikolaeva 2014; Rosén 1995)—the precise status of the so-called historical infinitives still requires clear definition, as the predicate of an independent finite sentence is established by assigning a grammatical subject to the verb (Radford 2004). Such predicates are absent in the constructions identified as historical infinitives in Tacitus' texts, at least when considering that these constructions are separated by periods from their surrounding text in Tacitus' editions. In formulating the conclusions of this study, it might be argued that the results of the corpus search in the Croatian language, such as in the HJR, are not relevant for drawing conclusions about Latin syntax. However, the definition of a sentence as a phrase containing a predicate—even if elliptical—or a subject and predicate, or formally as a predicate phrase (VP) where the subject obligatorily occupies the specifier position of the verb phrase (specV), reflects a conventional or deep understanding of what constitutes the deep structure of an independent finite sentence (NP VP), contributing to linguistic universality. Therefore, even though Croatian speakers are not native Latin speakers, those who understand Latin, such as some native speakers of Croatian, should possess an innate sense of sentence structure in Latin, as well as an understanding of non-clausal phrases. In this context, it is significant that the Croatian HJR corpus predominantly lists independent finite sentences (NP VP) as Tacitus' phrases. In the case of Tacitus' thoughts and proverbs, all are exclusively predicate or elliptical sentences, with a smaller number of nominal syntagmas, while other syntactic categories in the corpus of adopted phrases remain marginal. None of Tacitus' phrases from the LIA examined in the HJR corpus are structured as the so-called historical infinitives, nor do any originate from historical infinitive constructions. It might again be argued that this is due to the absence of the historical infinitive construction in the Croatian language. However, a counterargument can be found in the phrase *Ab Urbe condita* in the HJR corpus, which appears 37.5 times per million words. This phrase is structured in Latin as an ablative absolute, a construction unknown to Croatian. However, since it functions as an adverbial of time in the ablative of time, corresponding to deep

cases of source (if considered as a prepositional phrase indicating separation) or scope, measure, extent, or proportion (if considered through the deep meaning of the ablative absolute itself) (Marković 2012), or more precisely, as a temporal marker—which this study favours in the context of the ablative absolute—and since deep cases are linguistic universals, native Croatian speakers perceive such constructions as natural and evidently use them more frequently. It is also noteworthy that this phrase originates from Titus Livius, a Roman and Latin historian and one of Tacitus' predecessors. Although it must be considered that the human brain processes formulaic linguistic units faster than non-formulaic ones (Tabossi et alii 2009: 533–535), this finding should be even more valuable for Latin. Despite the fact that the majority of speakers or listeners of Latin *Dicta et Sententiae* are unable to analyse formulaic Latin due to a lack of knowledge of Latin syntax and lexicon, it is important to highlight that the transmission of phrases into the recipient language, in this case, Croatian, has over centuries been facilitated by individuals familiar with Latin syntax. Nevertheless, even these experts in Latin syntax, who incorporated numerous ablative absolutes, accusatives, and nominatives with infinitives into the Croatian phraseological thesaurus, did not transfer a single Tacitean historical infinitive into that thesaurus as a proverb, thought, or quotation, even when transformed into an indicative sentence. Considering that the historical infinitive is essentially a historiographical infinitive, some presence of such phrases in the citation of Cornelius Tacitus or other Latin historians would be expected. However, no examples have been found in the HJR corpus, neither in the sample of 128 Tacitus' phrases obtained through a comprehensive search of the LIA collection, nor in the sample of all 1,270 phrases from both known and unknown authors in the LIA collection that begin with the letter "A" (Zorić 2024). It appears that the surface syntactic structure and morphology of Latin expressions originating from Tacitus or other authors, as examined in this study, do not have a decisive influence on the understanding, acceptance, or quotation of these expressions in the Croatian language—provided that the deep structure of these expressions is universally validated across languages, regardless of whether they constitute full sentences or sub-sentential phrases.

4. Conclusion

In the *Latinum in aeternum* collection, 128 phrases traditionally attributed to the Roman historian Cornelius Tacitus were identified. Among all the quoted phrases, 71 are syntactically validated sentences in either full or elliptical form, a category that includes all 67 semantic thoughts and proverbs. The remaining 57 phrases are sub-sentential phrases, most commonly nominal phrases with genitive attributes or related noun syntagmas, categorized semantically as nominal collocations, followed by verbal collocations in third place. In their original Latin form, the most frequently quoted phrases in the Croatian Language Repository corpus of the Institute of the Croatian Language and Linguistics are: *Dictum sapienti sat (est)*, predominantly in its elliptical form *Sapienti sat*, with 25 occurrences; *Sine ira et studio*, with 16 occurrences; *In vino veritas*, with 7 occurrences; *Corruptissima re publica plurimae leges*, with 1 occurrence; *Ex tempore dicere*, also with 1 occurrence. All of these are syntactically clear (mostly elliptical) sentences, except for *Sine ira et studio*. Since other syntactic types of Tacitus' sayings have no occurrences in Latin within the HJR, the quotation of syntactic accusative with infinitive (ACI), nominative with infinitive (NCI), ablative absolute (ABL.APS), and independent subjunctives—which do not exist in Croatian—was tested using sayings from other or unknown authors. It was found that the absence of such constructions in the Croatian language does not hinder their use by Croatian speakers. This is because these constructions, as surface syntactic forms, express deep or universal linguistic structures. However, this does not apply to historical infinitive structures—that is, sentences where the predicate is an infinitive. This strongly suggests that historical infinitives cannot align with deep linguistic phenomena on a universal level. The absence of quotes featuring historical infinitives from Tacitus' works in Croatian implies their unacceptability as validated syntactic structures. Since the infinitive lacks its own specifier of verbal action, it cannot form an independent sentence due to its incompatibility with the deep function of the predicate. This results in its complete avoidance in both the *Latinum in aeternum* collection and the HJR corpus. On the other hand, the absence of surface structures such as ACI, NCI, and ABL.APS is not a barrier to the use and quotation of

such Latin expressions in Croatian. In fact, they are frequently quoted in modified forms, including partially combined Latin-Croatian modifications.

4.1 Future research

Expanding the understanding of the interplay between phraseology and syntax can be achieved by examining the deep or universal syntax present within the limited phraseological corpora of a given language or within borrowed phraseological corpora in another language. This can further support the hypothesis that speakers of a language do not accept borrowings of syntactic structures that lack deep validation, while they do accept borrowings of surface structures from another language that may not exist in their own, as long as these structures are deeply validated. It is particularly important to investigate whether, in the source language of the tested phraseological corpus, phrases whose surface structures lack deep validation are quoted as idiomatic expressions. For instance, it would be valuable to examine whether other ancient authors in the Latin corpus quote historical infinitive structures from Tacitus' works or from the works of other authors. A lack of mutual quotation of historical infinitives among ancient authors would provide additional strong evidence that these structures are not validated as independent deep sentence constructions.

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SEMANTIQUE DES PROVERBES: CE QU'IL FAUT FAIRE DES PROVERBES « LITTÉRAUX »

Résumé: L'article se penche, dans le prolongement du débat sur la sémantique des proverbes, sur la distinction *proverbes métaphoriques/proverbes littéraires*, telle qu'elle est conçue et défendue par Kleiber dans ses travaux récents. L'apport de Kleiber consiste à ériger le mécanisme de double figuralité, hyperonymique et transdomaniale, en une condition *sin qua non* de la proverbialité. Son application aux proverbes, métaphoriques et « littéraires », se solde par l'émergence de deux caractéristiques définitoires essentielles : (1) le sens proverbial est d'ordre superordonné, et (2) son articulation aux situations s'opère sur le mode indirect. Eu égard à cette double caractéristique, la distinction achoppe à une difficulté sérieuse en matière du fonctionnement des « littéraires ». Il est difficile en effet de déterminer comment ils peuvent référer sur le mode indirect sans perdre pour autant leur trait distinctif de littéralité. Pour sortir de l'impasse, nous plaiderons, en termes de la métaphore catégorisante, pour la parité métaphorique des deux types de proverbes, qui trouve son fondement dans la similitude de leur fonctionnement : tout proverbe est métaphorique en vertu de son sens superordonné, qui ne coïncide pas avec son sens littéral et de son application transdomaniale indirecte.

Mots-clés: proverbe, double figuralité, métaphore catégorisante, catégorie superordonnée, dénomination.

1. Introduction

Le proverbe donne encore du grain à moudre aux spécialistes, parémiologues, linguistes, psycholinguistes, etc. On s'accorde généralement à lui reconnaître un faisceau de caractéristiques : généricité, autonomie, binarisme, concision, archaïsme, rythme, prosodie, tournure syntaxique, etc. La métaphoricité est une propriété également caractéristique du proverbe, mais elle est, à la différence des autres, souvent une source de désaccord. Elle divise les spécialistes en deux camps : d'une part, les métaphoristes qui voient dans la métaphoricité le trait marquant et distinctif des proverbes et, d'autre part, ceux qui ménagent une place, à côté des proverbes métaphoriques, à un autre type de proverbes dits « littéraux ».

Le premier camp ne soulève pas de sérieux problèmes, dès lors qu'il admet que la métaphoricité des proverbes est chose acquise. Le second, par contre, parce qu'il s'attache à séparer les proverbes métaphoriques des proverbes « littéraux », se heurte à une difficulté troublante, celle de rendre compte du clivage sémiotique qu'entraîne leur répartition, encore qu'ils se prêtent indifféremment à la double figuralité (Conenna and Kleiber 2002 ; Kleiber 2008, 2010, 2017a ; entre autres), en deux sous-catégories proverbiales distinctes.

Nous nous fixons pour objectif, dans le prolongement du débat sur la sémantique des proverbes, de montrer notamment que la thèse de la distinction *proverbes métaphoriques/ proverbes « littéraux »*, telle qu'elle est conçue et défendue en particulier par Kleiber dans ses travaux récents, prête le flanc à la critique en ce qu'elle ne peut expliquer pourquoi les proverbes « littéraux » s'appliquent, en dépit de leur littéralité intrinsèque, sur le mode indirect aux situations particulières. Notre hypothèse de base consistera à plaider, en termes du modèle de l'inclusion catégorielle (Glucksberg and Keysar 1990, 1993 ; Glucksberg and McGlone 1999 ; Glucksberg and Haught 2006 ; Glucksberg 2001, 2008), pour l'uniformité sémiotique des deux types de proverbes, qui trouve son fondement dans l'identité de leur fonctionnement. Cette façon de faire aura pour mérite non seulement de rétablir la parité entre les proverbes métaphoriques et les proverbes « littéraux », mais aussi d'étayer l'hypothèse kleiberienne du proverbe comme dénomination.

2. Problématique

Voici les types de proverbes qui nous intéressent ici, glanés çà et là dans la littérature sur le sujet.

- (1) a. *Pierre qui roule n'amasse pas mousse*
 b. *Chat échaudé craint l'eau froide*
 c. *Il n'y a pas de roses sans épines*
 d. *L'habit ne fait pas le moine*
 e. *Chien qui aboie ne mord pas*
 f. *Il ne faut pas mélanger les serviettes et les torchons*
 g. *Les petits ruisseaux font les grandes rivières*
 h. *La pomme ne tombe jamais loin de l'arbre*
 i. *Ce sont les charrettes vides qui font le plus de bruit*
- (2) a. *Les apparences sont trompeuses*
 b. *A petites causes grands effets*
 c. *Tel père, tel fils*
 d. *Qui dort dîne*
 e. *L'union fait la force*
 f. *Charité ordonnée commence par soi-même*
 g. *Chassez le naturel, il revient au galop*
 h. *Bien mal acquis ne profite jamais*
 i. *Qui peut le plus peut le moins*
 j. *Qui ne risque rien n'a rien*
 k. *On ne peut pas être juge et partie*
 l. *Les absents ont toujours tort*

Les proverbes sous (1) n'achoppent à aucune difficulté ; leur métaphoricité est incontestable, et est le garant même de leur proverbialité. En revanche, les proverbes sous (2) font débat ; le désaccord est tel que d'aucuns, en leur refusant une place parmi les métaphoriques, les classent du côté d'autres apophtegmes. Ainsi, pour Rodegem (1984), comme le note Kleiber (2017a : 48), les proverbes *Qui ne risque rien n'a rien* et *Tel père, tel fils* correspondent respectivement à une maxime et à un aphorisme. Dans le même ordre d'idées, Visetti and Cadiot (2006) qualifient *Tel père, tel fils* de maxime et *On ne peut pas être juge et partie* et *Les absents ont toujours tort* d'adages. La leçon est bien claire : seuls les proverbes métaphoriques sont de véritables proverbes. Dans cette controverse, il nous semble que la position de Klei-

ber (2017a), qui maintient une distinction tranchée entre les proverbes métaphoriques du type de (1) et les proverbes « littéraux » du type de (2), a au moins le mérite de garantir aux proverbes « littéraux » le statut sémiotique de proverbe et de satisfaire, de ce fait même, à l'intuition des locuteurs qui veut qu'il en soit ainsi en général.

Les métaphoristes, de leur côté, demeurent divisés sur le type de métaphore qui confère au proverbe son caractère métaphorique. Tout compte fait, la métaphoricité peut tenir soit dans une métaphore lexicale d'ordre rhétorique comme en (3), soit dans une métaphore conceptuelle généralement évoquée par des expressions linguistiques comme en (4),¹ soit encore dans une métaphore conceptuelle qui consiste en une projection transdomaniale comme en (5).

(3) a. *La chance est chauve par derrière*

b. *Le vin est le lait des vieillards*

(4) a. *Money talks*

b. *Money is power*

(5) a. *Les chiens ne font pas des chats*

b. *A bon chat bon rat*

Nous souscrivons à l'idée de Kleiber (2021 : 60) que la métaphoricité dans le domaine des proverbes n'est pas une affaire de 'partie' mais de 'tout' (cf. Grzybek 2021, pour une synthèse exhaustive de la littérature sur la question). En d'autres termes, la métaphore proverbiale est par définition holistique en ce qu'elle porte sur le proverbe tout entier en tant que phrase générique et non seulement sur un de ses constituants. Aussi, selon lui, les proverbes *La chance est chauve par derrière* et *Le vin est le lait des vieillards* ne sont-ils pas métaphoriques encore qu'ils comprennent des constituants en emploi métaphorique, en l'occurrence « être chauve par derrière » et « le lait des vieillards ». En un mot, la conception 'globaliste' de la métaphore proverbiale

¹ Pour Gibbs (2018) et Kövecses (2018), par exemple, les proverbes (4a-b) sont structurés par la métaphore conceptuelle L'ARGENT EST UNE FORCE. On le voit, le domaine source *force* et le domaine cible *argent* sont évoqués respectivement via les termes *money* et *talks/power*.

ressortit à ce que Kleiber appelle « double figuralité », qui s'exprime de deux manières différentes : horizontalement et verticalement.

Horizontalement, dans l'emploi discursif pour une situation qui n'est pas de la catégorie ou du type de celle du sens littéral [...]. Il s'agit là de l'emploi métaphorique « classique », transversal, d'un domaine à l'autre. Mais il y a aussi une autre figuralité, la verticale, qui coulisse sur l'axe abstrait-concret, où la situation littéraire est utilisée comme la « figure » ou la représentation concrète ou imagée ou encore, terme rhétorique souvent convoqué par les parémiologues, comme *emblème* du principe, de la norme ou encore du précepte abstrait exprimé par le sens proverbial. (Kleiber 2017a : 51).

Chose curieuse, la double figuralité chez Kleiber ne sert pas seulement à souligner le caractère global de la métaphore proverbiale, mais aussi à distinguer les proverbes proprement dits du reste des phrases sentencieuses. Toujours est-il que sa mise en œuvre n'est pas sans susciter de sérieuses difficultés, notamment sur le chapitre de la distinction entre proverbes métaphoriques et proverbes « littéraux ». Tout le problème, en effet, est de savoir pourquoi la double figuralité, abstractive et transdomaniale, s'il est bien établi qu'elle s'applique indifféremment aux deux types de proverbes, ne parvient tout de même pas à uniformiser leur statut sémiotique. Nous reviendrons plus en détails sur ce point dans la sous-section (5.1). Contentons-nous pour le moment d'énoncer l'hypothèse de base, que nous tenterons de vérifier tout au long du travail. Celle-ci, pour faire vite, veut que la double figuralité débouche sur une métaphore catégorisante et qu'il n'y ait pas lieu, par conséquent, de distinguer entre proverbes métaphoriques et proverbes « littéraux ». Elle s'inscrit donc dans le droit fil du modèle de l'inclusion catégorielle (Glucksberg 2001, 2008 ; Glucksberg and Haught 2006 ; Glucksberg and Keysar 1990, 1993 ; Glucksberg and McGlone 1999). D'où l'intérêt, avant d'aller plus loin, d'en donner ici un bref aperçu.

3. *Modèle de la métaphore catégorisante*

Le modèle de l'inclusion catégorielle prend le contrepied de la théorie de la métaphore conceptuelle (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 1999 ; Lakoff 1993), qui est un modèle analogique, engageant des schémas de correspondances systématiques entre le concept source et le concept cible. Comme le rappellent Glucksberg and Keysar (1990) à la suite de Brown (1958), la métaphore inclusive est essentiellement catégorisante en ceci que le concept source sert à créer une catégorie nouvelle, dont les propriétés sont attribuées au concept cible. La catégorie ainsi créée est une catégorie superordonnée qui compte la source et la cible comme membres de la projection conceptuelle. Parce que la catégorie superordonnée ne bénéficie pas à sa création d'une dénomination préalable, elle prend le nom du concept source. Par exemple, l'interprétation métaphorique de l'énoncé *Mon travail est une prison* a pour conséquence de créer une catégorie superordonnée nouvelle se définissant par un faisceau de traits descriptifs, généralisés sur des situations caractéristiques de « désagrément », de « promiscuité », de « privation », etc. À défaut d'un encodage linguistique propre, la nouvelle catégorie se laisse désigner par le nom source *prison*. Qui plus est, la source *prison* ne se limite pas seulement à dénommer la catégorie superordonnée ; elle en constitue aussi l'instance prototypique.

On notera toutefois que la métaphore catégorisante n'est pas tributaire de la seule exemplarité de la source ; il faut de plus que la cible compte comme membre de la catégorie superordonnée créée. Ainsi, dans l'exemple précédent, la source *prison* et la cible *travail* déterminent conjointement la catégorie superordonnée à laquelle elles appartiennent.

Un point important : si la catégorie superordonnée créée ne se réduit pas à la catégorie représentée par le mot *prison*, c'est que la langue ne connaît pas ce nom comme catégorie superordonnée, mais plutôt comme catégorie de base. Dans ce sens, il peut être, comme le soulignent Glucksberg and Keyser (1990 : 7), l'hyponyme de différentes catégories superordonnées préconstruites telles que *châtiment*, *établissement*, etc. Mais il n'en reste pas moins vrai qu'il peut également appartenir à des catégories superordonnées nouvelles qui ne disposent pas de dénominations préalables. En un mot, *prison* opère dans la phrase à deux ni-

veaux distincts ; au niveau de base où il désigne habituellement un établissement où l'on reçoit des condamnés à une peine privative de liberté ; au niveau superordonné où il réfère à une catégorie d'instances partageant un certain nombre de propriétés référentielles. Parmi les membres de cette catégorie, il se trouve que c'est l'instance de base *prison* qui prête son nom à la catégorie nouvelle.

Il reste à préciser pourquoi c'est *prison* et non *travail* ou *mariage* ou tout autre membre qui dénomme la catégorie superordonnée créée. La réponse de la théorie de l'inclusion catégorielle tient dans la représentativité de l'instance prototypique. Cette réponse paraît satisfaisante, mais elle a le défaut de ne pas faire la lumière sur ce qui fonde et justifie une telle représentativité. Notre hypothèse consistera donc à la subordonner à la saillance cognitive de l'instance prototypique.

4. Le proverbe, instance prototypique d'une catégorie superordonnée

Pour accentuer le rôle important du proverbe en tant qu'instance prototypique dans la création d'une catégorie superordonnée nouvelle, nous partirons de l'analyse consacrée par Conenna and Kleiber (2002) au proverbe (6).

(6) On ne tire pas sur une ambulance

Ce proverbe fournit en effet une illustration d'autant plus éclairante que l'on est bien documenté sur sa genèse. Comme Conenna and Kleiber (2002) l'ont montré, ce proverbe est une phrase qui a accédé au statut d'un proverbe métaphorique. La situation spécifique initiale désigne, selon les auteurs, une situation homogène qui met en jeu des entités du niveau basique, mais le sens proverbial auquel a donné lieu l'ascension hyperonymique de la phrase originelle est plutôt hétérogène. La raison en est qu'elle s'emploie à référer à différentes situations spécifiques. Cette explication, quoique solide, oublie un aspect crucial de la genèse des proverbes ; elle ne montre pas pourquoi c'est cette phrase et non pas une autre qui a acquis le statut de proverbe. Le raisonnement de Conenna and Kleiber (2002) a donc pour in-

convénient de présupposer que la phrase originelle du proverbe (6) est la seule phrase qui ait prétendu à ce statut. La solution que nous proposons pour réparer cet oubli consiste à décrire la phrase originelle d'un proverbe sous son double rapport, d'un côté, à l'ensemble des autres phrases possibles et, de l'autre, à la catégorie hyperonymique correspondante.

4.1. *Pour ce qui est du premier rapport*

Il nous semble que c'est forcer la nature sémiotique du proverbe que de supposer qu'il y a toujours une seule phrase à la naissance d'un proverbe. Il est en effet moins vraisemblable qu'à l'époque où l'éditorialiste Giroud a utilisé la phrase à l'origine du proverbe (6), le contenu conceptuel qu'elle instancie (Langacker 1999, 2008) n'a pas endossé d'autres habillages linguistiques. Le contenu conceptuel *Il ne faut pas s'acharner sur une personne affaiblie* devait, selon toute vraisemblance, être exprimé par une infinité de phrases, selon les locuteurs et les situations de communication. Il en découle que si la phrase *On ne tire pas sur une ambulance* a accédé au statut de proverbe, c'est parce qu'elle a été d'abord le prototype d'une classe ouverte de phrases décrivant le même contenu conceptuel,² c'est-à-dire la phrase qui représente le mieux le schéma commun à l'ensemble des autres phrases. On en est amené à conclure à l'existence d'un processus qui prélude à la proverbialisation d'une phrase et dont la tâche essentielle est d'asseoir sa prototypicalité.

La prototypicalité de la phrase originelle d'un proverbe est fonction de sa saillance cognitive au sein d'une communauté linguistique.³ Selon Langacker (1987), la centralité ou la saillance cognitive d'une information est la résultante de quatre paramètres : la conventionalité, la généricité, le caractère intrinsèque et le caractère caractéristique. Ces paramètres fonctionnent comme un ensemble cohérent, formant, pour ainsi dire, un modèle cog-

² On se gardera toutefois de confondre le contenu conceptuel et le sens proverbial. Pour nous, le sens proverbial est un contenu conceptuel linguistiquement 'moulé'.

³ La saillance cognitive de la phrase originelle d'un proverbe n'interdit pas l'occurrence d'autres phrases exprimant le même contenu conceptuel. Rien n'empêche en effet les locuteurs de mouler le contenu conceptuel dans de nouvelles phrases (créativité linguistique oblige), ne serait-ce que parce qu'ils ignorent l'existence de la phrase prototypique, en passe de devenir un proverbe.

nitif dont la fonction primordiale est de mettre de l'ordre dans le pullulement des sens des mots. En d'autres termes, si ces sens, encyclopédiques par surcroît, n'ont pas un statut égalitaire, c'est qu'ils ne sont pas tous centraux à un moment donné de l'histoire de la langue. Il se trouve souvent, pour des raisons socio-culturelles, qu'un sens soit cognitivement plus saillant que les autres. Ce cas se produit lorsque ce sens vérifie les quatre paramètres à la fois : il est conventionnel, générique, intrinsèque et caractéristique. Un tel modèle, à y regarder de plus près, est de nature prototypique (Kleiber 1990 ; Rosch et al. 1976), dans la mesure où il sert, sur la foi de quelques paramètres, à déterminer sur l'ensemble des sens associés à un vocable celui qui présente un degré élevé de centralité et partant, se porte volontiers candidat au statut de prototype de la catégorie. Mais sa caractéristique cruciale est surtout d'être dynamique, comme en témoigne 'l'amovibilité' des sens centraux. Peut ainsi s'expliquer la sortie de l'usage de bien de sens naguère proéminents (Lemghari 2011).

Elargi au domaine des proverbes, ce modèle permet de comprendre pourquoi certaines phrases ont plus de chance que d'autres de fonctionner comme instances prototypiques des catégories proverbiales correspondantes. Pour reprendre l'exemple (6), il y a lieu de postuler que la phrase originelle de ce proverbe, compte tenu de son caractère à la fois conventionnel, générique, intrinsèque et caractéristique, a présenté à un certain moment de l'évolution du français une telle saillance cognitive qu'elle s'est érigée en phrase prototypique de toutes les phrases possibles de la catégorie. Il en ressort qu'une phrase ne constitue une instance prototypique d'une catégorie proverbiale que pour autant que sa saillance cognitive prévale contre celle de ses concurrentes.

Rappelons, au risque de redites, que ce modèle n'a pas pour mission d'établir la métaphoricité des phrases originelles des proverbes, mais plutôt d'en justifier la prototypicalité. A la limite, les instances prototypiques peuvent être unies aux phrases concurrentes par un lien mémoriel d'ordre métonymique. Fait tout à fait prévisible, puisque l'exemplarité des instances prototypiques s'explique, somme toute, par leur capacité à représenter le mieux le schéma intrinsèque à l'ensemble des phrases de la

catégorie. On postulera, sous cet angle, que ce lien est assuré par la métonymie LES INSTANCES PROTOTYPIQUES POUR LES INSTANCES NON PROTOTYPIQUES.

4.2. Pour ce qui est du second rapport

Le rapport de l'instance prototypique à la catégorie hyperonymique correspondante est un rapport d'inclusion. Il faut remarquer qu'à ce stade l'instance prototypique ne constitue pas encore un proverbe. Le fait qu'elle acquière une saillance cognitive au sein d'une communauté linguistique et qu'elle en vienne à atteindre un degré de conventionalité plus élevé que les autres phrases la prédestine à ce rôle, certes, mais il n'en fait pas un proverbe pour autant. Il faudra de plus qu'elle dénote une catégorie superordonnée. Se pose alors le problème de savoir comment l'instance prototypique, candidate au statut de proverbe, parvient à évoquer une catégorie superordonnée.

Deux réponses sont envisageables. La première peut être avancée, conformément à la théorie de la métaphore de la grande chaîne (Lakoff and Turner 1989), en termes de la métaphore GÉNÉRIQUE EST SPÉCIFIQUE. Celle-ci a pour fonction essentielle d'extraire une structure générique à partir d'une structure spécifique. Par conséquent, elle implique que la structure générique dégagée est un schéma et non un sens descriptif. Appliquée à un proverbe, elle rend compte de son schéma générique et non de son sens proverbial, celui-ci étant l'affaire du contexte en ce qu'il est déterminé par la structure spécifique de la situation particulière qui instancie le schéma. Un autre obstacle auquel se heurte cette solution tient dans ce fait que la métaphore GÉNÉRIQUE EST SPÉCIFIQUE est trop puissante. Comme le font remarquer Lakoff and Turner (1989) eux-mêmes, la poésie est le domaine privilégié de l'exercice de cette métaphore. Si elle est élargie aux proverbes, c'est que, d'après les auteurs, les proverbes constituent, dans une certaine mesure, une forme de poésie. Il s'ensuit un inconvénient majeur : étant trop puissante, elle échoue à séparer les proverbes des autres formules sentencieuses ; l'interprétation générique n'est pas en effet l'apanage des seuls proverbes. Mais si la métaphore GÉNÉRIQUE EST SPÉCIFIQUE peut ainsi opérer sur n'importe quel apophtegme sans toutefois transformer son sens générique en un sens superordonné, c'est que ce mécanisme,

nous semble-t-il, se comporte plutôt comme une métonymie que comme une métaphore, en l'occurrence LE SPÉCIFIQUE POUR LE GÉNÉRIQUE (Lemghari 2019a).

La seconde solution, qui nous paraît beaucoup plus séduisante, s'inscrit dans le droit fil de la métaphore catégorisante (Glucksberg and Keyser 1990). Un des postulats de base de cette théorie est que l'instance prototypique non seulement crée mais également dénomme la catégorie superordonnée correspondante. L'avantage immédiat en est double : d'une part, la catégorie superordonnée créée n'a pas de nom propre ; donc elle est identifiée sous celui de l'instance prototypique lui-même. D'autre part, le sens de l'instance prototypique ne se réduit pas à celui de la catégorie superordonnée. Celui-ci, étant inclusif, synthétise les traits descriptifs communs à l'ensemble des situations particulières représentées par l'instance prototypique.

On retiendra notamment le point essentiel suivant : l'instance prototypique bénéficie d'une double référence (Glucksberg 2008) en ce sens qu'elle réfère sur deux plans distincts : (1) sur le plan métaphorique où elle dénote la catégorie superordonnée dont elle est le membre prototypique, et (2) sur le plan littéral où elle renvoie à une instance particulière. La preuve en est que le mot qui dénomme la catégorie superordonnée peut être utilisé dans la même relation métaphorique à la fois comme instance prototypique et comme instance particulière, comme il ressort de (7).

(7) *Ma prison est une (vraie) prison*

L'acceptabilité de (7), sauf tautologie expresse bien entendu, demeure principalement subordonnée à la différence d'interprétation référentielle de *prison* en position de sujet et en position d'objet.

La notion de double référence contribue à une meilleure compréhension de la sémiosis du proverbe, c'est-à-dire du processus de signification qui fait que le sens de la phrase prototypique s'applique à dénoter un autre sens, le sens proverbial, dont le trait essentiel est d'être inclusif. Bien entendu, on ne peut parler de proverbialité pour une phrase, quelle qu'elle soit, que pour autant que son sens, outre son caractère générique, est d'ordre su-

perordonné. Tout le problème est de déterminer comment le sens littéral de l'instance prototypique devient un sens superordonné.⁴ La réponse réside dans sa double référence. La phrase originelle d'un proverbe, c'est-à-dire la phrase prototypique, sert à la fois à créer et à dénommer la catégorie superordonnée correspondante. Deux points sollicitent l'attention. D'une part, en créant une catégorie superordonnée, l'instance prototypique ne perd pas son sens littéral au profit de celui, inclusif, de la catégorie superordonnée. C'est pour cette raison même qu'elle peut toujours être utilisée en tant qu'instance particulière.⁵ Mais ceci posé, on se gardera de concevoir le sens superordonné comme étant issu, en termes d'abstraction, du sens littéral de l'instance prototypique, autrement on redonnerait raison à la thèse de la métaphore GÉNÉRIQUE EST SPÉCIFIQUE (Lakoff and Turner 1989). Il va de soi que le sens superordonné est générique, sauf que cette genericité n'émane pas de la structure spécifique de l'instance prototypique, mais des structures spécifiques de toutes les situations particulières que l'instance prototypique représente. La validité d'une telle thèse est garantie en effet par l'hétérogénéité du sens superordonné lui-même. Si celui-ci est susceptible d'être instancié par une classe ouverte de situations particulières, c'est qu'il est hétérogène. Or s'il est hétérogène, c'est qu'il synthétise le sens de toutes les instances de la catégorie et non seulement celui de l'instance prototypique. D'autre part, l'instance prototypique dénomme la catégorie superordonnée créée. Autrement dit, à défaut d'un nom qui lui est propre, elle se laisse identifier sous le nom de son instance prototypique. Sous cet angle, la phrase prototypique d'un proverbe, en tant qu'instance membre de la catégorie superordonnée créée, demeure une phrase qui peut toujours être interprétée comme telle, c'est-à-dire compositionnellement. Il s'ensuit un statut sémiotique particulier du proverbe : la phrase prototypique, sous son double aspect de signifiant et de signifié,

⁴ La séduisante réponse en termes de la thèse de l'ascension hyperonymique (Conen-na and Kleiber 2002) ne lève malheureusement pas le voile sur la façon dont la phrase originelle finit par dénoter une catégorie superordonnée. Elle ne dit pas non plus ce que devient la phrase originelle sitôt reconvertie en proverbe.

⁵ Cette remarque est d'autant plus simple qu'elle nous évite de recourir au phénomène de défigement sémantique ou de déproverbialisation (cf. Kleiber 1999) pour expliquer l'emploi 'non proverbial' d'un proverbe.

fonctionne comme le signifiant d'un autre signifié. Il s'agit là, on l'aura remarqué, du schéma tripartite que Barthes (1957) postule pour le mythe en tant que système sémiologique.

5. Deux implications cruciales

La caractérisation de l'instance prototypique du proverbe sous son double rapport à la catégorie superordonnée créée et aux instances particulières qu'elle représente s'accompagne de deux implications importantes, d'une part, sur la distinction *proverbes métaphoriques/proverbes* « littéraires » et, d'autre part, sur la question épineuse de la (non)compositionnalité du sens proverbial.

5.1. Sur la distinction *proverbes métaphoriques/proverbes* « littéraires »

On assiste dans les recherches récentes de Kleiber⁶ sur le chapitre des proverbes à un certain flottement sur la question de la distinction *proverbes métaphoriques/proverbes* « littéraires ». Ainsi, lorsqu'il s'attache à séparer les proverbes métaphoriques des proverbes « littéraires », il brandit l'argument de la double figuralité, et plaide ainsi pour l'incapacité des proverbes « littéraires », à la différence des proverbes métaphoriques, à admettre la montée hypo/hyperonymique. L'auteur défend cette position en particulier dans Kleiber (2008). Il fait remarquer à cet égard que les proverbes « littéraires »

ne supposent nulle opération de transfert métaphorique vers les hommes ni de montée hypo/hyperonymique d'une situation particulière vers une situation plus générale, puisque leur sens proverbial est donné quasi directement par leur sens littéral, c'est-à-dire, d'une certaine manière et d'une certaine manière seulement, compositionnellement » (Kleiber 2008 : 190).

⁶ Nous nous intéressons ici tout particulièrement à la position de Kleiber, non qu'il soit le seul à adopter la distinction entre proverbes métaphoriques et proverbes « littéraires », mais parce qu'il en fait, plus que quiconque, son cheval de bataille. Qu'on épouse ou non son point de vue, on lui doit, à force d'insistance et d'éclairage, d'ériger la double figuralité en une condition *sin qua non* de la proverbialité, imprimant ainsi une nouvelle direction aux recherches qui insistent sur la(les) particularité(s) sémiotique(s) de la catégorie des proverbes vis-à-vis du reste des énoncés sentencieux.

On le voit bien, l'intérêt de Kleiber ici porte essentiellement sur la catégorie proverbiale proprement dite. Autrement dit, l'auteur fait l'impasse sur les autres phrases sentencieuses, en particulier les dictons. Cependant, dès qu'il s'emploie à distinguer cette fois-ci les proverbes des dictons, il en vient à faire fi du trait de littéralité, que les proverbes « littéraux » partagent avec les dictons. La preuve en est qu'il postule la montée abstractivo-hyperonymique aussi bien pour les métaphoriques que pour les « littéraux ». Il note sur ce point que

ce qui fait la particularité des proverbes, métaphoriques et littéraux, et qui constitue par là même le trait sémantique définitoire spécifique de la catégorie des proverbes, est de conceptualiser ou de placer la situation implicative dénotée au niveau superordonné, alors que les dictons la conceptualisent ou la placent au niveau basique. Autrement dit, ce qui distingue les proverbes, métaphoriques et littéraux, des dictons, c'est le grain de conceptualisation : les proverbes saisissent les situations à un niveau plus abstrait que les dictons (Kleiber 2017a : 67).

Par ailleurs, la classification des proverbes, esquissée par Kleiber (2008), nous éclaire suffisamment sur la fluctuation de sa position. Dans cet article, l'auteur distingue trois classes de proverbes : les proverbes métaphoriques du type de (8), les proverbes, qu'on appellera *proverbes moitié métaphoriques, moitié littéraux*, du genre de (9) et, enfin, les proverbes « littéraux » du type de (10) (cf. Kleiber 2008 : 188–190) :

- (8) a. *Chat échaudé craint l'eau froide*
 b. *Pierre qui roule n'amasse pas mousse*
 c. *Petit poisson deviendra grand*
 d. *Les rivières retournent à la mer*
- (9) a. *L'habit ne fait pas le moine*
 b. *C'est en forgeant qu'on devient forgeron*
 c. *Ce sont les cordonniers les plus mal chaussés*
 d. *Le soleil luit pour tout le monde*
 e. *Quiconque se sert de l'épée périra par l'épée*
- (10) a. *Chose promise, chose due*
 b. *A petites causes grands effets*

- c. *A quelque chose malheur est bon*
 d. *Bien mal acquis ne profite jamais*

Pour Kleiber, ce qui sépare, d'abord, les proverbes (8–9) des proverbes (10), c'est leur capacité à vérifier la figuralité abstractive/hyperonymique/verticale et, ensuite, les proverbes (8) des proverbes (9), c'est la possibilité des premiers, les proverbes métaphoriques, à la différence des seconds, les « littéraux », de ne s'appliquer aux hommes que de façon indirecte. Autrement dit, les proverbes sous (9)

n'exigent pas la première opération réclamée par les premiers, à savoir le transfert métaphorique vers la classe des hommes, étant donné que leur sens littéral engage clairement déjà la dimension humaine. Ils exigent, par contre, la seconde, puisque leur sens ne se trouve acquis que moyennant la montée abstractive qui conduit d'un sens hyponymique littéral vers un sens proverbial hyperonymique (Kleiber 2008 : 189).

En somme, les proverbes sous (9) sont en partie métaphoriques et en partie « littéraux ». Ils sont, pour ainsi dire, à la charnière des proverbes métaphoriques en (7) et des proverbes « littéraux » en (10).

Cette classification nous met, toutefois, face à un problème épineux, celui de rendre compte de ce qui motive ou au moins explique la proverbialité des « littéraux », qui sont, d'après la répartition de Kleiber, des proverbes à part entière, quand bien même ils n'admettraient pas la montée abstractive. Le point névralgique de la classification est, à notre sens, ceci que Kleiber reste campé sur l'idée qu'il existe des proverbes « littéraux » qui n'ont rien à envier aux métaphoriques, autrement dit, qui prétendent à raison, c'est-à-dire grâce à « notre compétence sémantique proverbiale » (Kleiber 2000 : 44), au statut de proverbes et ne doivent aucunement, juste à cause de leur littéralité, être versés dans le giron des dictons.

Une telle position menace de discréditer l'hypothèse du proverbe comme dénomination elle-même. En effet, si le sens dénomiatif d'un proverbe correspond à son sens proverbial, c'est-à-dire le sens qui définit la catégorie que représente le pro-

verbe en tant que signe, il va sans dire qu'il est d'ordre hyperonymique. Or, on comprend mal comment le proverbe « littéral », qui est lui aussi une dénomination, ne peut avoir droit à la montée abstractivo-hyperonymique. Refuser l'ascension hyperonymique au proverbe « littéral » conduit en bonne logique à deux types de dénomination : une dénomination métaphorique qui, de par ce trait, habite les hautes sphères de la schématicité et une dénomination littérale, une sorte de schéma, située à un niveau qui n'est ni le niveau superordonné, puisque qu'elle est rétive à l'ascension hyperonymique, ni le niveau basique, dans la mesure où elle est supposée être hétérogène et partant, distincte du sens homogène, parce que littéral, du proverbe. Le vrai hic dans l'histoire, c'est de ne savoir si le sens du proverbe « littéral » est ou n'est pas, à proprement parler, un sens dénominatif. On en conclut que la classe des proverbes « littéraux », non susceptibles de montée abstractive, loin d'étayer la distinction entre proverbes métaphoriques et proverbes « littéraux », semble plutôt en saper le bien-fondé ; elle nous met en demeure de choisir entre deux alternatives inconciliables. Soit le proverbe « littéral » n'est pas une dénomination ; dans ce cas, il n'est pas un proverbe et mérite pour cette raison même de rejoindre les autres apophtegmes (dicton, adage, maxime, aphorisme, etc.). Soit, il est une dénomination et doit en conséquence prétendre à l'ascension hyperonymique. La seconde alternative, que nous adoptons bien volontiers, est plus avantageuse, car elle éloigne le proverbe « littéral » des autres types d'énoncés sentencieux, en particulier des dictons, tout en lui préservant le statut sémiotique de dénomination. En retour, elle le force à prendre le même 'ascenseur' abstractivo-hyperonymique que le proverbe métaphorique.

Cette alternative, c'est bien celle qu'embrassera Kleiber lui-même dans ses travaux ultérieurs. Dans Kleiber (2017a), en particulier, il ramène la classification tripartite à deux classes seulement, la classe des métaphoriques et la classe des « littéraux », la troisième se trouvant reléguée à la classe des dictons. Curieusement, les proverbes « littéraux » qui, dans la classification initiale, font partie de la classe des « littéraux », non susceptibles de montée abstractive, ont été (re)-versés dans la classe des proverbes « littéraux », que nous avons appelés par commodité *proverbes moitié métaphoriques, moitié « littéraux »*. Quant à

la classe des dictons du type de (11) (Kleiber 2017a : 43), elle comprend des énoncés sentencieux à sens littéral, qui est tel qu'il freine leur ascension hyperonymique.

- (11) a. *Noël au balcon, Pâques aux tisons*
 b. *Quand il pleut à la Saint Médard, il pleut quarante jours plus tard*
 c. *Labour d'été vaut fumier*
 d. *A la Chandeleur l'hiver se passe ou prend vigueur*
 e. *Bon pain se prouve le lendemain*

Tout compte fait, il est clair que si Kleiber a abandonné la classification tripartite des proverbes, c'est qu'il s'est avisé de la difficulté d'octroyer le statut de proverbe à des énoncés sentencieux qui ne satisfont pas au critère de la figuralité verticale.

La boucle est-elle bouclée pour autant ? Nous ne le pensons pas, car il reste à montrer pourquoi la montée abstractive des « littéraux » n'entraîne pas leur métaphorisation comme on peut s'y attendre. Certes, Kleiber a revu sa position et modifié sa stratégie dans Kleiber (2017a) ; il a érigé le processus abstraktif en une condition *sin qua non* de la proverbialité ; bref, il en a fait un critère décisif à même de séparer les proverbes du reste des énoncés sentencieux. Toujours est-il que l'on ne comprend pas comment le proverbe « littéral », dont le sens proverbial est d'ordre superordonné en termes de l'ascension abstractive, s'emploie littéralement et donc compositionnellement aux situations particulières.

Kleiber a apporté deux réponses, qui ponctuent l'évolution de sa position sur la question. Dans Kleiber (2008), afin de faire le départ entre les « littéraux » et les métaphoriques, l'auteur a soutenu la thèse de l'applicabilité directe des proverbes « littéraux », qui stipule, d'un côté, qu'ils consistent en une projection directe sur les hommes et, de l'autre, que cette projection n'est pas métaphorique. Cette thèse amène à conclure que l'application transdomaniale des « littéraux » à des situations particulières ne 'transite' pas, au contraire des proverbes métaphoriques, par le niveau superordonné. Elle conduit donc tout droit à une impasse, pour autant que leur applicabilité sur le mode direct s'accompagne inévitablement de la perte de leur proverbialité. Autant

dire, on le voit bien, que le statut sémiotique des proverbes en général trouve son fondement dans leur capacité à se comporter comme les hyperonymes des situations particulières exemplifiantes. S'il est bien établi dans la littérature que le proverbe dénote une catégorie, celle-ci ne peut donc être que superordonnée.

Par ailleurs, pour peu qu'on adhère à la thèse kleiberienne du proverbe comme dénomination, on est conduit à admettre que le sens dénominatif d'un proverbe, « littéral » ou métaphorique, est un sens superordonné. Ceci est d'autant plus plausible que tout proverbe, et non seulement les proverbes métaphoriques, s'applique à une classe ouverte de situations particulières. Un tel fonctionnement n'est concevable que si le proverbe, quel qu'il soit, dénomme une catégorie superordonnée. Considérons, au risque de redites, le proverbe (5c), repris pour convenance sous (12).

(12) *Tel père, tel fils*

Si (12) est un proverbe, alors il est une dénomination. Et s'il est une dénomination, c'est que son sens proverbial, étant irréductible à son sens littéral, est un sens non seulement générique mais également d'ordre superordonné. Aussi est-il généralisé non seulement sur une situation particulière où un fils se comporte et/ou a les mêmes traits de caractère que son père, pas non plus sur toutes les situations particulières où les fils sont rapprochés sur le plan du tempérament de leurs pères, mais encore sur toute situation spécifique exhibant le même rapport de ressemblance asymétrique. Un tel emploi, bien entendu, n'a pas échappé à Kleiber (2000) qui note qu'il y a lieu d'utiliser (12) pour un chien et son chiot. Corollairement, dans des situations de communication spécifiques, il est également possible de faire appel au proverbe pour exprimer, certainement à un niveau plus élevé de l'organisation conceptuelle,⁷ le rapport de ressemblance asymétrique entre un frère aîné et son frère cadet, un directeur et son directeur-adjoint, un maître et son disciple, etc. En somme, le caractère hyperonymique du sens proverbial sert non seulement

⁷ A un tel niveau de schématicité, le proverbe semble fonctionner comme une construction.

à différencier le proverbe des autres phrases sentencieuses, mais aussi – piste de recherche prometteuse mais à peine frayée – à expliquer ‘la métamorphose sémiotique’ de bien de formules sentencieuses en proverbes.⁸

C’est à plus forte raison ce type de raisonnement qui nous semble avoir décidé Kleiber (2017a) à revisiter sa position initiale sur la classification tripartie des proverbes et à faire prendre aux « littéraux » le même ‘ascenseur abstractivo-hyperonymique’ que les métaphoriques. Cette volte-face ‘sémiotique’, Kleiber (2017a) l’assoit sur des arguments solides, dont surtout celui de la (quasi)synonymie, que nous reprenons ici à notre compte pour l’implication importante qu’elle a sur la délimitation de la catégorie proverbiale. L’idée est simple : en théorie, si un proverbe « littéral » et un autre métaphorique sont synonymes, alors ils sont supposés admettre approximativement les mêmes emplois. Dans cette optique, il n’y a pas de raison au préalable pour refuser à un proverbe « littéral » comme (13) le double privilège de la montée hypo/hyperonymique et de la métaphoricité transversale qu’on concède à son synonyme (14).⁹

(13) *Les apparences sont trompeuses*

(14) *L’habit ne fait pas le moine*

Si l’application transdomaniale peut être reconnue au proverbe « littéral », c’est que son sens dénominatif est d’ordre superordonné. On ne peut en effet appliquer un proverbe « littéral » comme (13) à différentes situations particulières que pour autant qu’il vérifie la même montée abstractive que son synonyme métaphorique (14). Il s’ensuit que le caractère superordonné du sens proverbial se révèle être le seul garant de son extension à la totalité des situations particulières l’instanciant. S’explique ainsi

⁸ Même si Kleiber (2017a) n’affirme pas expressément cette hypothèse, il semble la privilégier, dès lors qu’il évoque, à l’appui de la différence de fonctionnement entre proverbes « littéraux » et dictions, cet argument que certains dictions peuvent coulisser sur l’axe vertical et fonctionner ainsi comme des proverbes métaphoriques à part entière.

⁹ Pour Anscombre (2016), les proverbes (13) et (14) sont des antonymes et non des synonymes, mais c’est là un autre débat (cf. Lemghari 2019b et 2020, pour plus de détails).

un trait marquant du statut sémiotique du sens proverbial. Parce que de niveau superordonné, il motive toutes les projections transdomaniales du proverbe en même temps qu'il les restreint aux situations, et seulement aux situations, qu'il prédit et justifie. Aussi le sens proverbial contraint-il l'application transversale du proverbe et, ce faisant, trace ses frontières délimitatrices vis-à-vis d'autres catégories proverbiales.

Le tour est-il joué ? La réponse est négative : un autre problème surgit du revirement de position lui-même. Maintenant que la classification tripartite kleiberienne est réduite à deux classes seulement et que la figuralité verticale se trouve être le seul critère possible de reconnaissance de la catégorie proverbiale, le trait de littéralité est plus que jamais douteux, sinon superfétatoire. La raison en est que la littéralité présuppose que le sens proverbial s'applique sur le mode direct aux situations. Dans ce sens, l'exclusion des dictons du type de (11) de la catégorie proverbiale à sens littéral est bien compréhensible : étant littéraux, ils ne peuvent s'employer autrement que directement et partant, compositionnellement. Il s'agit là d'une contrainte qui met à mal le postulat des proverbes « littéraux ». Corollairement, pour maintenir intacte la distinction entre proverbes métaphoriques et proverbes « littéraux », Kleiber (2017a : 67) a dû assouplir cette contrainte, de manière à relâcher le lien 'trop rigide' entre littéralité et référence directe du sens proverbial. L'assouplissement consiste en effet à voir dans la littéralité des proverbes « littéraux » et celle des dictons une différence de fonctionnement, c'est-à-dire, « une différence dans l'application aux situations ». La thèse défendue veut, en un mot, que la littéralité des proverbes « littéraux » soit indirecte, alors que celle des dictons, directe.

Une telle solution est judicieuse mais partielle. Judicieuse, parce qu'elle sauve ce type de proverbes d'une descente sûre dans la catégorie 'inférieure' des dictons. Mais partielle, parce qu'elle fait l'impasse sur la manière dont le sens des « littéraux », étant de nature superordonnée et indirecte, pourrait s'appliquer compositionnellement aux situations.

Faut-il donc abandonner la distinction *proverbes métaphoriques/proverbes* « littéraux » pour tout de bon ? Certes, notre position sur la question est claire. Conformément au cadre théorique adopté, tout proverbe est métaphorique ; d'abord, en termes

de son sens superordonné qui ne coïncide pas avec le sens littéral de la phrase originelle du proverbe ; ensuite, en termes de son application transdomaniale indirecte aux situations instanciantes. Mais comme, d'une part, la métaphore catégorisante n'est pas la seule alternative possible et que, d'autre part, le fonctionnement des proverbes « littéraux » est nettement différent de celui des proverbes métaphoriques – ces derniers exigeant une référence aux hommes qui opère sur le mode indirect –, on peut être tenté de la maintenir, mais au prix d'une modification considérable. On versera, d'un côté, les « littéraux » dans la catégorie des métaphoriques, en particulier pour les affranchir de la contrainte de littéralité qui pèse de tout son poids sur les énoncés sentencieux à sens littéral, et on considèrera, de l'autre, les métaphoriques plutôt comme étant allégoriques, ne serait-ce que parce qu'ils mettent en jeu des entités auxquelles sont associés des attributs symboliques, en somme, des entités qui réfèrent indirectement aux hommes.

5.2. Sur la transparence des proverbes

Le problème de la transparence des proverbes, tel qu'il est posé dans la littérature, peut être énoncé comme suit : le sens littéral des proverbes subsiste-t-il ou non dans le sens proverbial ? Ce problème, comme on le voit, revient à se demander si le sens proverbial est transparent ou opaque. Les expressions idiomatiques en sont le foyer. S'il est étendu au domaine des parémies, c'est parce que les proverbes sont généralement placés dans le giron des expressions figées.

La divergence des linguistes sur la transparence des proverbes est plutôt triviale. C'est que leur statut sémiotique, contrairement aux expressions idiomatiques, est tel que l'accès à leur sens proverbial ne paraît pas 'court-circuiter' leur sens littéral. Autrement dit, le sens proverbial ne semble pas s'opacifier. C'est par ailleurs l'explication de cette transparence qui divise l'opinion sémantique.

Pour Anscombre (2003), comme le rappelle Kleiber (2010), le sens proverbial demeure transparent, parce que le proverbe ne présente pas un figement total comme c'est le cas des expressions idiomatiques. En d'autres termes, le proverbe évolue et partant, en vient à adapter son sens littéral à l'usage actuel de

la langue. Il note ainsi que les proverbes (15) et (16) ont évolué respectivement vers les formes modernes (17) et (18).

- (15) *Qui trop se haïste si s'empeeche*
- (16) *Tout vient à point qui sait attendre*
- (17) *Qui trop se hâte reste en chemin*
- (18) *Tout vient à point à qui sait attendre*

Cette évolution s'explique par le fait que le verbe « s'empechie » (au sens de 'se freiner', 's'arrêter') dans le premier proverbe et la tournure syntaxique « qui » dans le second (utilisée naguère au sens de 'si...on') sont tombés en désuétude. Bref, pour Anscombe, le changement de pareils proverbes témoigne du caractère non figé du proverbe.¹⁰

Kleiber (2010) et Tamba (2011), par contre, souscrivent à la double thèse du figement et de la transparence des proverbes. La position de Tamba stipule que le sens proverbial résulte de la combinaison de deux types de sens, le sens compositionnel et le sens formulaire. Une telle combinaison a pour conséquence – défaut, selon Kleiber (2010) – de livrer un troisième sens qui est le sens proverbial. Curieusement, l'explication de Tamba s'inspire à bien des égards de la théorie de l'intégration conceptuelle (Fauconnier and Turner 2002). Ainsi, le sens compositionnel et le sens formulaire fonctionneraient comme deux espaces mentaux qui servent d'entrées à un troisième espace, celui de la structure émergente. Bien entendu, un tel sens est supposé être nouveau, car il ne procède pas de la somme des informations des deux entrées, mais plutôt de leur fusion conceptuelle.

Kleiber (2010), quant à lui, s'attache surtout à discuter les arguments qui entérinent le rôle du sens compositionnel dans le sens proverbial. Il s'arrête notamment à l'examen de deux phénomènes mis au jour par Anscombe et Tamba, en l'occurrence la subsistance du sens compositionnel dans le sens proverbial et sa traductibilité inter-linguistique. La stratégie de Kleiber consiste à faire d'une pierre deux coups : expliquer ces

¹⁰ Ce point de vue est contestable, car il aborde le proverbe en diachronie. En synchronie, par contre, la fixité formelle du proverbe et donc, son figement est un fait indéniable (cf. Kleiber 2010, pour une position similaire).

phénomènes sur la foi de la thèse du proverbe comme dénomination. Son idée maîtresse est que la traductibilité et la transparence du sens proverbial vont bien ensemble. En tant que dénominations, les proverbes réfèrent à des catégories superordonnées inaccessibles sinon à travers leur sens compositionnel. En conséquence, si leur traduction littérale dans une autre langue ne nuit pas à leur compréhension, c'est que leur sens compositionnel ne freine pas l'accession à leurs catégories superordonnées.

En somme, la littérature sur la transparence des proverbes se borne, de manière générale, à l'hypothèse que l'accès au sens proverbial met en œuvre non pas une métaphore, mais plutôt une métonymie et/ou synecdoque (Conenna and Kleiber 2002 ; Kleiber 2017b, 2021 ; Krikmann 1994 ; Meyer 1997). A priori, cette hypothèse est plausible. Puisque le sens littéral d'un proverbe est une instance particulière de son sens proverbial, on peut supposer que la relation entre les deux sens est assurée par la métonymie L'HYPONYME POUR L'HYPERONYME. Mais à y regarder de plus près, le problème demeure entier, car cette métonymie ne rend aucunement compte de la quote-part du sens compositionnel dans le sens du proverbe.

Par ailleurs, la notion de *point de référence* (Langacker 1993), qui sert à expliquer les relations de métonymie dans bon nombre de constructions, semble beaucoup plus prometteuse. Elle est définie comme la capacité cognitive à évoquer la conception d'une entité pour établir un contact mental avec la conception d'une autre entité. Aussi semble-t-elle a fortiori fournir la clé interprétative du lien métonymique et/ou synecdochique entre le sens littéral des proverbes et leur sens proverbial. En un mot, le sens compositionnel d'un proverbe serait le point de référence, une sorte de tremplin, qui donne accès à son sens proverbial. On notera, cependant, que cette notion a un aspect dynamique crucial (Langacker 1993 : 6). L'entité servant de point de référence est l'entité la plus cognitivement saillante d'une relation métonymique. Il s'ensuit qu'elle peut s'estomper au profit de l'entité qu'elle active pour peu que celle-ci gagne en prééminence cognitive et partant, se conventionnalise. Force est alors de constater, s'il est établi que le sens proverbial est un sens dénominatif et donc conventionnalisé, que le sens littéral en tant

que point de référence initial ne tient presque aucun rôle dans l'activation du sens proverbial.

La problématique de la transparence du sens proverbial, somme toute, a sa source dans la polémique autour de la façon dont le sens des expressions figuratives est saisi. Le problème peut être posé en ces termes : l'accès au sens figuratif d'une expression passe-t-il ou non par le sens littéral ? Le désaccord est total. Deux positions diamétralement opposées disputent de zèle pour atteindre à la plausibilité psychologique, notamment dans la littérature psycholinguistique, en l'occurrence le point de vue de l'accès indirect (appelé également *point de vue pragmatique standard*) et le point de vue de l'accès direct (cf. Gibbs and Colston 2012).

Le point de vue de l'accès indirect remonte à Grice (1975) ; il stipule que la compréhension du sens figuratif d'une expression passe par une série d'étapes. Le locuteur analyse d'abord le sens littéral de l'expression, puis le confronte avec le contexte de communication et, enfin, vérifie si ce sens est approprié ou non. Deux cas se présentent à ce niveau : si le sens littéral est approprié, le locuteur ne pousse pas l'analyse plus loin. Dans le cas contraire, le locuteur tentera de dériver un autre sens à la lumière des facteurs contextuels. Les recherches psycholinguistiques qui campent sur cette position appellent à l'appui cet argument expérimental que le temps d'analyse du sens figuratif est toujours plus long et donc cognitivement plus coûteux que celui du sens littéral.

Quant au point de vue de l'accès direct, il soutient la thèse d'une analyse concomitante entre le sens littéral et le sens figuratif. Ce point de vue, malgré les nombreuses critiques dont il fait l'objet, ne donne pas le pas au sens figuratif sur le sens littéral. Sa thèse centrale est que l'accès au sens figuratif d'une expression n'implique pas l'analyse totale de son sens littéral. En d'autres termes, il ne conteste pas la contribution significative du sens littéral, mais il refuse qu'un tel concours soit le résultat d'un processus différent de celui qui livre le sens figuratif. En un mot, il combat la thèse de la saisie du sens figuratif en deux étapes distinctes : d'abord, l'analyse totale du sens littéral ; ensuite, son rejet au profit du sens figuratif.

Le désaccord demeure entier sur le chapitre des proverbes. Le point de vue de l'accès indirect postule que l'analyse du sens littéral du proverbe est indispensable à la compréhension de son sens figuratif (Honeck 1997 ; Temple and Honeck 1999). Le point de vue de l'accès direct, par contre, stipule que les deux types de sens sont analysés parallèlement, mais que l'on saisit, à la faveur du contexte, le sens figuratif avant même que l'on vienne au bout du sens littéral (Gibbs and Colston 2012).

On l'aura remarqué, la divergence entre les deux points de vue réside dans la façon de rendre compte du sens figuratif, qu'il s'agisse de proverbes, d'expressions idiomatiques ou d'énoncés. Il est évident donc qu'ils reconnaissent tous deux au sens littéral un certain rôle dans la compréhension du sens figuratif. Mais encore une fois, la difficulté est de circonscrire ce rôle. Le problème reste tout posé, car, comme le souligne Gibbs and Colston (2012 : 12), les théories psycholinguistiques n'ont pas encore réussi à montrer comment l'analyse du sens littéral peut en fait conspirer à la compréhension des messages figuratifs.

On notera tout de même que la linguistique n'est pas obligée de s'inféoder à la psychologie expérimentale et/ou à la psycholinguistique – une tendance à la mode notamment dans la linguistique cognitive américaine. Autrement dit, elle ne doit pas ne s'occuper que des faits de langue qui soient testés 'psychologiquement plausibles'. Ainsi, s'il est vrai que l'on ignore si les locuteurs, en interprétant des proverbes dans des situations de communication particulières, doivent d'abord analyser entièrement ou partiellement leur sens littéral, il n'empêche que l'on tende à considérer le sens des proverbes conventionnels comme plus directement accessible que celui des proverbes non conventionnels et donc, non familiers. Face à un proverbe non familier, tout « littéral » qu'il soit, le locuteur doit s'évertuer à dégager le schéma commun à la fois à la structure spécifique du proverbe, en principe impénétrable sauf à travers le sens littéral de ses constituants, et à celle que déploie la situation discursive et qui, soulignons-le, motive le recours au proverbe énoncé.¹¹

¹¹ White (1987 : 157) fait remarquer à ce sujet que c'est la situation de communication qui fait sauter à l'esprit du locuteur le proverbe approprié : « In searching for candidate sayings, we discovered that it is quite difficult simply to retrieve proverbs

Une telle opération, qu'elle soit heureuse ou non, demande la construction d'une catégorie superordonnée qui subsume comme membres et le proverbe et la situation particulière. Dans le cas contraire, c'est-à-dire lorsque le proverbe est familier au locuteur, cette opération, qui dans le premier cas exige l'analyse entière du sens littéral du proverbe, n'est pas indispensable, car la catégorie superordonnée, vu « l'acte de dénomination préalable » du proverbe, selon l'expression de Kleiber (1984 : 79), est perçue comme étant préconstruite.

6. Conclusion

Notre but dans cet article s'est borné à examiner le statut sémiotique des proverbes à l'aune de l'une de leurs propriétés caractéristiques, la métaphoricité. Celle-ci, en effet, est souvent une source de désaccord entre les spécialistes des parémies. Nous nous sommes occupé notamment de la distinction qu'elle fait naître entre deux types de proverbes, les métaphoriques et les « littéraux », telle qu'elle est exposée, revue, modifiée et affinée par Kleiber dans ses travaux des deux dernières décennies. Nous nous sommes surtout arrêté au mécanisme de la double figuralité qu'il promeut au rang d'une condition *sin qua non* de la proverbialité. La mise en œuvre de ce mécanisme met au jour deux traits définitoires spécifiques de la catégorie des proverbes : d'une part, le sens proverbial est d'ordre superordonné et, d'autre part, son articulation aux situations particulières se déroule sur le mode indirect. Le dernier trait est d'autant plus crucial qu'il implique que l'extension transdomaniale 'transite' nécessairement par le niveau superordonné.

Loin d'être trivial, ce trait met à mal le bien-fondé de la distinction entre proverbes métaphoriques et proverbes « littéraux » en ce qu'il dévoile le paradoxe qu'elle renferme. Ce paradoxe, en un mot, tient dans la difficulté d'expliquer pourquoi les proverbes « littéraux », qui vérifient la double figuralité tout comme les proverbes métaphoriques, s'emploient, malgré leur littéralité intrinsèque, sur le mode indirect aux situations particulières.

from memory at will. They resist introspective recall. However, given the right set of circumstances, the appropriate proverb seems almost to leap to mind ».

Nous nous sommes fixé pour objectif essentiel d'apporter un élément de réponse à ce problème en partant toujours du postulat que les proverbes forment une catégorie nettement distincte du reste des énoncés sentencieux, en particulier des dictons. Aussi avons-nous proposé, en termes de la théorie de l'inclusion catégorielle, de ranger tous les proverbes sous la bannière de métaphoricité. A l'appui de cette alternative, la proverbialité elle-même qui ressortit, somme toute, à la double contrainte de figuralité. D'une part, le proverbe présuppose, en tant que tel, l'extension transdomaniale. D'autre part, cette extension n'est possible qu'à condition que son sens, proverbial par surcroît, soit d'ordre superordonné et que son emploi discursif aux situations s'opère sur le mode indirect.

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THE SEMANTICS OF PROVERBS: HOW TO DEAL WITH “LITERAL” PROVERBS

Abstract: The paper aims to pursue the debate on the semantics of proverbs. The focus is on the distinction between metaphorical proverbs and literal proverbs, as conceived and supported by Kleiber in a number of recent works. Kleiber’s main import consists in considering the mechanism he calls “superordinate and cross-domain figurativity” a prerequisite for proverbiality. Its operation as such on both kinds of proverbs results in two essential defining characteristics: (1) proverbial meaning is superordinate in character, and (2) it applies in an indirect way to instantiating cases. In view of this double characteristic, the distinction runs into a serious difficulty regarding the functioning of literal proverbs. It turns out to be hard to understand in this sense how literal proverbs can apply, despite their intrinsic literality, to a range of specific situations. We will argue from the perspective of class-inclusion theory for the metaphoricality of both kinds of proverbs, if only because of their similar functioning: every proverb is metaphorical in terms of both its superordinate meaning, which is quite different from its literal meaning, and its indirect cross-domain application.

Keywords: proverb, double figurativity, inclusive metaphor, superordinate category, denomination.

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PROVERBS AND PROVERBIAL THINKING WITHIN LOUISE BENNETT'S POETRY

Abstract: This article examines the poetry of Louise Bennett (1919 – 2006) using the concept of proverbial thinking to explore the impact of the proverbs in her poems. Proverbial thinking is used as a broad term referring to diverse methods of using, collecting, and preserving proverbs, which in turn activates a sense of urgency surrounding the need to preserve and protect a body of knowledge. Looking at proverbial thinking is also about pointing out elements of proverbial use and knowledge that are not always obvious and that become even more interesting when analysed. Bennett's own collection of proverbs, here entitled the Proverb Manuscript, serves as a means of expanding the interpretations of the proverbs. The moral and thematic headings under which Bennett places each proverb in the Proverb Manuscript are considered integral to understanding the malleability of the proverb form. The openness of the concept of proverbial thinking also allows for discussion of many of the central topics which surround Bennett, whose career crucially straddles the shifting cultural moment when Jamaica gained independence in 1962. Overall, the article illustrates the multiplicity of proverbial thinking that reflects the layers of complexity within Bennett's poems, which are written exclusively in Creole.

Keywords: Louise Bennett, Jamaican proverbs, poetry, Creole, proverb manuscript.

1. Introduction

Scholars have long recognised the importance of proverbs for Louise Bennett's poetry, but none has yet offered an in-depth study of her use of this form. This article demonstrates how proverbs are key to understanding Bennett's poetry, arguing that she creates a multi-layered poetic art form and illustrating how proverbs expand our readings of the poetic text through the multiple meanings they offer. Bennett was aware of the importance of folklore material as a means of capturing the concerns and interests of a community, including the importance of proverbs. As a result, she presents poetry and proverbs as intimately connected art forms within a communally shared linguistic and cultural heritage.

The following article leans on an analysis of Bennett's Proverb Manuscript to provide a wider understanding of her literary use of proverbs (Appendix 1). This collection of Louise Bennett's personal collection of proverbs, lost since 1976 and recently rediscovered by the author of this article, offers a unique and nuanced source text to contextualise and advance readings of her poetry (this collection will be referred to as the Proverb Manuscript hereafter and the story of the discovery of the Proverb Manuscript can be read in Appendix 2 along with a detailed description of the manuscript itself). The Proverb Manuscript reveals the inter-relational quality of proverbial thinking identifiable in Bennett's work. In the Proverb Manuscript, Bennett organises proverbs under moral and thematic headings, such as Greed, Ambition, Caution and offers 'translated' meanings of the proverbs in Standard English. Examination of this taxonomy and interpretation of proverbs offers a suggestively open reading of their impact on Bennett's poetry.

2. Reframing Bennett's Poetry Through Proverbial Thinking

An analysis that is attentive to proverbial thinking allows an analytical review of Bennett's poems through proverbs which are explicitly written into her poetic texts. This approach demonstrates how proverbs provide a broader and more significant

reading of the poems. Each approach will be considered in detail throughout the article.

The first approach illustrates how proverbs can form a structural framework as, for example, in the poem 'Proverbs' where multiple proverbs are explicitly placed within the verse lines (Bennett 1942:35; Bennett 1966:217; Bennett 1983:58). This leads to a unique layering effect within the poetic narrative wherein the structuring power of proverbs dominates the poem. A second approach examines how Bennett employs a proverb as a core element to a poem where the poem circles around the proverb, that is to say where the poetry relies upon the inherent qualities of the proverb to enhance the poetic narrative. An example of this technique, analysed in detail later, is the poem 'Wartime Grocery' (Bennett 1966:83). Bennett borrows from the imagery inherent in the central proverb, 'Jackass say de worl' noh level', and harnesses it to flesh out the poetic narrative.

In the two areas of proverbial use referred to above, that is, proverbs as structuring devices and as integral cores of a poem, the presence of an explicit proverb within the poems is central. In reframing her poetry for a new critique, a third approach is proposed which considers the absence of proverbs in Bennett's corpus of poetry. This will be briefly addressed in this article.

The everyday integration of proverbial wisdom has been passed down through communities over generations. To borrow Carolyn Cooper's phrase here, 'the essence of a proverb is its immediacy of access to members of the community' (Cooper 1993:38). Sharing a communal folklore heritage can be integral to the identity of a society and the presence of proverbs assists in representing the realities of a society that shares an understanding of them. Commonality is integral to the relationship of Bennett's poetry and proverbs, where the proverbial element embodies the commonality of the folk, that is 'the people' that Mieder refers to in the quote: 'After all, proverbs are the poetry of the people!' (Sobieski and Mieder 2005: xiv). By integrating proverbs into her creative art, Bennett is promoting not just a sense of cultural identity through the language she uses, but she is championing the traditions of Jamaican heritage as part of a living literary and communal conversation. Not only does Bennett use Creole to undermine the position of colonial Standard English,

but she fully values the wealth of oral folklore of her heritage, highlighted specifically by her use of proverbs. Her poetry presents a communal, cultural “writing”. In essence, she engages a community of readers/audiences in a Creole conversation.

To elaborate on this notion of a literary conversation framed in traditional expressions, it is helpful to reflect on Neal Norrick’s definition of proverbs: proverbs are consistently described as self-contained, pithy, traditional expressions with didactic content and a fixed poetic form (Norrick1985:32). To interrogate this further, Norrick considers how the traditional nature of proverbs correlates closely with their status as items of folklore. He writes that:

[...] the correlation between traditionality and folklore status comes out clearly in Abrahams 1969 definition of folklore as ‘traditional items of knowledge which arise in recurring performance’... since folklore is traditional and recurring it is viewed as authorless, sourceless and also as non- literary, non-learned. Further in as much as proverbs are linguistic items, the recurring performances in question must be verbal (even if they are later recorded in writing) (Norrick, 1985:39).

Norrick observes the traditional aspect of proverbs in the framework of their repetition through recurring performance, their authorless nature and the oral nature of the performances. The traditional wisdoms from older generations were initially passed down orally, and the emphasis Norrick gives to transmission of a non-literary proverbial form through oral channels accords with the debates surrounding the move from oral to text that scholars have continually debated within the field of Caribbean studies and across the body of Bennett’s work. Norrick’s parenthetical comment on ‘writing’ also raises questions as to the collectability of proverbs in written form; proverbs remain essentially speech elements within the field of folklore, and Bennett embraces oral forms in performance and in the written textual form in her poetry. Her live performances emphasise how proverbs come alive in spoken form as part of the living culture where Bennett manages the perceived schism between oral and written, and in utilising proverbs she creates a space for this ‘traditional item of knowl-

edge' in preserving, validating, and shaping the cultural identities and poetics of Jamaican people. Lisa Tomlinson elaborates on Bennett's skilful balance between oral and written form:

In reintroducing and legitimizing oral folk knowledge during a time when such a literary approach was often seen as inferior, Bennett's use of this approach, across the span of the written form, allowed her to speak directly to Jamaicans, thus promoting self-pride and a holistic sense of cultural identity (Tomlinson 2017:17-18).

The description of a 'holistic sense of cultural identity' is particularly significant. In this respect, Bennett was a visionary; she accepted the challenge at the time to champion the Jamaican 'dialect' (as she named it in her earliest publications), which was itself seen as inferior, utilising it in both performance and in the crafting of written representation. Carolyn Cooper also perceives that Bennett was ahead of her time in the Caribbean;

She (Bennett) has long recognised the evocative power of Jamaican proverbs as the locus of folk philosophy. She weaves this wealth of cultural inheritance and knowledge into her artistry and the application of proverbs demonstrates a cross fertilisation of that inheritance within the construct of her poems (Cooper 1993:45).

The cross-fertilisation of inheritance that Cooper refers to allows Bennett to bring the wealth of generational wisdom provided by the proverbs into her poems and Cooper hints here that 'folk philosophy'—or we might say proverbial thinking—is a dynamic transformative part of Bennett's poetics. Bennett's use of the proverbs reinforces the idea that multiplicity is central to reading her poems. In the quotation above Cooper calls this 'the evocative power of Jamaican proverbs' (Cooper 1993:45). The presence of the proverbs creates a synergistic relationship between her poetry and proverbs which leads to the re-valuing of proverbs as spoken art forms and seeing poetry as an important site of proverbial expression. This encourages the reader to reimagine the complementary relationship created between the poetry and proverbial thought. Bennett's use of proverbs is integral to her poetic approach to the 'everyday'. Proverbial poetry is informed

by social experience and practice, and for Bennett it enables a non-partisan critique of those experiences and practices. In Bennett's poetry, the commonality of the proverbial heritage creates a means to reclaim truths passed on through ancestral voices where proverbs open out layers of historicity and interpretation from within a poetic construct.

The phrase 'layers of historicity' is used here to emphasise the idea that the proverbs are calling back to the past, with each proverb layering echoes of the voices of those who have lived and communed before. Being authorless, the proverbs retain a sense of being related to the wisdoms of older generations even as they remain relevant in contemporary contexts. The voices coming through are reflected in the multiplicity of the voices within Bennett's poetic narratives and this is also something to consider when looking at Bennett's characters and personae. Essentially, the notion of historicity prompts consideration of what qualities of the past remain relevant and how the past may be framed in particular ways. Prahlad's holistic understanding is of the proverb as 'a lived part of the culture' (Keulker 2009:657). Bennett incorporates into her own poetic and cultural commentaries this aspect of a traditional "living culture" which is embodied in the proverbs and thus she creates multiple layers to her commentary: the layer of the present, and the inherited layers of the past. Bennett stabilises the shared needs and the identity of her own community through the relationship she creates between proverbs and her poetry.

3. *'On a Tramcar': Listening to 'Dialect'*

Scholars of Louise Bennett will be familiar with the poem 'On a Tramcar' and its status as the origin of her decision to write in Creole, a fact highlighted by Morris (Bennett 1983:xi). Bennett was greatly influenced by Claude McKay who first wrote in Creole in 1909 and Bennett follows him from the 1930s onwards. Like him, Bennett was educated under the colonial educational system which did not provide her with the freedom of language to represent communal everyday interests of Jamaicans in her poetry; instead, she chose to show this through writing in what

she initially calls ‘dialect’. Bennett explains this decision in her 1968 interview with Dennis Scott:

From the time I was quite young, I wanted to write. At first I started to write things about birds, and bees and trees. But then I realized that I was not doing what I really wanted to do. There was life going on around me and people living their lives, and what I was writing had nothing to do with what was really happening around me. So then I started to take a greater interest in people—to listen to what they were saying and how they were saying it, and the first dialect verse I wrote was about a tramcar (Scott 1968: 97-101).

What is important to note is that when Bennett wrote her first dialect poem as a teenager of nineteen, it was a direct consequence of wanting to write about people, through listening to their voices, through listening to what they were saying and doing. ‘On a Tramcar’ was her first poem written in Jamaican ‘dialect’ and is included in her inaugural book of poetry, (Jamaica) Dialect Verses, published in 1942 (Appendix 3). For Bennett, however, this step she took was not solely about writing in Creole — it was about viewing poetry as fundamentally ‘human-centred’. This was the moment she began to listen to the people around her, the content of their everyday chatter, and to the way they were using the vernacular to communicate. This is the origin of not only Bennett’s use of Creole, but of her lifelong position as observer and commentator on the everyday. In using Creole from this point forward, Bennett engendered new forms of critique and discourse.

However, it is notable that in ‘On the Tramcar’ Bennett did not initially turn to proverbs. Bennett’s framing of this early vernacular poem, published in its entirety in the 1942 edition, would have afforded the perfect occasion to claim space for a targeted proverb to be used in an educational manner or as part of new poetic idiom. The poem starts with the description of the actions taken by the market women when the poetic speaker gets on board. The first lines are as follows:

Preadout yuhself deh Liza, wan
Dress ’oman dah look like sey

She se' de li space side a we
 An want foace harself een deh (Bennett 1966:30-31).

On a socio-political level, this could be read literally as the market women making no room for a middle-class woman such as Bennett's 'wan / Dress –oman dah look like sey'. However, the condensed expression of this phrase feels reflective of proverbial speech where a multiplicity of meaning always underpins what is said. Even though there is no proverb in this first poem in the dialect, the sense hovers that there is more than one interpretation of the language — the connotation of the poshness and the schism in class between them and this 'dress-up' woman would not be lost on the market women, in their chatter, and the tension of the moment. This creates a poetic space for a social commentary that is essentially unsaid but understood in the context of the situation and environment of the tram. The commonality that enables the understanding of proverbs links to the commonality of the language that Bennett uses to explore the world of the market women.

Furthermore, the framing of this poem in Creole can be viewed metaphorically as making no room for the Anglophone language associated with those not from the working class. In Bennett's first steps to reclaim the language of the Jamaican people as a cultural marker, the absence of a proverb could be seen as a marker of the dominance of the coloniser's language over the language of the colonised; this is not to say that proverbs are seen as essential components of authentic Creole. However, the absence of proverb in this first dialectal poem perhaps evidences the instability of the moment and illustrates that Bennett's initial focus is to explore writing creatively in Creole. The notion of instability applies to the juxtaposition of the Standard English of Bennett's education and her desire that is now present to write in the Creole—in other words, the redefining of colonial dominance in vernacular terms. In response, Bennett's later use of proverbs in her poetry can be seen as reclaiming even more space for the colonised by remapping the relationship between proverbs and poetry. Proverbs impose a greater influence on Bennett's thinking as her use of the vernacular is solidified. In this early '(Ja-

maican) dialect verse' Bennett claims a national voice in the public sphere, one of empowerment and social redress.

For Janet Neigh, the mobility of the tram allegorically represents the cultural progression of the dialect spoken inside the vehicle and the heralding of independence (Neigh 2009:5-16). Consequently, in Bennett's poem, the 'li'(little) space of the tramcar becomes a microcosm for the state of Jamaica, through a Kingston-centred lens. While Neigh concentrates on the space inside the tram and the clash of class and social issues within the 'theatre space' of the tramcar, there is another space that is equally important. That is the liminal space between the street and the tramcar itself. This represents not only the divisions between class and gender but also creates the threshold between divisions of coloniser and colonised, where the physical crossing over from the status quo of colonial dominance captures the social instability of everyday life at this national moment of tension in approaching the end of colonial rule. It also represents the division between the Anglophone and the Creole and captures the decisive movement taken by Bennett to take subversive control through language. Therefore, by examining the issues of representation in the poem 'On a Tramcar', Bennett's work shows she is choosing Brathwaite's 'nation language' at a crucial time. Inclusiveness and exclusiveness are part of the process of identity construction: it is through the knowledge of the self and the discovery of others that an individual develops a feeling of belonging and security. The exclusion of the 'wan dress 'oman' from the community of the market women in the tram car gave rise to Bennett scrutinising her own position and may point to her decision to create her own identity as a writer in the language of the people. The decision to write in Creole embodies the politics of representation that Bennett makes when she chooses to claim the language of the people in her poetry. Bennett listened to the proverbs being spoken around her and it is in the framework of transformational listening and multi-layered performance that proverbs take their place as a form of creative practice. The following sections discuss the influence of the proverbs and the different approaches proposed above to examine the centrality of proverbial thinking in Bennett's poetry.

4. A Skeleton of Proverbs: Poetic Structure and Framing Techniques in 'Proverbs'

In the poem 'Proverbs', Bennett showcases the proverbs in line with the first approach outlined at the beginning of this article. In this poem the proverbs form a structural framework to the poem (Appendix 4). In stark contrast with the absence of proverbs noted in her first dialect poem 'On A Tramcar', this is a poem that is uniquely constructed around proverbs as an explicit part of the content. Notably the poem 'Proverbs' was first published in the 1942 edition of (Jamaica) *Dialect Verses* in the same volume as 'On A Tramcar', where the juxtaposition of these two poems in the same collection shows Bennett now claiming the folk element of proverbs as a fundamental part of her poetic voice. The (re)claiming of the proverbs in this poem strongly underscores Bennett's progressive desire to write with a greater focus on the people in her community, in a language and poetic style that embodies their heritage. The title of the poem itself proclaims the attention she is drawing to this complex and layered relationship between proverb and poetry.

A fundamental reading of the poem 'Proverbs' is that it deals with the memory of a dead parent. In terms of the authorial 'I', Bennett's poetry is generally dramatised in different kinds of voices. In 'Proverbs', Bennett uses the first-person voice of the orphan, who uses traditional Jamaican proverbs that carry with them the weight of collective memory. This automatically draws the orphan (and the reader's perspective of the orphan) into the collective identity of her people. The young lady turns for guidance to the proverbs as she enters a hostile world where catastrophe has befallen her. Her reliance on proverbs mirrors an interest in proverbs that the Jamaicans have turned to through generations. It is interesting to note, therefore, that Bennett presents this particular proverbially-led poem in the voice of the young girl, where historically the proverbs have been the province of elders. Yet, the poetic voice in 'Proverbs' is even more complex than this. At the start of a stanza, it is the disembodied voice of the mother that the reader hears, teaching the child lessons from the proverbs. Is the mother omnipresent? Or is it a more autonomous role? A voice is present, sometimes explicitly framed with quotation marks, but the voice is also indeterminable, which

adds to the question of who the author/ speaker of the proverbs might be, reflecting the authorless nature of proverbs.

In placing the proverbs in different positions in each stanza, Bennett uses different visual and aural effects of proverbial thinking within the narrative. Following Bennett's sequencing of her proverbial framework reveals how the poetic text in each stanza is built around the proverb producing a "skeleton effect" throughout the poem. Furthermore, the categories under which Bennett places the proverbs in the Proverb Manuscript offer a broader reading of the orphan's story and character. The categorisations of the proverbs in the Proverb Manuscript adds complexity to a reading of this poem, where proverbs are often placed by Bennett under two or more headings. In the first verse, Bennett establishes that the orphan's situation has changed:

'When ashes cowl dawg sleep in deh';¹
 For sence Ma dead, yuh see,
 All kine o' ole black nayga start
 Teck liberty wid me.

The focus of this proverb is the presence of the fire which keeps people/animals away when it is burning; however, when it cools there are no barriers. In this case, the orphan now feels exposed to particular dangers, dangers that she imagines in relation to racialised and social hierarchies. The reading of the poem is strengthened by the proverb where the element of the changing nature of the fire draws attention to the 'temporary nature of power/life' (Morris 1966:158). Throughout the Proverb Manuscript, a layered reading of this proverb can be constructed, taking into account the meanings and associations that Bennett explicitly recorded. In the Proverb Manuscript, Bennett places this proverb under two category headings of Change and Class. Bennett's first categorisation of the proverb fits with the translated meaning of the proverb given above—that a change in circumstances has occurred. In the following line it is evident that the orphan's mother has died. Importantly, the second categorisation of the proverb in

¹ 'Wen ashes cowl dawg sleep in deh'; circumstances alter cases/ when one has lost his high position any one can take liberties (*Change 1 and Class 28*).

Bennett's Proverb Manuscript (Class) allows for an expanded interpretation of this proverb within the context of the poem itself. By placing the proverb under the category of Class (which may not be an obvious interpretation here), Bennett now interrelates the categories and allows the reader to realise, from the outset, that the change in circumstances in which the orphan finds herself now also relates to a change in status/class. The translation given by Bennett for this proverb 'when ashes cole dog sleep in deh' under the heading of Class in the Proverb Manuscript is 'when one has lost his high position any one can take liberties'. In noting that the mother afforded the child a higher position in society and with that a form of protection from anyone taking liberties, the change of situation that occurs when the mother dies can be better understood. This allows a fuller reading of the orphan's predicament which can then influence an interpretation of the rest of the stanza and the poem itself. As Cooper observed earlier, Bennett is interested in the imagery within the proverb. In the second stanza she uses an animal image to conjure up a picture of a dog with fleas.

Me no wrap up wid dem, for me
 Pick an choose me company:
 Ma always tell me seh: 'Yuh sleep
 Wid dawg yuh ketch him flea'.²

The proverb, 'yuh sleep wid dawg yuh ketch him flea', expresses how the orphan tries to disassociate herself from an imagined 'common' people. A tension is created here around status and division where the perception of common people is pejorative and does not easily embrace community spirit. This also refers to the upturning of social order in which the orphan finds herself as a result of her change of status. Bennett categorises this proverb under the linked headings of 'Consequence and Results' and 'Weakness'. Here, Bennett draws an interesting relationship between victim or perpetrator. In effect, the placement of the proverb under these two headings asks the question as to whether

² 'Yuh sleep wid dawg yuh ketch him flea'; one who keeps bad company then evil will befall you (*Consequence 7 – see Results and Weakness*).

the ensuing situation is the result of the circumstances that the orphan finds herself in, or whether it is her own attitude of weak self-righteous snobbery that exacerbates the situation. Therefore, where the verse gives a poetic interpretation of the proverb—that it is important to pick and choose company—Bennett’s categorisation of this proverb provokes questions of interpretation when considered alongside the poetic narrative, leading into so many dispersed directions. Bennett herself recognised the multiplicity of proverbial interpretation and used her knowledge of this to expand the poetic interpretation.

As the poem progresses Bennett exposes the hypocritical nature of the speaker in that she continues to be polite to her neighbours yet she sees herself above them:

Ah teck time gwan me ways an doan
 Fas eena dem affair,
 Me tell den mawnin, for ‘Howdy
 An tenky bruck no square’.³

The proverb emphasises that saying ‘howdy’ (hello, how do you do) and ‘tenky’ (thank you) ‘bruck’ (breaks, harms) no one. However, this focus on everyday politeness is in tension with the criticisms of the new neighbours that the poetic speaker voices throughout the poem. In requesting politeness or kindness from others, it could also be noted that from the opening of the poem, the speaker fails to offer it herself, revealing herself to be someone who does ‘fass eena dem affair’.

Interestingly this proverb is not in her collection and this is a notable omission as she uses it in this poem, and in the monologues. Perhaps it has become so ingrained in everyday speech that it was an oversight. This could warrant further examination. Bennett uses proverbs within the rhyme scheme and, since she is free about the placement of proverbs and lineation, where her poems might be strict in some respects (rhyme scheme, stanza length), she is relatively flexible about using a proverb over two lines. As observed in this poem, proverbs are not discrete and do not always require a single line.

³ ‘Howdy an tenky bruck noh square’; Saying please and thank you won’t harm anyone (not included in the manuscript).

The dual categorisation of the proverb in the following stanza allows the reader to further pick up the disingenuous nature of the orphan's visits to the parson:

Sometime me go a parson yard
 Sidung lickle an chat –
 'Ef yuh no go a man fire-side, yuh no know
 Ow much fire-stick a bwile him pot'.⁴

The juxtaposition between the headings in the Proverb Manuscript of Association and Knowledge is an interesting one. The orphan has gone to glean knowledge, but also to acquire vicariously the associated and reflected status of the parson by gaining knowledge of the inner sanctum of his home. In context, it is the elders who hold respect in Jamaican society in Bennett's time and here, because of the interplay afforded by the two categorisations, the orphan is seen as either disrespecting or manipulating that relationship.

As demonstrated in the stanza above, the dual interpretation informed a more complex reading of the orphan's motivation. In this final illustration of the proverbial skeleton, reference to the Proverb Manuscript shows that by using one single proverb, Bennett not only invokes a traditionally recognised interpretation, but also expands it into a fivefold lesson of moral behaviour:

But when me go look fi parson
 Me ongle talk bout me soul,
 For Ma use fi tel me; 'Sweet mout fly
 Follow coffin go a hole'.⁵

The proverb in the Proverb Manuscript is classified under Ambition (see Caution, Class, Character and Greed). By recognising this proverb's placement under the heading of Ambition, the reader is prompted to consider how this category might inform a

⁴ 'Ef yuh no go a man fire-side, yuh no know ow much fire-stick a bwile him pot'; If you don't associate with others, you can't learn anything about them (*Association 1/ Knowledge 7*).

⁵ Sweet mout fly follow coffin go a hole; pursuit of luxury may lead to ruin (*Ambition 7* (see *Caution, Class, Character and Greed 47*)).

reading of the orphan's actions. The translation Bennett gives under Ambition (pursuit of luxury may lead to ruin) illustrates the consequences of pursuing luxury to the furthest degree; but the Creole words of 'sweet mout fly' are most descriptive of greed, where notably the translation Bennett gives under this category is that the proverb 'refers to those who will stop at nothing to get what they want'. This gives a more pointed insight into the motivation of the orphan. Bennett also places this proverb under the category of Caution which contains a moral lesson for the orphan, that is to say these two 'sins' of ambition and greed are to be handled cautiously. Furthermore, the proverb, being also placed under Character, now questions the character of the orphan which we have seen is dubious. Cooper's comment on this stanza is that the speaker is using this proverb to absolve herself of all culpability (Cooper 1993:44). The use of the proverb for personal absolution questions the orphan's principal motive in speaking to the parson and adds a qualifying tone to the poem. Bennett also applies the category of Class to this proverb. This reflects the theme of social standing and the issues of class integration that underlie the poem in its entirety, reflecting the relevance of the deeper interpretation of category of Class embedded in stanza 1. Thus, these different categories add to the dispersal of meaning embodied by the proverbs across the poem.

In review, the categorisation of the proverbs in Bennett's Proverb Manuscript attracts a multiplicity of proverbial interpretation and adds to a reading of the three tiers of structure, story and interpretation. The framing of the poem between the skeleton of proverbs allows the reader/listener to connect the proverbs to the poetic narrative. But the proverbs also operate independently from the story being told. Visually and audibly, the presence of proverbs highlights the commonality of the oral nature of both the proverbs and Bennett's poetic voice. This advances the idea of the meta questioning of the poetic form where the proverbs question the poetry from within the poetic narrative. Furthermore, as this study illustrates, Bennett's poetry demands of its audience to be more than a reader and speaker; they must also be a listener and a viewer.

5. *The Proverb as a Core Element to a Poem: The Reciprocal Relationship of Proverb and Poetry.*

It is clear that the proverbs in the poem 'Proverbs' discussed above dominate the entire poetic structure. In the following examples, the poems circle around the proverb using it to generate the poetry; however, in this case, the proverb does not dominate the entire poetic structure. Sometimes, the balance between proverbs and poetry vacillates, for example, in 'Wartime Grocery'. In this particular case the proverb does not dominate the poem visually as such but dominates the particular stanza it is presented in (Bennett 1966:83). The proverb comes in the third stanza of nine; the first two stanzas set the scene where Miss Vie is seen to be frustrated at not being able to buy milk and yet Miss Pam's servant could buy four big tins of milk for her mistress. In placing the proverb in the stanza immediately following these two scene-setting stanzas, Bennett evaluates the injustice of this and uses the proverb to highlight the generality of the predicament of inequality.

Jackass say de worl' noh level ⁶
 Koo how Miss Pam she fat!
 She noh need milk, wen me side o' her
 Me fava mawga rat! (Bennett 1966:83).

The poem addresses the wartime hardships faced by the Jamaican people, and the fact that the shopkeepers exploited the food shortage by 'marrying' commodities together to sell a commodity that was harder to sell with one that was in demand. For instance, flour was 'married' to cornmeal, salt-pork to mackerel. One commodity which was especially scarce was milk and this is the immediate context to which Bennett applies the proverb—it is unfair that the rich, who are well fed and thriving do not need milk but can obtain it, whilst the poorer people cannot obtain it, but need it.

The layout of the stanza itself mirrors the stratification of the Jamaican class system from rich down to poor, overarched

⁶ 'Jackass say de worl' noh level'; things are not evenly distributed (*Justice* 3; *Character* 109). For visual listings of the proverb under both headings see *Appendix 5*.

by the general comment provided by the weight of the proverb in the first line. It is here that the proverb sits in a dominant position and verbalises the main message around which the poem is generated. Notably, the fact that the proverb is placed at the beginning of the stanza brings into focus the generalised theme of inequality and juxtaposes the specific conflict between Miss Pam and the 'I' of the poem: it brings the proverb into a personal relation with the voice of the speaker. The proverbial statement contextualises the stanza by making a generalisation of inequality pertaining to a wider group. It relies upon the present moment being part of the flow of communal experience, as Morris observed (Morris 1982:xvi). The proverb creates a broad base for the stanza which then narrows down into a specific group.

As the stanza continues, Bennett names a single person who is identified with the richer class of people—in this case, it is somebody who is fat in times of food scarcity: 'Koo how Miss Pam she fat!' Here, Bennett uses a singled out and named persona, Miss Pam, to embody a group identity and represent the privileges of the rich. In the following line, Bennett continues to comment on the irony that although Miss Pam does not need milk she is still able to purchase it: 'She noh need milk, wen me side o' her'. The balance of this line, created by the comma, highlights the comparison to follow in the last line of the stanza: 'Me fava (resemble) mawga rat!' The term 'mawga' is found in several proverbs in the Proverb Manuscript under headings of Character, Class and Conceit, Need and Necessity; for instance, in the Proverb Manuscript, Bennett records proverbs such as: 'mawga cow a bull mama'; a poor person can have high connections (Class, 15) and 'mawga dog nebber pass ole bone'; those in need are not choosy (Need and Necessity, 24). In these proverbs Bennett applies many meanings to the word 'mawga', such as 'poor', 'needy', 'lowly', 'hungry' and 'humble'. Each of these descriptions can be applied to the line in this stanza, 'me fava mawga rat', where the speaker declares she resembles a rat. Notably, in these particular proverbs in the Proverb Manuscript, the word 'mawga' is used to describe an animal. The placement of the word 'rat' at the end of the last line is not a triumphant final word but rather emphasises the status of the speaker within the stratification of the stanza. Here, pre-empting Cooper's ar-

gument concerning the metaphorical status of proverbs (Cooper 1984) the use of animals starkly interrogates human social relations, as the speaker compares themselves to an implied poor, needy, lowly, hungry, humble animal.

The fact that the speaker is unnamed could imply that the poorer classes are unimportant, but this is countered in the poem by giving the role of authoritative speaker to someone not from an elite class. The speaker belongs to this poorer class who are struggling with the exploitation of the retailers who, in turn, are manipulating the situation for their own gain by selling two commodities at once; the poor are unable to buy the minimum that is required, in this case milk. Miss Pam's servant has already bought four tins of milk. It is this injustice that the stanza replies to, with the proverb at the start announcing one response to the issue. This exemplifies how a proverb can not only generate the theme of the poem around which the poetic text circles but can also dominate one stanza within the poem. In sum, Bennett's particular placement of the proverb directs the reader's attention to the weight it carries within that one stanza.

As observed throughout this chapter, proverbs need to be interpreted in terms of the 'humanness' that is at the centre of Bennett's poems. Cooper identifies the relationship between the themes that the proverbs embody from Jamaican life and the structure created in imagery which draws from that Jamaican environment and heritage. She writes that 'in both subject and structure the metaphorical proverb affirms Bennett's umbilical connection to [the] matrix of oral Jamaican folklore' (Cooper 1993:37). Here the notion of the proverb being born into the Jamaican folklore genealogy solidifies the relationship between tradition and folklore that was noted by Norrick.

The use of a proverb allows the poet to reimagine the representation of the community. In the poem 'Wartime Grocery' discussed above, Bennett deals with the issues that concern her community and uses her poetic narrative skills to represent them both realistically and hopefully. In approaching her poetry through proverbial thinking, Bennett encompasses the issues at the heart of her community where, as seen, the proverbs add another layer to her poetic constructs. Bennett listens to the multiplicity of the voices and issues and creatively blends this within

the relationship of proverb and poetic construct. She brings the weight of validation of the proverbs into her poetic narrative and directs this at current themes of the everyday. In other words, it is not the poem or the proverb alone that acts as a vehicle for Bennett to provide a social commentary but the complementary relationship both genres have with each other.

An example of a poem which circles around two proverbs is the poem 'Sweetie Pie' (Bennett 1983:52). In this poem there is an element of proverbial misdirection where a picture of Sweetie Pie has been built up so that the expectation is that the subject is a young child. However, he turns out to be 'one big strong – muscle man/dah run fi fifty bole!' (around 50 years old). Two proverbs, 'Donkey tink him cub a race horse'⁷ and 'John crow tink him pickney white',⁸ comment on the misguided perception of Sweetie Pie created by the poetic text itself, highlighting the reciprocal relationship between poetry and proverb. The proverbs are not only placed in the first and last stanza to reinforce the poem's interests in perception, but both also highlight the double meaning that can lie behind a proverb — 'the illusion' as Morris describes it in the following quotation: "The startlingly different reality prompts the reflection that people hang on to the illusions they need: the point is made in the proverbs that open and close the poem" (Bennett 1983:157).

The poem illustrates how parents can often have an inflated and boastful view of their children and their capabilities, for example where the donkey unrealistically thinks his progeny is a racehorse. Furthermore, there is a deeper illusion in the proverb, 'John crow tink him pickney white.' This refers to a bird whose chicks are born white, but which turn black as they grow up. In reality, they present first as one thing but soon change to their natural form, thus breaking the initial illusion. This proverb is also placed in the Proverb Manuscript (in addition to Boastfulness as noted above) under Selfishness, with the additional translation of 'John crow tink him pickney white' which refers to

⁷ 'Donkey tink him cub a race horse'; refers to those who overrate what belongs to them (*Boastfulness*,10).

⁸ 'John crow tink him pickney white'; refers to those who overrate their relations (*Boastfulness*,13)

overrating one's relations (Selfishness,4). A racialised reading of this proverb can be applied, but the poem also invites a reading focused on the notion of a selfish parent who wishes others to be impressed by their child. Bennett frames the poem 'Sweetie Pie' with the two proverbs which imbue the poem with an illusory undertone, illustrating once again the skill with which she uses the proverbs to inform the poetry. In this case, the illusion inherent in the second proverb creates a symbiotic relationship with the poem in terms of the revelation at the end about Sweetie Pie.

A final exemplary poem where Bennett places the proverbs at the start and at the end of a certain poem is 'Dutty Tough':

Sun a shine but tings not bright;
 Doah pot a bwile, bickle no nuff;
 River flood but water scarce, yaw;
 Rain a fall but dutty tough.

The last stanza turns this around:

Sun a shine an pot a bwile, but
 Tings no bright, bickle no nuff.
 Rain a fall, river dah flood, but
 Water scarce and dutty tough (Bennett 1983:27-28).

The stanzas at the start and the end of the poem are reversed and the effect of this, as Morris writes, is to turn the poetic narrative 'away from the individual into the communal expression of proverbs' (Bennett 1983:144). It puts that particular moment in a wider perspective in time but notably the use of the Creole words, 'bickle' (food) and 'dutty' (ground) challenges the reader to understand the meaning of the words—this highlights the tension between speakers of Standard English and those who speak the Jamaican dialect. The use of such localised dialectal vocabulary personalises the crisis to the Jamaican people whom it is affecting and references the historical divide between the coloniser and the colonised. For Bennett, not only the use of Creole but the use of proverbs reinforces the existence of group identities within societies.

In June 1981 Morris gave a talk in Beacon Bookstore in London (Morris 1981:audio cassette). In this, he gives an astute

gloss on the placement of the proverbs where he notes that they are more available to the reader rather than the listener. Morris's observation is that the proverbs in this poem are fundamentally sad, and in performance Bennett communicates this. However, the nuanced placement of proverbs may not be fully appreciated in performance. For instance, it is worth noting that in the last stanza the wording of 'rain a fall/ but dutty tough' is broken. Bennett does not do this in any other poem, and the effect here might be to make the reader pause to consider the jolt of discomfort this creates. To expand on this, Morris further notes that the proverbs are arranged so that in line 1 the proverb is positive, and in line 2 it is negative, positive in line 3 and negative in line 4. The tone of the poem is changed because of the rhyme schema and ballad form where lines 2 and 4 rest naturally, with a break after 2 and then 4 so that when you put a negative in lines 2 and 4 this comes across with more pathos (Morris 1981; audio cassette). The technique that Bennett employs here, placing the proverbs in opposition, encourages the reader to re-engage in the proverbs and to observe the different emphases created. The stress is in the last stanza, on the words 'Dutty tough' meaning that no matter what, the ground remains too hard—in other words, the harshness of life for a labouring class Jamaican will not ease. By framing a poem about hard times within the generational tradition of proverbs, this poem becomes transferable and applicable to other times and spaces. It is a deliberate technique used by Bennett to harness the timelessness and timeliness of proverbs. In this poem the individual and the communal come together to face a shared experience.

Overall, Bennett's continued use of proverbs presents an opportunity for scholars of today to better understand the relationship between this form and her poetry in an exciting and innovative way. This relationship emerges as fluid and relational, perhaps not always explored in earlier proverbial understandings. Indeed, in attending more closely to Bennett's proverbial thinking, and thereby moving the critical gaze away from a fixed understanding of proverbs as a self-contained form, one could suggest that Bennett may have been testing out the movability of the proverb genre through her different creative usages of it, that is to say by encouraging a more mutable, fluid approach to pro-

verbal meaning in her poetic art. This attention to proverbs and proverbial thinking in Bennett's poetry is ultimately transformational in that it allows for a use of proverbs that has not been seen in previous proverb collections, which necessarily adhere to a narrowness of form and perspective.

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Appendix 1

Illustration of a page from Louise Bennett's collection of proverbs (entitled the Proverb Manuscript)

PROVERB	ORIGINAL	TRANSLATION
1) Een cooco head meet rich soil, him root bore grum.	- One with ability is most likely to succeed.	
2) Dog flea tell him wife sey 'if man ketch him lef him dinner, but if oman ketch him meck him chifin.	- Refers to the feet that woman's finger are nimbler than man's own.	
3) Dame no grow like grass. (see Wrek a Success.	- Prosperity is not easily attained.	
4) Wolmerow no got test' but him can tear dead meat.	- Some people have hidden ability. (b) Dont judge by appearances.	
5) Ickle bit a axe can cut dung big tree.	- Dont judge by appearances.	
6) Ickle bit a dog-flea meck big man jump.	- Small things can have serious effect	
7) Ickle bit a crab hole, can bruck horse foot.	- Small things can have serious effect.	
8) Keep sensey foul fe pick obeh.	- Everything has its use.	
9) Learn fe dance a yard, before yuh go abroad.	- Make certain of your ability before you start to shot off.	
10) Ickle bush sometimes grow better dan big tree.	- Small beginnings are not to be dispised.	
Eckle billy goat got beard, but big bull no got none.	- Outward appearance does not always indicate importance.	
Ickle pepper bun big man mout.	- Small deeds can bring serious consequences.	
Ickle bit a water kill fire.	- Little things have worth.	
at no go a war, but him sen' him in.	- The humblest person can be of some use.	
crow no got test' but him can dead meat.	- Dont judge by appearances. (b) Some people hidden ability.	
bul' house, but oman meck de	- Each person has his particular talent.	
e good, better dan big wage.	- Ability serves pne better than money along	

Appendix 2

The story of the discovery of Louise Bennett's Proverb Manuscript

From the start of my research it was the observations from various scholars, which appeared to be based on hearsay, that first started me on my own explorations to find Louise Bennett's personal collection of proverbs; this was to become a two-and-a-half-year process.

Professor Mervyn Morris, for example, writes in his article 'Louise Bennett in Print' that 'she (Bennett) has a personal collection of more than 700 Jamaican proverbs and is adept at citing the one appropriate to the particular moment' (Morris, 1982). On meeting Morris in 2014 (at the start of my PhD) I asked him but he told me that he did not know where this collection was.

During my initial research into Bennett for my PhD I searched in the notebooks in the McMaster Digital Archives. In these notebooks, catalogued under 'other contents', I found pages on Louise Bennett by Mary Jane Hewitt, divided into separate sections.⁹ Mary Jane Hewitt was researching for her PhD in 1976, with the view to collating information for a book on Louise Bennett. She took this no further. In the section entitled 'Louise Bennett Anthology', under the title 'Proverbs' was a note stating that Bennett 'has a book in manuscript form waiting for Rex Nettleford's introduction'. This led me to the connection with Rex Nettleford and crucially also gives us the date that the manuscript was deemed to be completed by Bennett. This is the start of the trail to the manuscript, which led me to Nettleford's archive and the next stage of my inquiry.¹⁰

After initial unsuccessful approaches to various departments of the Mona library enquiring if Bennett's manuscript could be traced in the Nettleford archives, I asked Morris to enquire for me as he was on site. He did, and he received an acknowledgment

⁹ McMaster Bennett fonds ['Miss Lou Fonds'] Aunty Roachy Seh, 'Other Contents' in notebooks. <https://digitalarchive.mcmaster.ca/islandora/object/macrepo%3A33188>, retrieved on 1 May 2025

¹⁰ McMaster Bennett fonds / Aunty Roachy Seh, 'Other Contents' in notebooks, p.15. <https://digitalarchive.mcmaster.ca/islandora/object/macrepo%3A33188>, retrieved on 1 May 2025

from the curator of the Nettleford archives, Cezley Sampson, that there was a manuscript by Louise Bennett in those archives. Sampson called Morris and explained that, on his death, some of Rex Nettleford's papers had been given to the National Library of Jamaica and some to the University of West Indies (UWI) Mona library. On 4 September 2015, Morris sent me an email confirming that there did appear to be a collection of proverbs belonging to Miss Bennett in the Nettleford archives in the UWI Mona library. Following this, a few weeks later, Morris emailed again, this time telling me that the papers given by the Rex Nettleford trustees to the UWI Mona Library included a folder of proverbs. He stated that, having viewed them for himself, he was confident that this was Louise Bennett's collection. Rex Nettleford had apparently confirmed to Morris in January 2008, that he (Nettleford) had a manuscript but had not intimated which manuscript. This was the confirmation that I needed to continue onto the next stage.

In a well-timed conversation with Professor Alison Donnell, she said that she could connect me with Frances Salmon, who was the Head Librarian of Special Collections at the Mona library. Being located in Scotland and unable to travel to the Mona campus, I contacted Frances Salmon to ask if she would be willing to photocopy the proverb manuscript for me. Subsequently, a chain of emails was established between Frances and myself, where she explained that we would need permission to photocopy the collection from the trustees of the Bennett Coverley Trust in Canada. This was done via a series of emails over several weeks between myself and the trustees, Fabien Coverley and Judge Pamela Appelt (copying in Morris and Salmon). Permission was granted in November 2016 on the condition that the Trust be given due recognition in my PhD for allowing the collection to be photocopied. These terms were all agreed and met, and on 21 March 2017 I received a confirmatory email from Frances informing me that the collection had been photocopied and three sets of copies had been mailed during the first week of March, one to my address in the UK and two to Mr Coverley's address in Canada as requested.

As this account of events shows, this was indeed an inspirational transatlantic collaboration between researcher, archivists,

scholars, librarian and trustees which culminated in the rediscovery of Louise Bennett's valuable and exciting personal collection of proverbs. The process that began with my first question to Mervyn Morris in September 2014, followed by his email confirming that a collection of Bennett's proverbs had been traced to the Nettleford archives in the Mona Library, and culminating in the package containing the photocopied collection arriving at my door in March 2017, is testament to the value of transnational research cooperation and a collective willingness to track down and make available key resources. Each person in the chain contributed to this exciting rediscovery of an important collection and one that, as I found, is truly worthy of scholarly attention.

When I received my copy of the photocopied manuscript, I counted the proverbs listed and discovered that there were more than twice the number suggested by Morris – there are 1881 proverbs listed, including the repetition of certain proverbs under different headings and those written twice on the same page. Despite these repeats, I calculate that there are circa 1800 proverbs in the Proverb Manuscript, which constitutes a much more substantial collection than first believed.

In all, the Proverb Manuscript contains 196 pages of lists of proverbs, in A4 size, with no cover page, no introduction, no binding. Notably Bennett categorises the pages following an alphabetical ordering of 148 moral and thematic headings beginning with Ability, Abuse, Affluence, Age and ending with Work, Worth & Worthless, and Worry. The proverbs under those headings are apparently listed randomly, albeit with an occasional semblance of alphabetic ordering. These are numbered sequentially under each heading, with the section on Caution and Precaution being the longest with 167 proverbs included within it. Although it exists without any introduction or framing work, within its pages are clues as to how Bennett approached the Proverb Manuscript, giving an insight into her editorial choices and processes. If we look at the individual pages of the Proverb Manuscript, we note they are divided into two equal columns, with the proverbs listed in Creole on the left-hand side, and 'translations' in the right-hand column in Standard English. The heading 'Translations' immediately raises the question of this particular linguistic practice and its significance to Bennett's work, suggesting, at

the very least, that Bennett was acting as an interpreter, a bridge between Creole and non-Creole English speakers. On one level, the decision to translate shows that she may have felt a practical need to explain the meanings of the proverb, possibly for didactic purposes. The presence of translations could also simply reflect a desire to preserve the knowledge contained in proverbs for future generations, for non-Creole speaking Jamaicans or suggest a desire to make the proverbs more widely accessible when published. Indeed, it is to be surmised from the entry in Mary Jane Hewitt's note that Bennett did intend this collection to be published and to be accessible to a wider audience, hence the need for a translation. Bennett's intralingual translation practice in the *Proverb Manuscript*, such as her refusal to see Creole as a 'copy' in any way inferior to the language of colonial power and her refusal to erase Creole even as she translates it into Standard English, clearly echo some of the complexities within postcolonial understandings of translation.

Appendix 3
Illustrations from Louise Bennett, Jamaica Dialect Verses
(1942), pp. 30 - 31

6. Me doan believe in obeah mam
 Ah hooden tie to yuh
 Me buy wan ticket mam an dis
 Is all an all ah do.

7. Me wrap it up wid noonoo hush
 Same sweet hazley, yuh know —
 Keiba it eena sardine pan
 An' bury it a-me doas.

8. An' every mawrin jus' before
 Ah put me left-foot dung.
 Ah keas me y're an' stap me breath
 An' cut some unknown tongue.

9. Wen me deh pon haste me cut it short
 An' sey "akarash ni-toe"
 But wen me ha' mo' time me sey
 "Ski bam bam chinka po'".

10. An' dat is all mam, I don't use
 No Wax nor common pin
 For I doan believe in obeah
 But ah still have hopes fe win.

—:—:—

ON A TRAMCAR

1. 'Preadout yuhself deh Liza, wan
 Dress 'oman dah look like sey
 She se' de li space side-a we
 An' want foace harsef een deh.

2. 'Pread out gal she deh come. No mah
 No space een yah at all.
 Wey meek yuh fool soh Liza
 'Pread out yuhself noh gal.

3. Tap, Tap but-a wey de 'Oman
 Dah pick me up fah doah
 Femma mou' noh deh a good place
 Me w' tell yuh aft yuh noah.

4. Yuh pertinent to, noh look pon me
 Like washa pon dutty clothes,
 Because yuh dress yuh 'ink yuh good
 But dat a ongle pose.

5. Gu-weh, me an yuh noh company
 For doah me po' me raise
 Betta din yuh, yuh favah —se
 Yah pickney keiba yuh aise.

Child:

6. Lawd, nash yuh talk too had yuh know
 What ah shame soh tell
 Doesn't mine wat she sey lady
 Har nerves dem not so well.

7. Yes mam, yuh can sidung yuh doesn't
 Trouble me at all
 I canage' dress dung lickle more
 An' yuh is very small.

8. Me Mada she is ignorant
 She nevah goh to school
 Das y yuh se' she talk so had
 An' das y she soh fool.

Mother:

9. Yuh gwan talk to wite 'oman Miss
 Liza gwan play f'gh
 We soon ketch home an' yuh noh know
 Watch o'w de tramp-a fly.

10. Liza, we ketch, gal yuh noh 'ear?
 Come awn before ah flame
 Right out fore all de people dem
 An' bax yuh tili yuh shame.

11. Nex' time ah naw teck yuh pon tramp
 Fe en' all a de fus
 A gwine poke yuh een a corner
 Pon de back seat a one bus.

—:—:—

COUSIN JOE

1. Pupa me go a Kingston an
 Me meet up Cousin Joe
 An' ah start fe awell wid proudness
 From me head to me big toe
 Far not anasta man in tung
 Is high like Cousin Joe.

2. Who him 'igh like? me noh noa
 King noh 'igh like Cousin Joe
 Sajan Maja? Pupa cho.
 Govanna? Inspector? poh!
 Wey yuh sey Prime Ministah?
 Higha pupai higha sah!

31

*Appendix 4**Illustration from Louise Bennett, Jamaica Dialect Verses (1942), p. 35*

PROVERBS

1. "Wen ashes cowl dawg sleep in dey",
Far sence Ma dead yuh se,
All kine a old black nayga start
Teck libaty wid me.
2. Me noh wrap-up wid dem, for I
Pick an' choose me company.
Ma always tell me sey — "Yuh sleep
Wid dawg yuh ketch him flea."
3. Me know plenty a dem noh like me,
An' doah de time soh hard,
Me kip fur fram dem far — "cockroach
Noh biniz a fowl yard".
4. Ah teck-time gwahn me ways an' doan
Fast eena dem affair.
Me tell dem mawnin far-howdy
An' tenky bruck noh square.
5. Sometime me goa parson yard
Sidung lickle an' chat.
"Ef yuh no goa man fira-side, yuh noh know
'Ow much fiastick bwile him pat."
6. Sayka dat as lickle news get 'bout,
Dem call me po' gal name,
Me bear it, far doah — all fish nyam man,
Dah shark wan wet de blame.
7. But when me go look fe parson,
Me ongle talk 'bout me soul,
Far Ma use fe tell me — "Sweet mout' fly
Follow caffin go-a hole."
8. Das y ah miss me Muma yaw,
Ef she was a live today,
All dem libaty couldn' teck wid me
Dem couldna sey me sey.
9. She was me shiel' an' me buckla,
She was me rod an' staff.
But — back noh know wey ole shut do fe i'
Soh tell ole shut tear aff.

Appendix 5
Justice, 3

<u>PROVERBS</u>	<u>JUSTICE</u>	<u>TRANSLATIONS</u>
1) De stick weh neat de black monkey, wi beat de white.	- No one is secure from justice.	
2) Slave driber fum him wife fuss.	- Justice favours n no one.	
3) Javkass sey de worl' no lebel.	- Things are not evenly distributed.	
4) Yuh black monkey fe black dog, a change fe change.	- Exchange without profit. (see Chan	

‘Jackass say de worl noh level’; things are not evenly distributed

Appendix 6

Character, 109

CHARACTER cont.	TRANSLATIONS
100 Falls fashin' bruck monkey neck.	- Those who ape their betters often hurt themselves.
101 Talk fe mutton, better dan siding fe mutton.	- It is better to look for a thing, than wait for it to come to you.
102 Hog run fe him life, but dog run fe him character.	- Every one has a different motivation for what they do.
103 Him face fava foo-foo.	- An expression of derision.
104 Non gree fe hatch duck egg fe him, but him no gree fe teck duck pickney fe him.	- One can only help another according to his ability.
105 Hallow bourdy meck nose noise.	- Those who boast a lot are usually ineffective. (see Boastfulness)
106 Hog sey if him no ben' fe grunt him belly woulda pop.	- (a) Everything has its use. (grunting keeps the hog from eating too fast.) (b) Also applies to one who talk to ease his conscience.
107 Hungry sweeten bean, belly full meck pitate got skin.	- Those in need are not choosy, those with plenty are.
108 Litty water kill fire.	- Small things have their uses.
109 Jackass sey de worl noh level. ^{now} JL 84	- (a) <u>Things one does not get a fair deal</u> (b) <u>Refers to one who makes excuse for his own actions.</u>
110 Yuh scarcer dan how ratton mango scarce- roun christmas time.	- Refers to one who seldom visits friends and relations.
111 Me come fe drink, no fe count cow.	- Refers to one who minds his own business.
112 Monkey dah hide, but him tail fall dung a door.	- It is difficult to hide our faults. (see Weakness)

'Jackass say de worl noh level' (a) one does not get a fair deal (b) refers to one who makes excuse for his own actions

It is interesting to see in the listing of this proverb under the heading of Character that Louise Bennett adds a second interpretation in her own handwriting. This shows that the manuscript was a work in progress to which she was always adding new meanings.

<https://doi.org/10.29162/pv.42.1.1039>

Original scientific paper

Received on 31 January 2025

Accepted for publication on 6 April 2025

MAWONTHING NG

“WHAT FATWOOD DECAYS, WHAT WORD DECAYS”: TOWARDS A TANGKHUL PAREMIOLOGICAL-MINIMUM

Abstract: This paper examines the data drawn from a survey conducted in 2020 among Tangkhul diasporic students in Shillong, Meghalaya, regarding their familiarity with and use of some traditional proverbs and proverbial phrases. This is in response to the growing concern in the community regarding the cultural competence of the younger generation. Given their status as repositories of ancestral wisdom, proverbial usage in contemporary communication must have very specific modes of operation. The aim of this study is, therefore, twofold: firstly, to gauge the proverbial literacy of younger Tangkhul diasporic speakers and to try to understand the contemporary currency of Tangkhul fixed expressions among a globalised youth. The proverbial literacy of 129 college-educated urban Tangkhul youth aged between 19 and 33 years was tested using snowball sampling to determine the contemporary relevance of these proverbs among the young diaspora. While the small sample size inhibits the establishment of a paremiological minimum, the findings are useful for the understanding of cultural continuities and shifts among the Tangkhul Naga, especially given the UNESCO status of the language as endangered. The findings show that although over 50 percent of speakers have low proverbial literacy, a significant number do possess active knowledge. These insights contribute not only towards establishing a paremiological minimum for Tangkhul, but also potentially address questions of cultural influence, diasporic identities, and the ability of fixed expressions to survive even in the absence of current cultural referents.

Keywords: Tangkhul proverbs, proverbial phrases, proverbial literacy, paremiological minimum, young native speakers

1. *Introduction*

The Tangkhul is a Naga tribal ethnic group primarily settled in the Ukhrul and Kamjong Districts of Manipur, India, and in the Somra tract hills of Myanmar. They speak the Tangkhul language,¹ which belongs to the Tibeto-Burman family, although its exact linguistic classification is debated (Mortensen and Miller 2013: 1). Its population, as per the 2011 Indian census of Ukhrul district, is around 183,998, settled in over 200 villages, each having its own dialect, mutually incomprehensible with Tangkhul.² Tangkhuls are generally multilingual, speaking Tangkhul, their village dialect, Manipuri, and often English and Hindi. The Tangkhul language uses the English alphabet with two additional letters (Ā and A) and is employed in official proceedings and education. Despite its use, Tangkhul is categorised as ‘endangered’ by the UNESCO WAL. In Walter Ong’s terms, Tangkhul may be considered a “residual oral” culture (2002).

Among the Tangkhuls, proverbs traditionally have served various communicative functions and can be regarded as one of the most frequently utilised oral genres in daily interactions, but there is increasing concern among the community regarding the cultural competence of the younger generation. Adopting a modern way of life has had a double impact on the community. While global modernity has been enthusiastically embraced by some native speakers, especially among the youth (rural or urban diasporic), a counter influence has been a recent call for cultural preservation as part of maintaining ethnic identity (for example, in administrative decisions at the village and state level, through the printing of collections of oral texts and writing textbooks, and on various social media platforms). Tangkhul proverbs do not reflect modern life but are rich resources for reconstructing the social and cultural history of the people. It may be argued

¹ Tangkhul, based on the Hunphun dialect, was standardised by William Pettigrew, a British missionary who played a significant role in the introduction of Christianity to the region toward the end of the 19th century. (See Pettigrew 2023).

² See <https://censusindia.gov.in/nada/index.php/catalog/858>, retrieved on 31 January 2025. For district-wise population distribution in Manipur, see data available at <https://censusindia.gov.in/nada/index.php/catalog/43013>, retrieved on 31 January 2025. For total native speakers in India, see Table C-16 data available at <https://censusindia.gov.in/nada/index.php/catalog/10191>, retrieved on 31 January 2025.

that rhetorical effectiveness and contextual convenience contribute to their dynamism and popularity as an oral genre. Moreover, Tangkhul is a tonal language, and therefore, its very orality and phonic properties add sophistication and melody to the proverbs. Given their status as ancestral wisdom within the community, proverbial usage in contemporary communications must thus have very specific modes of operation. Distinguished by their unique style and structure, Tangkhul proverbs differ from everyday language, enhancing the versatility and impact of quotidian communication. This paper reports the findings of a preliminary empirical study towards the establishment of a paremiological minimum for Tangkhul. Through this process, it investigates the level of familiarity that young Tangkhul speakers have with these old proverbs and proverbial phrases, using the notion of cultural literacy to frame the inquiry, thereby contributing to the larger understanding of the status of the language for its multilingual speakers, the role and currency of its traditional proverbs on contemporary (diasporic) living, and its risk of future endangerment.

2. Cultural Literacy and the Paremiological Minimum

Individuals within any cultural context possess a set of culture-specific words, expressions, and verbal arts that enable effective communication with native-like competence. In 1987, E. D. Hirsch coined the influential term “cultural literacy”, referring to the comprehension of shared cultural information, which is seen as crucially facilitating fluent communication within a particular community and contributing to cultural identity formation. Hirsch’s book includes an Appendix featuring a list of 5,000 items encompassing facts, phrases, dates, famous people, ideas, events, literature, science, and concepts that he deems essential for every literate American to know in order for them to be considered American at all. As he eloquently puts it, in order to “grasp the words on a page, we have to know a lot of information that isn’t set down on the page” (Hirsch 1988: 3). Hirsch asserts that cultural literacy goes beyond mere memorisation of words: it entails understanding the usage contexts and cultural nuances associated with them. Cultural competence, therefore, involves shared knowledge that has been relevant and acknowl-

edged within a community for generations. Complementing this work, Hirsch, Kett, and Trifil published *The Dictionary of Cultural Literacy* in 1988, which provides annotations and explanations for various cultural elements, and contains a list of proverbs as well.

More recent work in cognitive psychology also agrees with the assertion that words can acquire meaning only through cultural connotations. As Richard P Honeck notes, language comprehension is a sophisticated cognitive process that moves beyond simply grasping the meanings of words, encompassing both their core, context-free definitions and the manner in which meanings are integrated. Additionally, this process is influenced by various contributing factors such as background assumptions, extensive world knowledge, inferential reasoning, immediate context, and more (1997: 52). Heather A Hass also states that “the capacity to function effectively in a culture requires at least some minimal familiarity with the elements of the shared culture” (2008: 320). Language comprehension is a dynamic process that involves a combination of linguistic, cognitive, and contextual factors.

Proverbs are widely acknowledged as being constitutive of a significant aspect of cultural literacy, contributing to a person’s ability to navigate and engage meaningfully within their cultural milieu (Đurčo 2015: 187). The study of an individual’s proverb knowledge becomes instrumental in gauging their cultural literacy. As Wolfgang Mieder puts it, proverbs “continue to be an effective verbal device, and culturally literate persons, both native and foreign, must have a certain paremiological minimum at their disposal to participate in meaningful oral and written communication” (2015: 312). Scholars have endeavoured to establish this paremiological minimum or proverbial minimum—a fundamental set of proverbs that an average adult from a specific culture is expected to be familiar with (Đurčo 2015: 183)—for various languages. The list of 265 proverbs printed in Hirsch’s abovementioned 1988 dictionary, which are prescriptive as part of the cultural literacy expected from every literate American, is questioned by Mieder since the methodology for creating this list is not explicitly stated and it seems unlikely that Hirsch acquired his proverbs from newspapers (which he considers as arbiters of public language usage and therefore authoritative in terms of

cultural literacy) (2015: 309). Nevertheless, it is agreed that such lists, generated from various methods of sociolinguistic corpora, are essential for establishing and evaluating cultural competence, and scholars have accordingly employed diverse sampling and testing methods to arrive at what Grigorij Permjakov named “the paremiological minimum.”³

The American sociologist William Albig pioneered the use of demographic methods with proverbs in 1931, marking a significant development in the field (Mieder 2015: 299). In his approach, Albig instructed participants to write down all the proverbs they knew within a thirty-minute timeframe. The abovementioned Grigorij L'vovich Permjakov, who introduced the concept of the paremiological minimum (1973), used Russian as the target language. He presented a comprehensive list encompassing proverbs, proverbial expressions, proverbial comparisons, and other fixed phrases to 300 participants, subsequently analysing the data according to certain conditions. Psychologist Stanley S. Marzoff (1974) focused on American proverbs, asking participants to identify and mark the texts they were familiar with (qtd. in Mieder 2015: 297–316). Some experiments provided the initial portion of proverbs, prompting participants to complete the missing parts, although this method had its detractors due to the arbitrariness of compilation in the list. Important questions, that remain unanswered, were: How should the proverbs be chosen, and should the initial or the final part of the proverb be provided? (Čermák 2003: 15, qtd. in Ďurčo, 2015: 184). Wolfgang Mieder conducted empirical research on the English paremiological minimum in 1994, F. Čermák in 2003 on Czech, Doctor Raymond in 2005 on Gujarati proverbs, and Peter Ďurčo in 2015 (who also offered the alternative “paremiological optimum”). Ďurčo’s proposed concept refers to a set of proverbs that are both widely known by speakers and exhibit a high frequency of occurrence in text corpora. Ďurčo convincingly claims that the proverbs most commonly used in everyday speech do

³ It must, however, be noted that recently Peter Ďurčo (2015) has argued that since empirical experiments in the paremiological minimum have been made with proverbs and not other kinds of paremia, a more appropriate term to designate this would be “proverbial minimum.”

not necessarily correspond with those that appear most frequently in published texts and argues for a “correlation between the best-known proverbs by users and their high frequency in text corpora” (186, fn 133), which he refers to as the “paremiological optimum.” Other notable contributions to this field include Ďurčo’s compilation for Slovak (2002), Szpila’s study, which also focuses on Polish (2002), Vyshya’s research on Ukrainian (2008), Čermák’s work on Czech (2003), and Meterc’s investigation into Slovenian (2016), among others.⁴

The common problem that the debate around the paremiological minimum/optimum grapples with, however, is the challenge of determining what should be included in the circulated and/or compiled list and how to assess proverbial literacy. Creating a comprehensive list of proverbs for the paremiological minimum of a language is a complex task, whether from a corpus or empirical data. Equally complex is the evaluation of an individual’s cultural knowledge and the definition of the threshold of cultural literacy attainment. Developing a paremiological minimum requires consideration of the most fundamental and widely recognised proverbs within a specific cultural and linguistic context, but views on how to develop a valid and objective methodology for curating that list differ widely. The challenge arises from the diversity of proverbs, their regional variations, and the subjective nature of what may be deemed essential cultural knowledge. Similarly, assessing proverbial literacy involves gauging the ability to memorise proverbs and understanding their usage, cultural contexts, and nuanced meanings. In this sense, cultural literacy extends beyond rote memorisation to encompass a deeper comprehension of the societal, historical, and practical contexts in which proverbs are employed. The multimodality of the skills required to perform these tasks underscores the multifaceted dimensions of cultural literacy and proverbial knowledge, making

⁴ Other studies are Hungarian (Tóthné Litovkina 1992), English (Grzybek, Chłosta 1995, Fiedler 2020), Croatian (Baur, Chłosta, Grzybek 1996, Matovac, Varga 2016), Lusatian Serbians (Hose 1995), Portuguese (Reis, Baptista 2020), Spanish (Sevilla Muñoz, Díaz 1997), German (Chłosta, Grzybek, Roos 1994, Ďurčo 2006, Steyer 2012), Czech (Schindler 1993), and Polish (Szpila, 2014). I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer of this report for drawing my attention to them. However, I have been unable to access them at the time of writing.

it a complex endeavour to develop a definitive list or ascertain a precise level of cultural literacy for individuals. The following section of the paper describes the methodology used for a pilot study as an initial step toward establishing the Tangkhul paremiological minimum in the future. It is based on the Tangkhul textual corpus, which is still far from complete. Some attempts have been made by the author of this paper to tailor the method to the particular linguistic and demographic context, keeping in mind the problems that the methodological debate briefly touched upon above seeks to address.

3. Problems in Establishing a Tangkhul Paremiological Minimum and Methodology Adopted

As noted earlier, the objective of this study is to assess the enduring popularity of these proverbs and their usage in everyday communication among young Tangkhul speakers. It is important to note that the list of fixed expressions compiled for this purpose is not asserted to be a paremiological minimum applicable to the entire Tangkhul community. Selecting proverbs that may be considered ‘commonly known proverbs’ that any Tangkhul should be familiar with is challenging. Firstly, there are no exhaustive collections and dictionaries of Tangkhul proverbs. Secondly, as Tangkhuls speak different dialects, there is a possibility that they draw from a different repository of proverbs, and pinpointing a specific expression to be considered a ‘commonly known proverb’ that a Tangkhul should know cannot be established without exhaustive documentation, which is yet to be done. There is no comprehensive dictionary or corpus of Tangkhul proverbs available. Thirdly, there is no clear demarcation of proverbs from idioms, maxims, adages, sayings, aphorisms, apophthegms, and other fixed expressions in Tangkhul culture. They are commonly referred to as *chāncham* (proverb), which is used as an umbrella term. Tangkhul paremiographers do not undertake this typology either, being content to compile various genres of fixed expressions under the term proverbs. This definitional ambiguity makes the identification and selection process for inclusion in the list even more complicated. The circulated list is ultimately based on personal judgement and experience as a native speaker along

with findings of field-work among village elders (octogenarians and nonagenarians) which showed that the selected proverbs and proverbial phrases were among the most widely recognised and used by the older generation (Ng 2024).

It is important at this point to acknowledge that native speakers’ intuitive perceptions of what constitutes a proverb may differ from definitions established within global paremiological scholarship. Therefore, in the present study, expressions that speakers identified as proverbs (*chāncham*) were included in the questionnaire, irrespective of whether they conformed to formal scholarly definitions. Although the distinction between proverbs and proverbial phrases was not explicitly presented to respondents during data collection, this report maintains a clear differentiation between the two categories. While no universally accepted definition of the proverb exists, foundational paremiological studies—such as those by Taylor (1931), Mieder (1985), and Norrick (1985)—commonly regard the complete grammatical sentence or autonomous propositional statement as one of the characteristics of the proverb. Although this criterion has considerable limitations, as Norrick (1985: 34) acknowledges, it remains a useful heuristic for distinguishing proverbs from proverbial phrases. This distinction is maintained here to delineate what Mieder terms “true proverbs” (2015: 41) from the proverbial phrases. Following the tentative typology and categorisation criteria proposed in my doctoral study, this report uses the addition of the word *kathā* (“like”) to proverbial phrases as a marker for identifying “true proverbs” in the corpus. This word cannot be added to proverbs according to the Tangkhul language structure, *kachi kathā* (which also means “like”) can be added instead (Ng 2024: 73 ff). Since the list provided to the participants contained both proverbs and proverbial phrases according to this mode of categorisation—despite being collectively identified as “proverbs” by native speakers—it is more accurate and academically appropriate to refer to the study as a pilot work towards establishing a phraseological-paremiological minimum rather than solely a paremiological minimum.⁵

⁵ I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer of this essay for this suggestion.

For the purposes of this study, I adopted Wolfgang Mieder's widely cited definition: "A proverb is a short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorisable form and which is handed down from generation to generation" (1985: 119). Although proverbial phrases may similarly exhibit figurative language and cultural specificities, they generally lack the evaluative dimension, structural autonomy, and didactic function that characterise true proverbs. Proverbs and proverbial phrases that are documented in two or more written collections of proverbs and are also present in the Phalee village dialect are included in the list. The list is far from exhaustive, however, and a proper survey would first require the establishment of a comprehensive collection, which is still in progress at the time of writing.

The participants in the study comprise native Tangkhul speakers of both genders (no individual identified as non-binary) aged between 19 and 33 years and studying in Shillong, the capital of Meghalaya, India. The average age of the participants is 22.2 years. The data was collected in 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic using a snowball sampling method. The choice of location was based on several considerations. There are more than 200 Tangkhul villages, with inhabitants speaking a distinct dialect corresponding to the village name (Ahum 1997: 21). Ideally, data should be collected from each Tangkhul village, with participants from all age groups, educational backgrounds, and occupations. However, this was not feasible, especially during the pandemic. The next best option was to identify a single location in which individuals who speak the language from various villages reside. This was found in Shillong, Meghalaya, which has a concentration of Tangkhul students from several different villages living and studying there. Although this reduces the risk of biased sampling, it does not ensure proper or even representation of participants from every village. Moreover, the concentration of students in higher education institutions pursuing undergraduate or postgraduate studies limits the population attributes along the lines of age and social background, thereby reducing the possibility of identifying a reliable minimum.

One hundred twenty-nine participants from different parts of the Ukhrul and Kamjong districts of Manipur participated

in this study. Out of these participants, 70 are female, and 59 are male. No attempt has been made to assess and interpret the collected data based on age, socio-economic status, gender, or educational qualification, which are factors that are likely to affect proverb familiarity. The primary goal of this research was to determine whether the English-educated younger generations are still familiar with the proverbs and proverbial phrases of the older generations; therefore, the other factors were ignored for the moment in this study.

The methodology was drawn from Peter Ďurčo’s questionnaire model discussed in “Empirical Research and Paremiological Minimum” (2014). Ďurčo evaluates the level of familiarity on five scales. Following his familiarity rating structure, with slight modifications, the participants were provided with a list of thirty-six proverbs and twenty-three proverbial phrases (see Appendix) with five options to choose from according to their level of knowledge about the proverb. The first four are as follows:

- (i) Never heard it before,
- (ii) Heard it before but do not know the meaning,
- (iii) Heard it before, know the meaning but never use it, and
- (iv) Heard it before, know the meaning and use it.

Since some proverbs in the list can have variants in standard Tangkhul as well as other village dialects, a fifth column was also provided for participants to supply variants or versions. This modification allows participants to choose from the five options, thereby making it possible not only to observe the different levels of familiarity for each proverb/saying but also to identify variants and thus to serve an additional paremiographical function in the future.

The compiled list is drawn from a larger corpus of approximately 1,000 proverbs and proverbial phrases, which were curated from five scanty collections of Tangkhul proverbs: S Kanrei’s *Tangkhul Chānjam (Tangkhul Proverbs)* (1978), L. K. Sira’s *Haowui Kharar Chānsam (Proverbs)* (1991), Peter Pheirei’s *Hao Chāncham (Hao Proverbs)* (2018), Stephen Angkang’s *Ancient Sayings of Hao and Modern Proverbs* (No date), and K John’s *Awo-Ayi Ngashan (Culture, Custom, Lasem)* (No date). S

Arokianathan also lists 163 proverbs in *Tangkhul Folk Literature* (1982), and the modern edition of William Pettigrew's *Tangkhul Dictionary* (2023) includes 28 proverbs. Somi Kasomwoshi's *Hao Tangkhul Chanjam* (2022) was not published during the time of the survey. Nevertheless, his collection of proverbs is also compared and cited in this report. The lists of proverbs in Arokianathan, and Pettigrew are also cited. Notably, 43 out of the 59 items provided in the questionnaire are included in higher secondary-level Tangkhul textbooks, which also probably draw from these collections.

For the purposes of discussion in this paper, asterisk marks have been added to each proverb and proverbial phrase to indicate the number of printed volumes in which they appear, ranging from * to * as a shorthand. Although these marks were not included in the original questionnaire, they have been added here in the discussion to provide a visual reference regarding the frequency of their inclusion across multiple anthologies and, thus, their frequency of occurrence within the corpus. Source titles are not mentioned by name in the text for readability. This information is provided in the Appendix, which lists by name the sources in which every proverb or proverbial phrase appears.

4. Findings and Interpretation

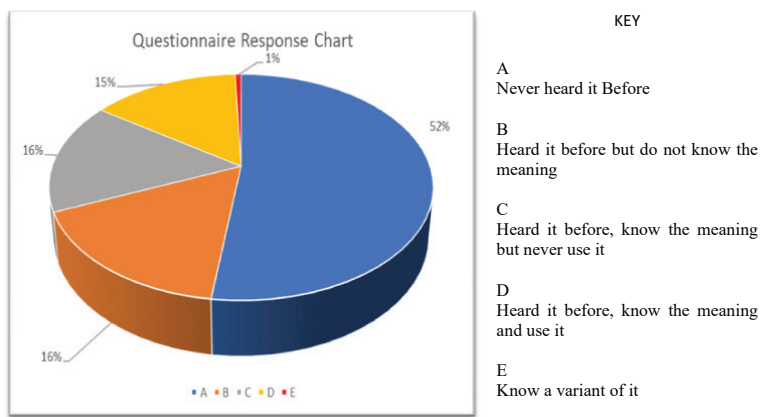


Figure 1. Visual Representation of Respondent Data

The above pie chart represents only the mean value. The findings show that, on average, 52% of the college students surveyed had never encountered these commonly used proverbs and proverbial phrases before (Fig. 1). This indicates a potential gap in exposure to traditional or common proverbs and proverbial phrases within this demographic, providing a certain degree of validation to the recent concerns being voiced within the community regarding cultural heritage preservation. Nevertheless, a not insignificant portion of students (16%) do recognise these proverbs, although they do not understand their meaning. This deficiency in the comprehension or interpretation of these fixed expressions, despite some degree of exposure, possibly points to the changes in everyday language use of bilingual speakers, in whose pragmatic use scenarios (especially in a multicultural milieu), English phrases and idioms may be more commonly employed. Another 16% of students understand the meanings of these proverbs but do not actively use them in their own language or conversations. This again suggests that while they recognise the sayings as part of the cultural heritage, they may not find them easily applicable to their daily lives. A marginally smaller but still significant portion of students (15%) are both familiar with the meanings of these proverbs and proverbial phrases and incorporate them into their own speech. The fact that at least some students do find value in these traditional sayings and manage to actively use them in everyday interactions is also significant in that they offer the potential for more in-depth study to isolate factors that keep these sayings living and current, which may then be implemented for strengthening cultural literacy in the future. Some students claim that they know variants of these proverbs, but while variations or alternative versions may exist, they are not widely recognised among this demographic.

The least known proverb is (11) *Ngawurla chungnāakha ālāngkham mashungmana***** lit. “When bamboo rats are many, they neglect to close the entrance,” although it appears in several collections. 121 participants (93.7%) have not heard this proverb before. Seven participants have heard it but do not know the meaning, six have heard it and know the meaning but never used it, and four people know the meaning and use it. The second least familiar proverb is (41) *Marekla maleka, yārekla ngale-*

*ka, yāningla nganingtāya**** lit. “Work hard, you’ll eat; show pride, you’ll bow; act arrogantly, you’ll fall.” 119 participants (92.2%) have never heard of it before. (2) *Ava thila ashāmali kachap kathā**** lit. “like weeping for her/his lover at her/his mother’s death” and (36) *Siluināo thangkha chānga, wungnao⁶ thangkha chānga**** lit. “Sometimes a calf is scrawny, sometimes *wungnao* is scrawny” has a low level of familiarity as well. 117 participants heard them for the first time; that is, only 12 participants are familiar with these expressions; only two use the latter, but no one has ever used the former one. Thus, although the least known proverb appears in half the collections (see asterisk notations as explained above), the others appear in only three collections each and is neither frequent in the corpus nor popular amongst these speakers.

The top fifteen least familiar proverbs were unknown to more than 100 participants each. Those who have heard the proverbs do not use them. (49) *Shanāle—Pharon sanglu; Sāng-nāle—Katat haolu****** lit. “It’s too short—Join more; It’s too long—Cut off” has the highest number of users among the least familiar proverbs, with fifteen participants. The proverb (54) *Chihānla ngamāna**** lit. “Hopeful expectation becomes a vain expectation” has ten users, whereas the remaining least familiar proverbs have fewer than ten users. Cultural relevance may not be a factor for this unfamiliarity, since none of them refer to specific cultural concepts or practices that may have grown obsolete with changing lifestyles. This data indicates that these traditional fixed expressions may be in immediate danger of extinction, but this apprehension would need to be correlated with data from a larger and different demographic to establish this further.

The most commonly used expression is the proverbial phrase (6) *Hangkornāli tarā heikharor kathā***** lit. “like pouring water over yam leaves”, with 104 participants (80.6%) using it. Only five participants claim that they have never heard it before. Two participants say they have heard it before but do not know the meaning, and sixteen have heard it and know the meaning

⁶ *Wungnao* is a village chief or clan chief. This proverb talks about resilience and eventual prosperity. Just as a weak calf matures into a powerful bull, a nobleman may face poverty but is destined to regain wealth and status.

but never use it. Two participants claim to know a variant of it but do not supply the variant. This proverbial phrase has a similar meaning to the English idiom “water off a duck’s back”. The second most used are the proverbial phrases (25) *Pawung mashuithei kahon kathā****** lit. “like an owl waiting for *mashuithei*”⁷ and the proverb (12) *Khamathā sāsi chila favā on****** lit. “Mending to make it better turns into a dog”, with 74 participants claiming to use each. The other 23 participants have heard and know the meaning but never used the phrase (25) *Pawung mashuithei kahon kathā*, the other eight participants have heard it but do not know the meaning, and 24 participants have never heard it before. 33 participants have heard proverb (12) *Khamathā sāsi chila favā on* and know the meaning but never use it, and the other ten participants have heard it before but do not know the meaning. This proverb has a similar meaning to the Greek proverb “Excess mars perfection”. Yam leaves, owls, and dogs are not specific to any particular lifestyle or culture, although a negative attitude towards some kinds of dogs may be a characteristic of Tangkhul (Ng 2024). Furthermore, such fixed expressions might have gained popularity precisely because they are versatile and applicable to a wide range of contemporary life situations.

The existing literature on proverb literacy acknowledges the generational factor in proverb recognition and usage. As Raymond puts it, “[w]ithin a synchronic time frame, different generations have different proverb “registers” just as they admit different language “registers”” (2005: 52). Malmgren also points out that “since cultural practices change over time, the possible proverbs also change” (2007: 232). The proverbs in the list might have lost their popularity among college students as they have little significance in their daily lives. The proverbs and proverbial phrases that were on the list were from the collections of proverbs collected a few decades ago and were not widely circulated. Therefore, those proverbs and the proverbial phrases

⁷ The *mashuithei* (needlewood fruit) hardens as it ripens, rendering it inedible for owls that wait in vain. This proverbial expression describes a situation where someone waits endlessly for something unlikely to occur. Its meaning is comparable to the theme of futile waiting depicted in Samuel Beckett’s play *Waiting for Godot*.

that have a cultural allusion to that era or before might have lost their currency among the younger generation.

However, this does not address the question of non-recognition of proverbs included in the school curriculum. Tangkhul is taught as one of the third-language subjects in the Manipur Board of Secondary Education curriculum up to Class VIII. From Class IX to Class XII, it is offered as an optional subject for students who choose not to study Alternative English. Some of the proverbs and proverbial phrases (43 of them) in the questionnaire are also in the syllabus, but surprisingly, some have a low familiarity level among the participants. (57) *Kathishila khāngkakhei āzang kahai kathā****** lit. “Send to report someone’s dead; joins in festivities” has a very low level of familiarity. 104 participants (80.6%) said they had never heard it before. Similarly, (52) *Pheipāng yā, khamor yā; pheipāng theng, khamor theng**** lit. “Wet limbs, wet mouth; dry limbs, dry mouth” also has a low familiarity among respondents. 61 participants, i.e. 47.2 %, encountered it for the first time in the questionnaire. Similarly, (48) *Zātrom makaphung zātpar shimei***** lit. “One who doesn’t bring tiffin moves his hand faster” also has a low familiarity. 44.6% of the respondents claim that they have never heard of it before, and only eleven participants have used it.

As noted above, the proverbial phrase (6) *Hangkornāli tarq heikharor kathā* ***** lit. “like pouring water over yam leaves” is the most familiar and used of the listed expressions. (23) *Parki kachina shup, shupki kachina par******, lit. “Those aiming for a handful get a pinch, and those aiming for a pinch get a handful” (27) *Rārāli har kachiphun kathā****** lit. “like sending chicken through a civet cat”, (50) *Faphei mei kachui kathā****** lit. “like a dog’s feet on fire”, (51) *Nāyong shimsak kathā* ***** lit. “like the way monkeys build a house” (probably a truncated version of *Nāyong shimsak zurli ngathāna* lit. “Monkey’s house gets scattered in rainy season”) and (4) *Fāna paila harna khangayā kathā****** lit. “like a dog defecates and a hen scratches it” have a high level of familiarity and a higher level of usage than the other proverbs and proverbial phrases. The data indicates that respondents demonstrate a greater familiarity with proverbial phrases compared to proverbs, possibly because they are quicker

and more elastic and thus handier to incorporate within everyday discourse.

Unsurprisingly, proverbs and proverbial phrases that contain archaic words have lower familiarity levels. (16) *Kh̄rei zatla kh̄rāna kakapā****** (105/81.39%)⁸ lit. “like small cats [hyena, leopard etc.] that mimic the roar of big cats when there’s a rumour of them nearby”, (2) *Āvq thila ashāmali chapkazat kathā**** (117/ 90.69%) lit. “like weeping for her/his lover at her/his mother’s death”, (57) *Kathishila khāngkakhei āzangkahai kathā****** (104/80.62%) lit. “Send to report someone’s dead; joins in festivities” contain some archaic words like *kakapā* (to cry), *ashāma* (lover), *kathikashi* (to send the news of death), and *khāngkakhei* (merrymaking). Likewise, proverbs and proverbial phrases that reference unknown sources also tend to have low familiarity. For instance, in the proverb (31) *Shapeilāna Ramshilāli hāngkhamachin*****, lit. “like Shapeilā admonishes Ramshilā”, the proper names *Shapeilā* and *Ramshilā* have unclear sources of origin. They are recognised as the names of two immoral women but have no clear references in folk narratives.

5. Towards a Tangkhul Paremiological Optimum

This survey faces several challenges, some of which have been outlined above but may be more fully discussed here. Firstly, there is a lack of prior research on the Tangkhul proverbs, leading to the compilation of a somewhat ‘unscientific’ list based on limited proverb collections presumed to represent the ‘most commonly used proverbs and proverbial phrases’ of the older generation. Secondly, the respondents are exclusively college students. For a more comprehensive understanding, a broader demographic study considering age, education, and gender across the entire Tangkhul population would be more insightful.

⁸ Never heard it before.

(16) Describes individuals who commit wrongdoing under the name of a powerful person, causing blame to fall on the influential figure.

(2) Refers to a person acting inappropriately or failing to adapt to a given situation.

(57) Denotes someone unreliable in serious matters.

(31) Highlights the hypocrisy of an immoral individual advising another immoral person.

Thirdly, this model does not make clear which level should be used as a standard level to categorise an individual as proverbially literate.

Despite its limitations, however, this study clearly shows that more than half of the proverbs in the questionnaire cannot be called the most commonly known proverbs and proverbial phrases, as they have never been heard by more than half of the participants. If currency is used as a prerequisite to proverbiality, most of the fixed expressions in the list cannot be called proverbial because they are not familiar enough today to meet the 'currency' criterion necessary to characterise them as proverbs in the first place. The level of proverb usage is also surprisingly low among the young Tangkhul speakers. This indicates that the students have low paremiological literacy and that these proverbs will probably soon fall out of use and only exist in written collections. So far, there are no proverb dictionaries in the language, let alone in the many dialects that constitute the Tangkhul identity, and some of the collections of existing proverbs do not provide their meaning and usage; therefore, some of the proverbs will arguably soon be out of currency.

It is observed that proverbs included in the school curriculum tend to be more familiar to students. Nevertheless, some proverbs taught in school have low familiarity, possibly due to the fact that not all students may have received their secondary education from the Manipur State Board. Students coming from one of the centralised national boards of Indian education would not have encountered these textbooks, while still growing up in the state of Manipur. Unfortunately, in this present survey, without information on students' educational histories, it is difficult to draw a definitive conclusion from the data collected. Extensions of this study will seek to remedy this gap and be attentive to not only socio-economic background, age, and gender but also education.

This study also revealed that it would be more beneficial if participants were given the option to write down the proverbs they know beyond those listed in the questionnaire. This approach could give clearer information on the proverbial knowledge of the young Tangkhul speakers. Additionally, there is uncertainty regarding which of the four rating scales should be

regarded as the standard for measuring familiarity levels and determining whether the speaker is paremiologically literate.

The findings highlight varying levels of familiarity and usage of commonly used proverbs and proverbial phrases among college students, with a majority having little to no exposure to them. This could reflect shifting cultural norms or a lack of emphasis on traditional wisdom in modern education. In short, the popularity of these proverbs and proverbial phrases has greatly declined among the constantly connected modern youth.

The Tangkhul community, which has only recently transitioned to a written culture, requires more time and the contributions of individuals and organisations to study its own history, culture, and material practices, that are constitutive of community identity. Consequently, establishing a paremiological optimum—representing the ideal corpus widely recognised by the speakers and exhibiting a high frequency of occurrence in text corpora—is particularly complex. However, while the threat of obsolescence remains present, efforts are also underway to preserve, record, document, and in some cases revive the cultural heritage. While studies such as the present one, which tries to develop a modality for arriving at the usage frequency of fixed expressions within written corpora, face significant challenges, they also prepare the field for further inquiry. Thus, a preliminary exploratory investigation into the paremiological minimum, focusing on the core set of proverbs and proverbial phrases recognised and employed by specific demographic groups, may prove valuable. This essay thus tries to show how such limited work may nevertheless lay the groundwork for the eventual development of a standardised set of Tangkhul proverbs, which would serve as a critical resource for fostering culturally informed, effective, and pleasurable communication within the community. Furthermore, this standardised corpus could ultimately facilitate the establishment of a paremiological optimum, thereby contributing to the preservation and promotion of the Tangkhul linguistic and cultural heritage.

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Appendix

1. *Porhumna ngalei zai, kaphung mintā akha khi zāsito. Khayāmli ngayili yongsanglaka khi mangsito kachi* (Sira, Kanrei, Kasomwoshi, Pettigrew) [Textbook]
lit. “During landslide, the toad says, “What shall I eat?”, while jumping into a pond it says, “What shall I drink?””
2. *Āvā thila ashāmali kachap kathā* (Kanrei, Sira, Kasomwoshi) [Textbook]
lit. “Like weeping for her/his lover at her/his mother’s death”
3. *Fāna maloshoklaka zāsangluishitta* (John, Angkang, Kasomwoshi)
lit. “Dog vomits and eats it again”
4. *Fāna paila harna khangayā kathā* (Sira, Kanrei, Arokianathan, Kasomwoshi, Pettigrew) [Textbook]
lit. “Like dog defecates and chicken scratches it”
5. *Fāna sāchao shingkhur rikkh kakahao kathā* (Kanrei, Sira, Arokianathan, Kasomwoshi, Pettigrew) [Textbook]
lit. “Like a dog yearning to eat *sāchao* as big as *shingkhur*⁹”
6. *Hangkornāli tara heikharor kathā* (Sira, Arokianathan, Pheirei, Kasomwoshi, Angkang) [Textbook]
lit. “Like pouring water over yam leaves”
7. *Hana hannui shaiphāmei, tuiva ārartui shimei* (Sira, John, Arokianathan, Kasomwoshi, Angkang)
lit. “Young greens are tastier; words of the elders are sweeter”
8. *Harvā eina rarā lā khangnui kathā* (Sira, Kanrei, Kasomwoshi) [Textbook]
lit. “Like rooster and civet cats singing”
9. *Hokna ot murmur sāla fāna ina sāya kachi* (Angkang, Sira, John, Pheirei, Arokianathan, Kanrei, Kasomwoshi) [Textbook]
lit. “Pig did the hard work, dog says, “I did it””
10. *Hongāna hongā tung, kaopona kaopo tung* (Sira, Angkang, Kasomwoshi) [Textbook]

⁹ *Sāchao* is a traditional snack made of glutinous rice, perilla seeds, chilli and salt. *Shingkhur* is a mortar for pounding paddy. It means wishing for more than what one is capable of achieving.

- lit. *Hongā* produces *hongā*, *kaopo* produces *kaopo*¹⁰
11. *Ngawurla chungnāakha alāngkham mashungmana* (Pheirei, Sira, Kasomwoshi, Pettigrew) [Textbook]
lit. “When bamboo rats are many, they neglect to close the entrance”
 12. *Kamathā sāsichila fāvā on* (Kanrei, Sira, John, Arokianathan, Angkang, Pettigrew) [Textbook]
lit. “Mending to make it better turns into a dog”
 13. *Kashong meirong khāmongli zokkakhui kathā* (Kanrei, Arokianathan, Pheirei, Kasomwoshi) [textbook]
lit. “Like getting into trouble at the threshold”
 14. *Huirea chithang thāk, thākra chithang hui* (Sira, Kasomwoshi, Kanrei, Pettigrew)
lit. “Early when anticipated to be late; late when anticipated to be early”
 15. *Khamachinali kachina, sotkhamasaowali kaso* (Kanrei, Sira, Arokianathan, Kasomwoshi, Angkang, Pheirei) [Textbook]
lit. “Detests the adviser, applauds the flatterer”
 16. *Khareī zatla kharāna kakapā kathā* (Kanrei, Sira, Arokianathan, Angkang, Pheirei, Kasomwoshi, Pettigrew) [Textbook]
lit. “like small cats [hyena, leopard etc.] that mimic the roar of big cats when there’s a rumour of them nearby”
 17. *Maremrazai tara kakhon makazang kathā* (Kanrei, Sira, Kasomwoshi) [Textbook]
lit. “Like *Maremrazai*¹¹ not taking part in the construction of a well”
 18. *Masi maphanla thingnā manganukmana* (John, Arokianathan, Pheirei, Kasomwoshi)
lit. “No leaves quiver without wind”
 19. *Mi kathi, kashong kaphung ngalang machingmana* (Sira, John, Kasomwoshi)
lit. “There’s no schedule for death and for getting involved in crime”
 20. *Rachangle—Thei nguishailu; Ritle—Ngalung khāngsanglu* Kanrei, Sira, Pheirei, Kasomwoshi, Arokianathan, John, Angkang, Pettigrew) [Textbook]
lit. “(I’m) thirsty— Eat roasted nuts. It’s heavy— Add rocks”

¹⁰ *Hongā* and *kaopo* are varieties of the same plant species, *lagenaria siceraria*. They have different sizes and shapes. It is similar to the English proverb “You can’t get figs from thistles.”

¹¹ a type of bird (unidentified). This phrase originates from a Tangkhul folktale in which the bird *Maremrazai* does not participate in the communal well-boring activity. Consequently, an unsociable individual is metaphorically referred to as *Maremrazai*.

21. *Ngalengakha shilengthā, ngayurakha ngawurthā, ngayangakha ngayangthā* (Kanrei, Sira, Arokianathan, Kasomwoshi, Pettigrew) [Textbook]
lit. “Like a colony of rock bees when united, like a mischief of bamboo rats when together, like a sieve when sieved”
22. *Seikahomali shaoki kachili seikahomana ākhavāli kashao kathā* (Sira, Kasomwoshi, Pettigrew)
“Like the cow-keeper who was going to be punished by the cattle owner, and who punishes the owner instead” (trans. Pettigrew)
23. *Parki kachina shup, shupki kachina par* (Kanrei, Sira, Arokianathan, Pheirei, Kasomwoshi, Pettigrew) [Textbook]
lit. “Those aiming for a handful get a pinch, and those aiming for a pinch get a handful”
24. *Phayomakha shātyoma, chipata ngapata* (Kanrei, Sira, Kasomwoshi, Pettigrew) [Textbook]
lit. “Oppressing leads to misfortune, insulting results in falling short”
25. *Pawung mashuithei kahon kathā* (Angkang, John, Arokianathan, Sira, Kanrei, Pheirei, Kasomwoshi, Pettigrew) [Textbook]
lit. “Like an owl waiting for *mashuithei*”
26. *Rāmshi khumshili machinalu, yorlāshili machinalu* (Angkang, Sira, Arokianathan, Kasomwoshi) [Textbook]
lit. “Don’t despise old huts and old *khum*; don’t despise *yorlā*¹²”
27. *Rārāli har kachiphun kathā* (Kanrei, Sira Pheirei, Pheirei, Arogianathan, Kasomwoshi) [Textbook]
lit. “Like sending chicken through a civet cat”
28. *Rārēi mamakeimana, wungnao khayum tui mamatuimana* (John, Angang, Pheirei)
lit. “Python doesn’t bite, *wungnao* doesn’t insult others”
29. *Sāna sāchonli thi, mina tuimatuili thi* (John, Pheirei, Angkang, Kanrei, Kasomwoshi)
lit. “Animals are killed by their spoors and men by their words”
30. *Sampā kachat kathā* (Sira, Kanrei, Kasomwoshi)
lit. “Like the snapping of a strand of hair”
31. *Shapeilāna Ramshilāli hāngkhamachin kathā* (Sira, Pheirei, Arokianathan, Kasomwoshi) [Textbook]
lit. “Like Shapeilā admonishes Ramshilā”

¹² *Khum* is a traditional rain shield crafted from bamboo and himalayan screw pine. *Yorlā* is a married woman.

32. *Zingsho philāvali āyai hola āmaili shireokatā kathā* (Sira, Kanrei, Kasomwoshi, Pettigrew) [Textbook]
lit. “Like *zingsho philavā* rolling down a slope for calling her *āchon*”¹³
33. *Shiwok khamei khamayut kathā* (Sira, Kanrei, Kasomwoshi, Pettigrew) [Textbook]
lit. “Like grabbing a rat’s tail”
34. *Siluili fana shalaka ākhamei makakhayit kathā* (Sira Kanrei, Kasomwoshi, Pettigrew) [Textbook]
lit. “Like a buffalo not wagging its tail at the dog’s barking”
35. *Fakapai thingtung kāula āzingshong khaishang ngayapa* (Pheirei, Angang, Kasomwoshi) [Textbook]
lit. “One who farts climbs up a tree, but those who sit beneath hit each other’s thigh”
36. *Siluināo thangkha chānga, wungnao thangkha chānga* (Kanrei, Sira, Kasomwoshi) [Textbook]
lit. “Sometimes a calf is scrawny, sometimes *wungnao* is scrawny”
37. *Thari phur shāra* (John, Kasomwoshi, Angkang)
lit. “One shan’t remove boundary stones”
38. *Tharik varhāwui naokhanganao kathā* (Kanrei, Sira, Kasomwoshi, Pettigrew)
lit. “Like a khalij and koklass pheasants rearing their youngs”
39. *Thila arakui mapār* (Angkang, Arokianathan, Kasomwoshi, John)
lit. “Though one dies, one’s bone doesn’t decay”
40. *Thing mashoda mariklo, tui mashoda matuihaipaishina* (John, Angkang)
lit. “Don’t place the firewood upside down, lest you’ll speak upside down”
41. *Marekla maleka, yārekla ngaleka, yāningla nganingtāya* (Sira, Kanrei, Kasomwoshi) [Textbook]
lit. “Work hard, you’ll eat; show pride, you’ll bow; act arrogantly, you’ll fall.”
42. *Thora chithang thai, thaira chithang thoi* (Kanrei, Sira, Kasomwoshi, Arokianathan, Pettigrew) [Textbook]

¹³ The term *zingsho philavā* literally translates to “princess of the east,” while *āchon* denotes “elder sister” and serves as a title specifically reserved for the eldest daughter of a clan or village chief, reflecting her elevated status within the community. Her exaggerated act of rolling down a slope symbolises childish tantrums. The proverb characterises individuals who are difficult to please or perpetually complain despite their privilege. It also refers to those who, inflated by excessive praise, ultimately face downfall.

- lit. “Hungry, when expected to be full; full, when expected to be hungry”
43. *Tui chi lāna, lā chi tuina* (John, Pheirei, Kasomwoshi)
lit. “Word is song; song is word”
44. *Tuirei hāt mirei thi; tuinao hāt minao thi* (Pheirei, John, Kasomwoshi) [Textbook]
lit. “When a big promise is broken, an important person dies; when a small promise is broken, a less important person dies”
45. *Vāhongnao kashāng hanremhan katim sāngmei* (Kanrei, Sira, Kasomwoshi) [Textbook]
lit. “Buckwheat flourishes longer than a poor man’s wealth”
46. *Zaimukna machārongli kapalaka “Meitei leiwuk theitāya” kachi kathā* (Sira, Pheirei, Kasomwoshi) [Textbook]
lit. “Quail perches on a fern and says, ‘I can see the Imphal valley’”
47. *Zātham/hampai kaiakha fana manya* (Kanrei, Sira, Angkang, Arokianathan, Kasomwoshi) [Textbook]
lit. “Dog smiles when the earthen pot breaks”
48. *Zātrom makaphungana zātpar shimei* (John, Arokianathan, Angkang, Kasomwoshi) [Textbook]
lit. “One who doesn’t bring tiffin moves his hand faster”
49. *Shanāle—Pharon sanglu; Sāngnāle—Katat haolu* (Sira, Kanrei, Angkang, Kasomwoshi, Arokianathan)
lit. “It’s too short—Join more; It’s too long—Cut off”
50. *Faphei mei kachui kathā* (Sira, Kanrei, Kasomwoshi, Arokianathan, Pettigrew) [Textbook]
lit. “Like a dog’s feet on fire”
51. *Nāyong shimsak kathā* (Sira, Kanrei, Arokianathan, Kasomwoshi, Pettigrew) [Textbook]
lit. “Like the way monkeys build a house”
52. *Pheipāng yā khamor yā; pheipāng theng khamor theng* (Sira, Kanrei, Kasomwoshi) [Textbook]
lit. “Wet limbs, wet mouth; dry limbs, dry mouth”
53. *Malum thāda chāmkathi* (Sira, Pheirei, Kanrei, Kasomwoshi, Pettigrew) [Textbook]
lit. “rush to death like a moth”
54. *Chihānla ngamāna* (Sira, pheirei, Kasomwoshi)
lit. “Hopeful expectation becomes a vain expectation”
55. *Ningaishida matheimila nao vaikhui* (Angkang, John, Sira, Kanrei, Arokianathan, Kasomwoshi) [Textbook]
lit. “Lying down out of courtesy gets pregnant”

56. *Fa khañāli pai kakā kathā* (Kanrei, Sira, Pheirei, Arokianathan, Kasomwoshi) [Textbook]
lit. “Like a dog with poop on its ear”
57. *Kathishila khāngkakhei āzangkahai kathā* (Sira, Kanrei, Angkang, Kasomwoshi, Pettigrew) [Textbook]
lit. “Send to report someone’s dead; joins in festivities”
58. *Mafathingli paishāra mangareimana* (Kanrei, Sira, Kasomwoshi, Angkang) [Textbook]
lit. “No *paishāra*¹⁴ climbs on *mafathing*”
59. *Paoyi rakhanshai kathā* (Kanrei, Kasomwoshi, Pettigrew) [Textbook]
lit. “Like eating wine dregs at Paoyi¹⁵”

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¹⁴ *Paishāra* is unidentified and *mafathing* is *Phoebe hainesiana*, the state tree of Manipur. The message draws on naturalistic logic: just as a creeper offers no benefit to a mighty tree, a lower-class spouse is considered of little value to their partner and family.

¹⁵ A village now called Pe. It means claiming to know something despite actually being unaware.



<https://doi.org/10.29162/pv.42.1.1042>

Original scientific paper

Received on 31 January 2025

Accepted for publication on 6 April 2025

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IS AN ALBANIAN MAN'S *BESA* HIS BOND? – A PAREMIOLOGICAL DIMENSION OF *BESA*

Abstract: “An Englishman’s word is his bond”. What about the Albanian concept of *besa*? *Besa*, regarded as the holiest word and a precious value in Albanian culture, is reflected in Albanian personal names, legends and ballads, customary laws, and the works of both English and Albanian writers such as Edith Durham and Ismail Kadare. It is also present in museums dedicated to the rescue of Jews during the Holocaust, in cultural and political events, and in media coverage, such as the BBC article “What can Albania teach us about trust?” Considered the cornerstone of the Albanian code of honour in past centuries and a defining virtue of Albanian identity, *besa* has generated a rich corpus of proverbs. This study explores proverbs about *besa* in the Albanian language, as depicted in Albanian written sources, primarily dictionaries such as “Fjalë të urta të popullit shqiptar” (“Wise sayings of Albanian people” by Jorgo Panajoti and Agron Xhagolli, 1983) and “Fjalor i Shqipes së Sotme” (Dictionary of Current Albanian Language, 2002). The aim is to portray the many nuances and attitudes encapsulated by *besa* in these proverbs. The discussion highlights the richness of Albanian proverbs about “trust, troth, the pledged word, honour, the solemn promise and bond”, i.e. *besa*, by examining their content and cultural significance.

Keywords: Albanian proverbs, *besa*, paremiology, promise, value, culture

1. Introduction

In the context of English lexicology instruction at the University of Tirana, students are often asked to provide examples of authentic Albanian proverbs. After mentioning some of the most frequently used proverbs, students are then presented with their English equivalents. This process frequently leads to the emergence of proverbs such as "*The religion of Albania is Albanianism, Besa is stronger than steel, Albanian besa is worth more than gold*". The recurrent appearance of these proverbs highlights the centrality of *besa* in Albanian culture and inspired the present study. *Besa* is roughly translated as 'promise' or 'word of honour'. It is a recurring theme in Albanian culture featuring prominently in Albanian customary law, literature, history, ethnography, and albanological studies, and has significant implications throughout Albanian society. Consequently, a substantial proverb corpus stems from *besa*. In their ideo-thematic proverb collection "Fjalë të urta të popullit shqiptar" ("Wise sayings of Albanian people", 1983) paroemiographers Jorgo Panajoti and Agron Xhagolli have listed many proverbs about *besa* (more than 160 proverbs) which clearly indicates the preoccupation with its meaning, value and importance in the life of Albanians. The aim of this paper is to investigate proverbs with *besa* as the keyword (45 proverbs), analyze the proverbs' content and cultural features by drawing on the many nuances and attitudes associated with the concept of *besa*. This cultural treasure, closely tied to the historical development of the Albanian nation, customs, ethnography, religious beliefs, mythologies and literature may certainly contribute to an understanding of the worldview and culture of Albanian people. In conducting this analysis, two perspectives are considered: 1. Care must be taken when looking at proverbs as expressing aspects of a certain worldview or mentality that no stereotypical conclusions about a so-called national character are drawn. There are so many proverbs from classical, biblical and medieval times current in various cultures that it would be foolish to think of them as reflecting some imagined national character, as for example Chinese or Finnish (Lister 1874-1875; Kuusi 1967) 2. "Nevertheless, the frequent use of certain proverbs in a particular culture could be used together with other social and

cultural indicators to formulate valid generalizations” (Mieder 2004: 137. See also Mieder 2019).

2. Methodology

Several methods and approaches are employed in this paper. As the primary aim of this paper is to analyse the themes present in Albanian proverbs concerning *besa*, the content analysis approach (within the qualitative research) has been deemed appropriate, as it allows for valuable historical and cultural insights. In this process, proverbs have been traced to their origins in customary laws, history, cultural traditions, legends and literary traditions, and, where possible, to their known or attributed authors. Forty-five proverbs with the keyword *besa* are analysed thematically. This article is intended as a presentation of *besa* proverbs as texts that offer a window into a culture under-researched in terms of its proverbial wisdom. In order to understand many of the semantic aspects, the finer linguistic and cultural points that the proverbs try to convey, the lingua-cultural method has been adopted. Relevant literature that covers linguistics, history of Albanian people, Albanian ethno-culture, cultural anthropology, history of Albanian literature, literature, etc. has been consulted. To facilitate a deeper understanding of various nuances, contextualized references, historical references and explanatory comments are provided.

The Albanian proverbs have been translated into English by the author, with careful attention to preserving the metaphors and images as used in the authentic material. In addition, the English equivalent/similar ones are provided where possible. In attempting to lay out the richness of Albanian proverbs on *besa*, it is hoped that this study will encourage further comparative research, including investigations into geographical distribution, sources, and related topics.

3. The semantics of *besa*

The content of proverbs and words naturally leads to lexicographical sources. The treatment of the word *besa* in dictionaries is far from straightforward, as evidenced by the three principal dictionaries consulted for this study. While the polysemous na-

ture of the word is reflected in all three, certain meanings are labelled as archaic in the “Oxford Albanian-English Dictionary” (1998: 59), while the “Dictionary of Current Albanian Language” (2002: 103-104) highlights its significance in Albanian ethnography, and the “Dictionary of Albanian Religion, Mythology and Folk Culture” by R. Elsie (2001: 35-36) describes it as a popular custom. Although some meanings are indeed becoming obsolete, they remain important for understanding the depth or intensity of this virtue over time, particularly as it approaches modernity. The meanings of *besa* according to Oxford Albanian-English Dictionary (1998) are as follows:

Besa

1. pledge, word of honour
2. oath
3. (old) pledge taken by a family to take revenge on the murderer of a member of that family within a particular period of time; truce between the two parties to a blood-feud; truce period; the protection enjoyed by a guest¹ during his stay with the host; protection, custody, aegis
4. (colloq) religious faith, faith
5. Alliance; faithfulness
6. Trust, belief

Besa-besë *nf* solemn promise, sacred pledge, word of honour

In the “Dictionary of current Albanian language”, *besa* is presented as a noun with five distinct meanings:

1. The sworn promise with an uncompromising commitment not to be violated, a word of honour to fulfill an obligation one undertakes; archaic. A covenant; faithfulness. *Albanian besa. Man's besa. The word of besa. A man of besa. To give one's besa. To violate besa. Albanian besa is worth more than gold. Man's besa weighs more than the rock. Bond by besa. Like the serpent's besa* meaning not to be trusted.

¹ The guest in the Albanian culture refers to anyone who knocks on the door. “... and the guest, as the symbol of otherness, receives full attention and respect from the owner of the house. Even the greatest enemy loses his ‘negative’ connotation the moment he steps into the house” (Dingo, 2007; Schmitt, 2020; Lauria, Flora, Guza: 172).

2. A total trust in someone, bona fide, in good faith. *To lay besa (to entrust). To give besa to trust. I hold/have besa I am convinced.*
3. (ethnography) (in blood feuding) the commitment by the family of the deceased towards the *gjaksor* (the one who killed) not to take blood within a certain period of time; a suspension of blood-taking by giving one's word by both parties; the time that this cease-fire lasts; the protection that is given to the guest by the host as long as s/he is accommodated in his house. *To give one's besa. Bond one's besa. Extended one's besa. Destroy/violate one's besa. Kill someone in besa. Break one's besa.*
4. Colloquial. Religious faith, religion. *The religion of Albanian is Albanianism.*
5. Used as an adjective. Someone who keeps one's promise, trustworthy. *A man of besa. A woman of besa.*
**Për besë! Upon besa/for besa's sake"* a) upon one's word of honour; b) really, I mean it. *S'pata besë* (I had no *besa*) I could wait no more. *E preu (hëngri) në besë* (to violate one's *besa*) a) betray b) did not keep one's sworn word

In addition, the dictionary notes the use of the word *besa* not only as a noun, but even as a particle used colloquially to mean "indeed, honestly" as in the example *Besa, çupë si ajo nuk gjen.* (*Indeed, you will find no girl like her.*)

The word *besa* appears in compound that describe a person's character in terms of reliability and trustworthiness, typically falling into the binary opposition of reliable/trustworthy vs. unreliable/untrustworthy. Examples include: *besëkeq* (of bad *besa*), *besëmbajtës* (trustworthy, reliable), *besëmirë* (of good *besa*), *besëpakë* (of little *besa*), *besëplotë* (full of trust), *besëpre-rë* (backstabbing), *besëqen* (whose *besa* is like that of a wretched dog, unreliable) and many more.

Additionally, there are compound nouns such as *besëlidhje* (covenant), *besa-besë* (word of honour); derived words such as *besim* (conviction; religion; bias), *besimtar* (religious), *besnik* (faithful), etc.

These observations indicate that *besa* is a highly nuanced word, frequently used, emotionally charged, highly productive in word formation and featuring in all registers.

Proper names such as *Besa* (for girls) and *Besnik*, *Besart* (for boys meaning reliable, of golden *besa*) are very popular in Albania. In his "Dictionary of Albanian Religion, Mythology and Folk Culture", Elsie defines *besa* as a popular custom:

Besa. Popular custom. The *besa*, Alb. *besë*, def. *besa*, is one's word of honour, a sworn oath, a pledge or a cease-fire. In Albanian culture, the *besa* was regarded as something sacred and its violation was quite unthinkable. The *besa* was not only a moral virtue, but also a particularly important institution in Albanian customary law. Among the feuding tribes of the north, it offered the only form of real protection and security to be had. A *besa* could be given between individuals or feuding families for a specific period of time in order for them to settle other urgent affairs. It could also be concluded between the tribes as a cease-fire between periods of fighting. The *besa*, taken to extremes, however, could have terrible repercussions. The Rilindja author Sami bey Frashëri (1850-1904) exemplified this in his Turkish-language play, *Besa yahud ahde vefa* (*Besa or the fulfilment of the pledge*), published in Constantinople in 1875 and translated into English as *Pledge of honor*, an Albanian tragedy (New York 1945). In this rather melodramatic work, we are confronted with the tragic dilemma of an Albanian father who prefers to kill his own son rather than break his *besa*. Despite some excesses and exceptions, the Albanian *besa* is an institution which until recently was generally respected by the Albanians and of which they can still be proud. Amusingly enough, the Turkish expression *arnavut besa* 1 "Albanian *besa*" is translated in the Redhouse Turkish-English dictionary as "an agreement sure to be quickly broken"².

² This phraseological unit should be considered within the historical context. It is amusing also to notice that many proverbs with the Turk as a keyword in Albanian proverbs show that "Turks are not to be trusted". The earliest recorded version of the Albanian proverb *S' duhetë me zanë besë as ujit, as turkut* (*One should not trust water and the Turks*) dates back to 1635, compiled by Frang Bardhi in "Dictionarium Latino-Epiroticum". This proverb appears even in the later collection of Albanian proverbs (Panajoti and Xhagolli 1983: 41). Another mention of *besa* in proverbs by Bardhi in 1635 is *S'bet besë ndë këtë shekullë* (*There is no trust left in these centuries*) found as *S'bet besë ndë këtë shekull* (*There is no trust left in this century*) in the manuscript of Nikollë Keta (Niccolo Chetta, 1741-1803) which should be put within the historical context, as well. (For more information see B. Demiraj 2008: 55-72)

The Croatian priest Lovro Mihačević O.F.M., who lived in the mountains of northern Albania in the late nineteenth century, described the institution of the *besa* in the following terms:

The *besa*, equivalent to our word of honour, is sacred to the Albanians. Anyone who does not keep his *besa* is no man at all, and certainly not a gentleman. The *besa* is made between individuals as a pledge that they will protect one another. It can happen that two or more individuals who are in the middle of a blood feud, will give one another their *besa* for a certain period of time, during which the feud and any other hostile actions must be put aside. The Albanian would rather die than break his word of honour, especially if he has taken someone under his protection... The following happened in a village I know. A guide had given his guest a *besa*. They arrived together in the village where the visitor had business, which he concluded successfully. It was the guide's duty to accompany his guest from the village where the latter had done his business to the safety of the border, and then to leave him. When they got outside the village, the guest rashly told his guide, "You can go back home now because I can find my way alone." "Alright," replied the guide, "you don't need me anymore. My *besa* has thus come to an end" and, cocking his rifle, shot the man who had been his guest up to that moment (L. Mihačević 1913, p.24-25). (cf. A. Siljani 1907; L. Mihačević 1913, p.24-27; A. Jovičević 1923, p.101-103; D. Kurti 1932; Z. Catapano 1943; S. Pupovci 1968a; D. Shala 1985 a; S. Tabaku 1978; S. Schwandner-Sievers 1993, 1996b, 1999). (Elsie 2001: 35-36)

It is noteworthy that the lexicographical treatment of *besa* in the three dictionaries does not cover different historical periods, and in fact, they were compiled within a four-year span. Nonetheless, there is a highly similar semantic structure in the organization of the lexical meanings. In the Oxford Albanian-English Dictionary (1998) meanings are listed without being illustrated in certain contextual use, and aspects of *besa*'s combinability are not reflected. In the "Dictionary of current Albanian language" (2002), three proverbs appear with reference (keywords) to Albanian *besa*, (Albanian) man and Albanian religion: "*Albanian besa is worth more than gold*", "*Man's besa weighs more than the rock*", "*The religion of Albanian is Albanianism*". In addi-

tion, the contextual use of this polysemantic word is provided in different senses.

Furthermore, in his "Dictionary of Albanian Religion, Mythology and Folk Culture" (2001), Elsie contextualizes the meaning of the word not only as a popular custom in Albania, but most importantly as "an *institution* which until *recently* was generally *respected* by the Albanians and of which they can still be *proud*"; therefore, as a construct of identity and a cultural aspect viewed and analyzed by other cultures/outsideers, as well.

4. Besa in customary law, history and literature

An understanding of the polysemanticity of *besa* (as reflected in proverbs) is facilitated by an understanding of the culture and history of the Albanian people. Drawing on several comprehensive studies, such as "The History of Albanian People I, II, III" by the Academy of Sciences of Albania (2007), "Rebels, Believers, Survivors. Studies in the history of the Albanians" by the eminent Oxford scholar Noel Malcolm (2020), "A concise history of Albania" by Bernd J. Fischer and Oliver Jens Schmitt (2022), etc., it is essential to highlight certain historical facts and cultural features. These include Albania's role as a meeting-ground of religions and cultures, its rich traditional folk culture, the resilience of the oral Albanian customary laws and the emergence of their collection in a written form, the remarkable acts of rescuing (all³) Jews during the Holocaust, all of which are grounded in *besa*.

In a very synthesized way, Sir Noel Malcolm gives a very insightful view of the history of Albanian people as a meeting-ground of religions and a crossroad of cultures and interests:

For all the contingent reasons, the history of the Albanians may seem, to the casual observer, a rather self-enclosed and inward-looking affair. But the truth is the opposite: this is a history that radiates outwards in all kinds of directions. The Albanian lands have long been a meeting-ground of religions, and Catholicism, Orthodoxy and Islam all connected Albanians with larger

³ See Sarner, Harvey *Rescue in Albania. One hundred percent of Jews rescued in Albania during the Holocaust*. Cathedral City CA: Brunswick Press, 1997.

currents of culture and thought outside their own region. For much of their history, the Albanian lands were a crossroads of cultures and interests – a channel through which Venetian and other Italian powers interacted with the Ottoman Balkans from an early stage, a place of interest to the Habsburgs over several centuries as they tried to extend their own Balkan influence, and a focus for Greek and Slav ambitions both during the later period of Ottoman rule and, crucially, at the time of that empire's disintegration. ..." (Malcolm 2020: x).

The specialist in Albanian studies, R. Elsie draws on the richness of the Albanian folk culture:

Indeed, the historical, political, economic and cultural development of the Albanians has been so arduous that those who know them well, can do little but marvel at how they have managed to survive as a people at all.

Only in one sense have the Albanians been rich. Their traditional folk culture, which evolved over the centuries in relative isolation, offers a surprising wealth of elements. (Elsie 2001: vii)

In "The history of Albanian people III" we find that an important part in the history of Albanian people and their ethnography is drawn on the compilation of Albanian customary laws:

An extensive and praiseworthy work in the discipline of folklore and ethnography was undertaken and fulfilled by the Franciscan priest Shtjefën Gjeçovi, who collected and systemized with many detailed explanations one of the monumental works of Albanian customary laws "The Kanun of Lekë Dukagjinit", published in 1933 after his death. Sh. Gjeçovi left many published and unpublished works on Albanian traditions and customs of birth, marriage, death, collective wailing (*gjëma*), hospitality and Albanian *besa*, on wise sayings and saluting expressions. He dedicated most of his energies to the study of Albanian customary law (The Academy of Sciences of Albania 2007: 417).

Tarifa (2008) notes, "Gjeçov's work is genuinely a professional piece of ethnographic anthropology". Translator Fox observes that the Code of Lekë Dukagjini is "the expression and reflection

of the Albanian character, a character which embodies an uncompromising morality based on justice, honor, and respect for oneself and others” (Fox 1989: xix; Tarifa: 2008). Tarifa highlights that “The cornerstone of the Kanun was the concept of *Besa*—a term very rich in meaning and use, which means oath, faith, trust, protection, truce, word of honor, or all of these together—since honor was the primary and most important cohesive institution of Albanian social fabric (See Tarifa: 2008).

Furthermore, Mary Edith Durham, an early British ethnographer of Southeastern Europe, through a comparative analysis “remembered that many of the tribes of my own land believe in planchette and table-turning – consult palmists and globe-gazers, are ‘Christian Scientists’ and ‘High Thinkers’ – and reflected that all the training of all the schools had but little removed a large mass of the British public from the intellectual standpoint of High Albania, whereas for open-handed generosity and hospitality the Albanian ranks incomparably higher” (Durham 1985:192, Delouis 2022).

She experienced the Albanian proverb of hospitality *Buk⁴, kryp e zemer (Bread, salt, and our hearts is all we can offer)*:

.... When I rose to go, the old man asked if we had a roof for the night. “We are poor. Bread, salt, and our hearts is all we can offer, but you are welcome to stay as long as you wish.” It gave me joy to know that even in the bitterest corners of the earth there is so much of human kindness. (Durham 1909, trans by R. Hysa and Xh. Lloshi 1991: 131)

Most notably, numerous acts of kindness and compassion followed by many courageous acts of saving thousands of Jewish lives by the entire Albanian community during the Nazi occupation, are attributed to the code of honour, *besa*, deeply rooted in Albanian culture. There is so much humanism well-couched in *besa*. Many stories of *besa* and the rescue of Jews during WWII have emerged, such as those highlighted in the BBC Studio Podcast production for BBC Sounds “History’s secret heroes -10. Arslan Rezniqi and the Besa Code”, hosted by Helena Bon-

⁴ Bread is a symbol of hospitality in many Albanian proverbs.

ham Carter, which sheds light on an extraordinary story from World War Two rooted in Albanian *besa*.

The assistance provided to Jews by the entire Albanian community (and the fragile Albanian government) in the face of extreme adversity should be understood as a matter of national honour for Albanians. Such knowledge has become proverbial:

Indeed, The Albanian Embassy in Berlin continued to issue visas to Jews up to the end of 1938, at a time when no other European country was willing to take them in. Jewish refugees were mostly well looked after by the local population and survived the German occupation of Albania (1943-1944) unscathed. Indeed, it is said that during the Nazi occupation not one single Jew in hiding in Albania was betrayed or handed over to the Germans, an admirable reflection of how well the Albanians adhered to their traditional customs of hospitality and *besa*. (Elsie 2001:141)

Historians like Bernd J. Fischer and Oliver J. Schmitt draw on this fact, as well:

Neubacher recognized how unpopular fascism was in Albania and determined that it would play only a limited role. No Albanian fascist party was required, no domestic labour service was established, and at least until late in the German occupation, the Germans generally refrained from hunting, deporting and exterminating Jews. This allowed the Albanians to hide and protect a considerable number of both Albanian and foreign Jews, for which they have rightly been honored by the Israeli government” (Fischer and Schmitt 2022: 261).

This historical example of basic human solidarity has grasped the attention of many scholars, the photographer Norman Gershman, the institution of the Museum of Holocaust History in Yad Vashem and other museums, American and British media, filmmakers, etc. Every study, piece of information or story, exhibition at the museums or universities in Albania, Jerusalem, UK, USA, Australia, etc., about the rescue of the Jews in Albania most certainly lays great emphasis on the unique value of Albanian *besa*. Thus, Albanian *besa* transcends several boundaries and borders.

Besa is an integral part of Albanian cultural literacy. The virtue and valour of *besa* is penned by writers, too. One of these is the British romantic writer, George Gordon Byron in his “Child Harold’s Pilgrimage”. In the Albanian translation, the words in italics encapsulate *besa*.

Table 1. Child Harold’s Pilgrimage, Canto the Second, Stanza LXV in English and Albanian

English	Albanian
Fierce are Albania’s children, yet they lack Not virtues, were those virtues more mature Where is the foe that ever saw their back? Who can so well the toil of war endure? Their native fastnesses not more secure Than they in doubtful time of troublous need: Their wrath how deadly! But their <i>friendship sure</i> , When <i>Gratitude or Valour</i> bids them bleed, Unshaken rushing on where’er their chief may lead (Lord Byron 1812: 81)	Të rreptë bijtë e Shqipes! Por vetitë Nuk u mungojn’ veç t’ishin më të arrira: Armiku ua pa kurrizin ndonjëherë? Kush e duron si ata mundimn’ e luftës? Shkëmbinjt’ e tyre s’jan’ më të patundur Nga ata në çast rreziku dhe nevoje; Ç’armik për vdekje, po sa <i>miq besnikë!</i> Kur <i>besa a nderi</i> i thurret të derdhin gjakun, Si trima, turren ku t’i çojë i pari i tyre. (Trans by S. Luarasi 1956, republished 2004: 74)

While many Albanian literary works elaborate on *besa* (permeating Albanian ballads and myths, Albanian National Awakening, etc.), one of the Albanian writers with a broad international reputation, Ismail Kadare (1936-2024), whose themes draw heavily on Albanian history, politics, folklore and ethnicity has masterfully given an in-depth portrayal of *besa* proverbs in his works “Broken April” (based on the proverb *An Albanian’s house is the dwelling of God and the guest*) and “The ghost-rider” (based on an ancient Albanian ballad known by all Albanians, with the Leonore motive which draws on the proverb *An Albanian might die, but he will never break his promise* with many of its variants

found in the corpus of *besa* proverbs). Selected excerpts from these works are presented below.

In “Broken April” we read about the sacredness of the guest:

... He talked to her about the rule of hospitality, in general referring to all the provisions concerning the guest within one’s gates, which for an Albanian was sacred, quite beyond comparison with anything else. “Do you remember the definition of a house in the *Kanun*?” he said. “*An Albanian’s house is the dwelling of God and the guest.*” Of God and the guest, you see. So, before it is the house of its master, it is the house of one’s guest. The guest, in an Albanian’s life, represents the supreme ethical category, more important than blood relations. One may pardon the man who spill the blood of one’s father or of one’s son, but never the blood of a guest. “A guest is really a demi-god,” he went on after a while, “and the fact that any one at all can suddenly become a guest does not diminish but rather accentuates his divine character. The fact that this divinity is acquired suddenly, in a single night simply by knocking at a door, makes it even more authentic. The moment a humble wayfarer, his pack on his shoulder, knocks at your door and gives himself up to you as a guest, he is instantly transformed into an extraordinary being, an inviolable sovereign, a law-maker, the light of the world. And the suddenness of the transformation is absolutely characteristic nature of the divine. Did not the gods of the ancient Greeks make their appearance suddenly and in the most unpredictable manner? That is just the way the guest appears at an Albanian’s door. Like all the gods he is an enigma, and he comes directly from the realms of destiny or fate – call it what you will. A knock at the door can bring about the survival or the extinction of whole generations. That is what the guest is to the Albanians of the mountains.” (Kadare 1990: 75-77)

In “The ghost rider” (Doruntina), in order to economize with the space, the extracted excerpt lays emphasis on the proverb *An Albanian might die, but he will never break his promise*, so it reads:

That was what the *besa* meant. That was how Konstandin saw it. He considered the *besa* a bond linking all that was sublime, and he felt that once it and other similar laws had spread and held sway in every aspect of life, then external laws, with their corresponding

institutions, would be shed naturally, just as snake sloughs off its old skin.

Thus spoke Konstandin on those memorable afternoons they used to pass at the New Inn, where he went on and on about Albanian-ness. Perorating, or as some wits put it, albanating. "So that's how it is," he would say, "for my part, I shall give my mother my *besa* to bring Doruntine back to her from her husband's home whenever she desires. And whatever happens – if I am lying on my deathbed, if I have but one hand or leg, if I have lost my sight, even if... I *will never break that promise.*" (Kadare 1988: 143-144)

5. *Besa in Albanian Proverbs*

The polysemanticity of the word *besa* ensures that proverbs cantered on *besa* display *significant* "polysituativity, polyfunctionality, and polysemanticity" (Krikmann 2009: 15–50).

Several themes such as Albanianism (Albanian identity), honour, trust and integrity, fortitude, bravery, commitment (to marriage, friends, etc.), loyalty, hospitality, and challenges that beget embracing *besa* feature in these proverbs. As we explore the themes, issues of polysituativity and polyfunctionality are either inferred or explicitly analyzed. In general, we can say that the function and context of use for many *besa* proverbs is to praise, advise, warn, reprimand, etc.

There is one nonmetaphorical tautological proverb such as "*Fjala fjalë e besa besë*" (The word is the word and *besa* is *besa*), which serves to emphasize the importance of keeping one's word and fulfilling promises.

5.1. *The power of besa*

In Albanian proverbs, *besa* is hard and fast. It is such a powerful bond that it transcends boundaries of death and is strong and unyielding like iron. It bestows honour, success, dignity, riches and hope on those who possess *besa*. Conversely, individuals lacking *besa* are portrayed as having no religion, living a lifeless existence, and being easily forgotten.

(1) *Besa asht ma e fortë se vdekja. Besa is stronger than death.*

- (2) *Besa e njerit do të jenë hekurit. One's besa is as strong as iron.*
- (3) *Besa e njeriut – çilci i nderit. One's besa is key to one's honour.*
- (4) *Besa s'kthehet. One can never violate besa.*
- (5) *Besa s'lot. Besa is hard and fast.*
- (6) *Besën e mban toka, jo ma nieri. Besa is kept by the earth, let alone man (man in the sense of human being).*
- (7) *Gjithkush e ka besën për vete. Besa is part of who you really are.*
- (8) *E hupe besën, e hupe shpresën. You lose your besa, you lose hope.*
- (9) *Ku është shpresa, atje është edhe besa. Where there is hope, there is besa. (In this variant of the previous proverb, we find that besa and hope go hand in hand together)*
- (10) *Kur jep besën, mos lyp pjesën. Once thou promise, never beg thy share.*
- (11) *Kush luan në besë, do të ketë pendesë. One shall always come to repentance for the promise not kept.*
- (12) *Mbanie besën ndër shenjë veti, s'ka c'u bën kurrfarë mileti. Own thy besa, no one shall get at you.*
- (13) *Muri luan, besa s'luan. The wall can move, besa never shall.*
- (14) *Peta lara-lara; besa faqebardha. Pies can be colorful, besa is pure white (makes you white-cheeked as literally translated – an Albanian word for a successful and honorable person)*
- (15) *Si të kesh besë, nuk je fukura. If you have besa, you will never be poor.*
- (16) *Këmba e thyer e besa e kthyer nuk ndreqen. The broken leg and the broken besa are hard to fix.*
- (17) *E hupe besën, e hupe rrnesën. No besa, no life.*
- (18) *Kush ka gjetë një mik bestar, ka gjetë një hazne. S/he who finds a friend of besa, finds a treasure.*
- (19) *Pa besë s'kie kurrxha: as kie zot, as kie pushtet, as kie mik. No besa, no religion, no power, no friends/guests.*
- (20) *Mos e humb besën, se të humbet varri. Lose not thy besa, for thy tomb shall be forgotten.*

As the messages and implications encoded in *besa* proverbs are explored, it is worth analyzing some formal elements regarding the proverb texts in this subsection. The use of the Albanian semantically unmarked noun or the generic noun *njeri(u)* (a human being, a person) and the indefinite pronouns (gender neutral pronouns) *kush*, *gjithkush* (whoever, one) show that *besa* is a value not specific to either masculine or feminine gender. Furthermore, both the meaning and structure of these proverbs emphasize the qualities and power of *besa* rather than focusing on a male – female dichotomy, which becomes more prominent in the following subsection. One significant remark that may be formulated here is that *besa* is not an inherently male or female characteristic, despite the fact that there are many elements in Albanian traditions and culture which are female-unfriendly. Moving on this trail, reference should be made to the study by Tirta, which seems to supply some details about women in Albanian culture. Notwithstanding that patriarchy has manifested itself in many aspects of Albanian culture until recently (most notably in customary laws), Tirta dwells especially on two displays of women's *besa* in Albanian customary laws:

- The Albanian woman had the right to take under her protection a man (in case he asks for that), so he could travel or walk alongside her and nothing menacing could happen to him.
- Even in cases of a shootout or gunfight back in time, the woman could intervene holding a child and call for the men to cease fire imposing her authority (Tirta 2016: 479-480).

Upon closer examination, in addition to the “protection” and “truce” context, when *besa* is used adjectively meaning *trustworthy* and *keeping one's promise*, in Section 3, in the “Dictionary of current Albanian language”, meaning 5 we find *man of besa*, *woman of besa* equally. This is best illustrated by the power of *besa* bond reflected most evidently in the marriage bond. The Albanian proverb makes use of the metonymy *kunorë* crown/flower garland to refer to the marriage bond.

(21) *Besa e kunorës – ma e madhja besë.* (*The marriage bond – the biggest bond*) (More literally: *The besa of the crown/flower garland – the biggest besa*)

Considering the marriage bond as the most powerful shows a lot about the commitment, uncompromising morality and integrity that the Albanian men and women should show reciprocally. The reading/s of this proverb should be seen in the light of the solidarity of the family, of one's kith and kin and society in general.

While *besa* and women are not rendered explicitly in the content of *besa* proverbs (but rather implicitly or wrapped in the notion of human being or honour in general in some other proverbs e.g. *Gruen e mban ndera e jo buka - Women feed on honour and not bread, etc.*), there are nine proverbs which are evidently loaded with the qualities and character of men, deep-seated in the concept of *besa*.

5.2. *Besa and man*

According to Albanian traditions, the “Albanian man” is recognized as such, or as a “man of the earth/soil” in regional social contexts, if he demonstrates wisdom, weighs his words carefully, gives his *besa* (keeps his promise, provides protection, etc.), highly values honour as an ethical-moral institution, is hospitable, courageous and a patriot, is not dodgy in social work or towards others, a hard-working man who never cheats, helps the poor in material and spiritual terms and never looks down on them. A man who fails to embody these virtues is not considered a true man, but merely a male in physical form. He is never born worthless, but can become so by his vices and inhumane or discourteous deeds (Tirta 2016: 475).

Table 2. *Besa* and man

Albanian proverbs	English translation
<i>Besa e burrit – pesha e gurit.</i>	<i>Men's besa weighs more than the rock.</i>
<i>Besa e burrit thyen edhe gurin.</i>	<i>Man's besa breaks even the strongest rock.</i>
<i>Besa – e burrave.</i>	<i>Besa is the virtue of man.</i>
<i>Burrë asht ai qi ka besë e njerzi, e jo ai qi ka hijeshi.</i>	<i>Besa and humanity, not charms, are the virtues of man. (The English equivalent would be: Handsome is as handsome does).</i>
<i>Lisin e naltson kmesa, e burrin e naltson besa.</i>	<i>An oak by its crown, a man by his besa.</i>
<i>Trimi trimit gjithmonë besë i nxe.</i>	<i>The brave always trusts the brave.</i>
<i>Shumë burra janë, po jo gjithkush besë mban.</i>	<i>Men – of different sorts; not all live by besa.</i>
<i>Burri për besët, e kau për veshit.</i>	<i>A man by besa, an ox by its ears.</i>
<i>Kalin e kallxon ngarkesa e burrin e kallxon besa</i>	<i>A steed by its carriage, a man by his besa.</i>

The proverb *Ke ansht shpata, atje asht besa* (*To hold onto your pledge, hold onto your sword*) highlights the importance of bravery and fortitude that *besa* demands in cases of danger, a virtue and valour penned by Lord Byron as already mentioned (See Table 1).

5.3. *Besa* and guests/friends

Loyalty to the *miku* (Albanian for guest and friend) runs deep in Albanian proverbs. This principle originates directly from the customary laws passed orally throughout centuries, most notably codified in The Code of Lekë Dukagjini. In Book 8, “Honour”, which is divided into “Personal Honour” and “Social Honour”, articles 96-100 set out detailed provisions determining the behaviour and attitude towards guests. Article 96 (point 602) starts with the proverbial *Shpija e Shqyptarit asht e Zotit dhe e mikut* (*An Albanian's house is the dwelling of God and the guest*) (Gjeçov 1933; trans by Ajazi in a bilingual version, 2016: 66). Guests can be interpreted first and foremost as sacred, a theme

masterfully explored by the eminent Albanian writer Ismail Kadare.

The close bond between the Albanian man and his friend, combined with the golden rule (with a slight adaptation), is also referenced in the first Albanian autobiography (1881-82). This is an autograph fair-copy manuscript written in Italian “My life in Albania” (“La mia vita in Albania”), found in the provincial library of the Capuchin order in the norther Italian town of Trento.

..., the following chapter comes as a welcome relief: entitled “Friendships in Albania”, it is both more positive and more autobiographical. Lazër Tusha gives a passionate description of the depth of loyalty that is to be found in Albanian friendship. ‘For his friend, an Albanian would drown himself, throw himself into the flames, fall from a high precipice, or condemn himself to perpetual imprisonment, to hunger, privations, the loss of all his property, and of his own life. And if the Albanians are wanting when it comes to obeying the other commandments of our Lord, I believe that they perfectly fulfil the one that says “*love your neighbour like yourself*” – given that, frequently, they love their neighbour *more* than they love themselves’. (Malcolm 2020: 269)

The depth of this loyalty is further illustrated in the proverb *Shqiptari për mik asht tretë e asht fikë* (*The Albanian is like a candle to a guest (burning oneself up)*). Moreover, the proverbs emphasize the importance of reciprocal trust in friendship and hospitality:

(22) *Njeri besnik, gjan shok e mik. A man of besa is a friend indeed.*

(23) *Pa besë s'kie kurrxha: as kie zot, as kie pushtet, as kie mik. No besa, no religion, no power, no friends/guests.*

(24) *Kush ka gjetë një mik bestar, ka gjetë një hazne. S/he who finds a friend of besa, finds a treasure.*

5.4. *Besa is not to be taken for granted*

However, the existence of impure friendships is acknowledged, and despite the strength of the bonds of friendship and the sa-

credness of the guest, trust is not to be taken for granted. One should not trust indiscriminately, even if one is a trustworthy person or a person of *besa*. Consequently, Albanian proverbs frequently include warnings regarding trust:

(25) *Pernia më ruajtë nga miku i pabesë, pra nga armiku ruhem vetë. God save me from my besaless friend (a friend of no trust), for I can take good care of mine enemy!*

(26) *Besë jep, por besë mos ki! Give thy besa, but doubt other's besa!*

(27) *Besë s'ka e besë mba. (Besnik bëhu, por besë mos ki) Own your besa!*

(28) *Besnik banu e besë mos zen! Give besa, but keep your eyes wide open!*

(29) *Besnik behu, por besë mos ki! Give thy besa, but don't trust!*

(30) *Bestar duhet të jesh, por besë kollaj te mos zash. Own thy besa, but beware of others' besa!*

(31) *Jepe besën ku duhet e jo ku s'duhet! Give thy besa wherever needed!*

With the exception of the first proverb, all the other proverbs seem to be variants in structure or dialect use and they can most certainly be compared with the American proverb *Trust but verify* (Ronald Regan 1966, Mieder 2019: 224).

5.5. *Besa and Albanian(ism)*

(32) *Besa e shqiptarit është shqiptaria. (The faith/religion of the Albanians is Albanianism).*

Is *besa* the true Albanian religion? (cf. Godart 1922: 75)

Albanianism can be interpreted in various ways. When combined with *besa* in proverbs, the term is used to denote the prioritization of national and ethnic identity over religious differences, serving as a concept of unity, solidarity among Albanians. It reflects a strong sense of a unique and resilient Albanian identity and pride in it, and has contributed to cultural cohesion in the face of powerful divisive forces in the history of Albanian people so that the proverb becomes a symbol of Albanian culture.

In their historical study, Fischer and Schmitt employ the term Albanianism in Part Two, Chapter 5 as “*Arnavutluk* to Albania: The Triumph of Albanianism 1912-1924” with reference to the state and nation-building in Albania (2022: 143-186).

Without wishing to engage with broad issues of history or etymology, it is necessary to add a note to supply some background on the designation *Arnavutluk* and the Albanian self-designation *Shqiptari*.

Arnavutluk is a Turkish term (ethnonym) for the Albanians under Ottoman Rule. The Ottomans ruled over the southwestern Balkans between the late 14th century and the first Balkan war in 1912. Only a section of *Arnavutluk* was transformed into the modern Albanian state.

“Arnavutluk literally means an area full of Albanians or a region where the Albanian ethnic element is dominant among many other ethnic groups. The second advantage to the term Arnavutluk is that semantically it is not related to any kind of institutionalized power. In terms of space and delimitations, its vagueness precisely fits the premodern, sociocultural patterns of open and overlapping spaces” (Fischer and Schmitt 2022: 7)

The native endonym and ethnonym *shqiptar* attested from the 14th century onward appears in written sources around 1700, reflecting the socio-political, cultural, economic and religious context that Albanians experienced during the Ottoman era. Before this era, the Albanian term Arbër was used (likely a variant of the word Albanian).

“Muslim and also Christian Albanians identified with a new self-designation. The term *Shqiptar* (derived from the verb *shqiptoj*, to express oneself in an understandable way) described an Albanian in the context of the Ottoman empire and its predominant Islamic culture; it referred to someone belonging to a *linguistic community* whose majority had been Islamized” (Fischer and Schmitt 2022: 90).

The Albanologist Maximilian Lambertz (1882- 1963) preferred a connection of *shqip* (“Albanian language”), *shqiptar* (“Alba-

nian”) and *Shqipëria* (“Albania”) with Alb. *shqipe* or *shqiponjë* (“eagle”), which is the ethnic and national symbol of Albanians, used in that capacity in the earliest records.

The background knowledge of these designations is instrumental in understanding the content and power of the proverb *The faith/religion of the Albanians is Albanianism* as a pledge of allegiance. This proverb emerged from a poem written by Pas-hko Vasa around 1878 and 1880 and shows that national and ethnic identity supersedes religious identity. The stirring call to national awakening urging all Albanians to overcome their religious and cultural differences and defend their homeland permeates the poem as translated by Elsie.

*Oh Albania, poor Albania
Awaken, Albania, wake from your slumber,
Let us all, as brothers, swear a common oath
and not look to church or mosque,
The faith of the Albanian is Albanianism!*

... (O moj Shqypni, ca. 1878 translated by Robert Elsie)⁵

“This phrase would later become famous since it expressed the suprarreligious identity model of nationalist activists and of the modern Albanian state” (Fischer and Schmitt, 2022: 137).

In his essay “Crypto-Christianity and religious Amphibianism in the Ottoman Balkans. The case of Kosovo” (which the author holds true for (other) parts of Albanian lands, as well), Sir Noel Malcolm distinguishes three factors regarding religion/s:

1. The social coexistence of Christians and Muslims that matters here is not the co-presence of the two faiths in towns or country areas, but the close coexistence of people living in such social intimacy that they could not avoid experiencing, and even in some way sharing the ritual acts or religious observances of each other’s faith. The strongest form this took was the coexistence of religions within a single family

⁵ Elsie, Robert http://www.albanianliterature.net/authors/classical/vasa/vasa_poetry.html, retrieved on 1 May 2025

2. Religious syncretism – at the level of folk-religion, many practices were shared between Muslims and Christians, for a range of purposes including divinatory, medical and apotropaic.
3. Theological equivalentism – that both Islam and Christianity were equally valid ways to salvation. (See Malcolm 2020: 55-67)

On a similar tone, the British romantic writer Lord Byron would comment “No nation are so detested and dreaded by their neighbours as the Albanese; the Greeks hardly regard them as Christians, or the Turks as Moslems; and in fact, they are a mixture of both, and sometimes neither” (Byron 1818: Appendix to Canto the Second, p. 103; trans by Luarasi 1956, 2004: 223).

Be that as it may, the coexistence of religions within a single family is present even in modern Albania and, in fact, the inter-religious harmony is impressive. Suffice it to mention that Albanian official holidays include religious holidays of Catholicism, Orthodoxy, Islam and the pagan feast of the Summer Day on 14 March.

“The presence of different religions in the life of the Albanian ethnicity has nourished throughout the centuries the richness of the typological and stylistic culture of Albania, its regional and national variation making it thus more expressive and diverse” (Jakllari 2018: 205). This cultural richness continues to impress visitors and tourists today.

Needless to say, this proverb is incorporated in all the dictionaries of Albanian language, is widely taught at school and widely used by Albanians. It can most certainly be considered as a proverb participating in nation-building (Granbom-Herranen 2018: 369-379) and serves to define Albanianism, so that *besa* and Albanianism become synonymous.

Furthermore, the spirit of unity embodied in this proverb recalls the old classical proverb and the famous American traditional motto *e pluribus unum* (Obama 2002-2009, Mieder 2010, 32; Mieder 2019: 57). (Albanians of different religions are still Albanians with a strong and unique identity relying on language, etc. rather than religion). This might be interpreted as evidence that Albania, like many European countries, is strongly secularized. Quite amusingly, through a playful language use, the Albanian intellectual Fatos Lubonja has coined the anti-proverb

Skyscrapers are the symbols of our new religion (Fischer and Schmitt 2022: xviii).

Other proverbs related to Albanian(ism) (Table 3) can be attributed to Albanian oral tradition, ballads and customary laws which are themed on the inestimable value of Albanian *besa*, the psychological intensity involved in keeping a promise as a marker of Albanian character and one’s honour (their supreme moral value as reflected in the ballad and Kadare’s literary work of Doruntina). The last three proverbs appear to be variants of the same underlying proverb.

Table 3. Besa and Albanian(ism) proverbs

Albanian proverbs	English translation
<i>Besë e shqiptarit si purtekë e arit.</i>	<i>Albanian besa is worth more than gold.</i>
<i>Shqiptari vdes dhe besën që ep, nuk e çart.</i>	<i>The Albanian might die, but he will never do away with besa.</i>
<i>Shqiptari kryet e pren, e besën s’e then.</i>	<i>For the Albanian it is better off with one’s head than off with the troth.</i>
<i>Shqiptari, kur thotë “besën ta jap”, s’i bjen prapë.</i>	<i>The Albanian shall never break his promise.</i>

In response to the question “Is Albanian man’s *besa* his bond?” as posed in the title, the proverbs indicate that an Albanian man’s *besa* is the strongest and deepest bond, worth more than gold, his religion, his honour, identity, and hope.

“In their entirety, proverbs constitute an encyclopedia of the wisdom and philosophy of the people of a particular culture, their mindset and psychology, their artistic and esthetic consciousness. Proverbs constitute the basic code of their ethical and moral norms” (Panajoti and Xhagolli,1983:7).

While many *besa* proverbs can be perceived as quintessentially Albanian with strong ties to Albanian cultural and historical developments, researchers point that there is a broader European spirit within Albanian culture which is evident in the persistence of the cult of the homeland as opposed to religion, the use of shared symbols such as the Leonore motif which is found in the traditional culture of other European countries, and the fact that the basic ethical concepts of Albanian customary laws such

as friendship, family, honour, property, church, etc., have been widely applied by both Christian and Muslim communities in Albania and are compared to the canonical and customary laws of Medieval Europe (see Jakllari, 2018: 206-208).

6. Concluding remarks

A few concluding observations are warranted to summarize the rich content of *besa* proverbs and to highlight some broader aspects that emerge from this analysis.

Besa is a multi-dimensional construct and its impact is very powerful. Its paremiological dimension encompasses issues of character, family, ethnic and national identity, friendship, hospitality, and notions of “otherness” within the Albanian cultural context. The exploration of *besa* proverbs leads to themes found in myths and legends, customary laws back in time, history, literature, religion/s, museums and other aspects of Albanian culture. Notably, proverbs featuring *besa* consistently encode positive implications. In the wise sayings of *besa*, there is a devotion to values, virtue and compassion, patriotism, a reflection of the ethical and social relations in Albania and room for hope (*Ku është shpresa, atje është edhe besa. Where there is hope, there is besa*). Themes such as honour, trust, dignity, commitment, protection, fortitude, hospitality, bravery, identity, and loyalty are intricately woven into *besa* proverbs. Indeed, all these cannot be fathomed at all without knowledge of Albanian *besa* and *besa* proverbs.

Albania is changing dramatically. While *besa* most likely belongs to Albanian cultural heritage, its influence continues to shape Albanian attitudes towards hospitality and keeping one’s word. Although the formal concept might be fading, its resonance persists within the culture.

Bringing *besa* proverbs together in this article is intended to serve students, researchers and to propagate them to a wider readership. However, the multifaceted picture of *besa* proverbs presented in this article is not exhaustive, and many proverbs on *besa* remain unexplored. Moreover, while some proverbs may be highly familiar and frequently used, it should be emphasized that a more comprehensive study of *besa* proverbs would require a far more rigorous and extensive analysis.

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[https://doi.org/ 10.29162/pv.42.1.1027](https://doi.org/10.29162/pv.42.1.1027)

Original scientific paper

Received on 1 October 2024

Accepted for publication on 30 March 2025

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“EVERY MAN HAS HIS DAY IN COURT”: PROVERBS, SAYINGS, AND PROVERBIAL EXPRESSIONS OF THURGOOD MARSHALL

Abstract: This essay explores some of the proverbs, sayings, and proverbial expressions used by Thurgood Marshall, the first African-American Supreme Court Justice (1967). It argues that Marshall’s proverbial language use conveys several aspects of his worldview including his philosophy concerning race, class, and social justice in American society. The essay also aims to illustrate ways that Marshall’s multifaceted proverbial language use demonstrates the sound knowledge he possessed in the area of legal studies and the exceptional talent he possessed in the areas of rhetoric and deliberation. Furthermore, the essay reveals some of the ways Marshall used proverbial language to connect with other people as he incorporated various proverbs and phrases into his speech which would help make legal language more accessible to common folk (especially the people he would represent as an NAACP and LDF attorney) while also allowing him to capitalize on opportune rhetorical moments in the courtroom. The essay utilizes several Marshall biographies, interviews, and legal documents as source material. It also incorporates the scholarship of other paremiologists such as Wolfgang Mieder, Anna T. Litovkina, Sanda Eretescu Golopentia, Harvey Sack, and others to address issues concerning: categorization, definition, origin, meaning, interpretation, and context.

Keywords: Black studies, Civil Rights Movement [CRM], folklore, human rights, proverbs, paremiology

1. Introduction

Thurgood Marshall (1908-1993) is one of the most important figures in American history and is most remembered as being the Nation’s first Black Solicitor General (1965), and the country’s first African-American Supreme Court Justice (1967). In commenting on his decision to appoint Marshall to the Nation’s highest court, President Lyndon B. Johnson (1908-1973) once stated to reporters: “I believe it is the right thing to do, the right time to do it, the right man, and the right place” (Cambron 2022: 177). On a side-note, repetition in proverbs will be addressed more fully in the third part of the essay which deals with tautological proverbs. Johnson’s tautological statement reflects the fact that many believed Marshall was the right man for the job because of the exceptional skill he displayed as lead attorney in the landmark case *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, which he argued before the United States Supreme Court in 1954. *Brown* is one of the most important cases in American history. This monumental ruling made segregation illegal in the American public school system and paved the way for segregation to be banned in all other spheres of American society. It brought the Nation much closer to achieving social equality for all people. Segregation in American public schools delineated in part from strict policies called Slave Codes (Cambron 2022: 257-66) which denied personhood and prohibited teaching enslaved African-Americans to read or write. For instance, violating this law was punishable by up to thirty-nine lashes in North Carolina. After the Civil War (1861-1865) the Freedman’s Bureau led by General Oliver Otis Howard (1830-1909) established thousands of schools throughout the South for African-Americans and taught hundreds of thousands to read and write. However, the overwhelming majority of these schools would be destroyed during Reconstruction as backlash from white supremacists intensified. Despite the passage of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments, the Reconstruction era (1863-1877) in American history has largely been characterized as a failure due to thousands of lynchings and attempts to regain control over the labor and movement of African-Americans. With the exception of the Amendments, neo-slavery is what many of the policies enacted during Reconstruction amounted to. Such policies in-

cluded: Black Codes, vagrancy laws, convict leasing, and unfair farming practices such as sharecropping (which included debt peonage, and other exploitative crop lien systems). In the courtroom, Marshall often commented on the failures of Reconstruction as a lawyer and later as a Judge to highlight some of the ways such historical issues impacted individual cases and American society as a whole. On one such occasion, Marshall asserted:

The problem then was of assuring equal rights and protection to the new freedmen who were the victims of racial antagonism; against that background, it seems obvious, that when Congress spoke of constitutional rights had meant to include those derived from the Due Process and Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, and the right to freedom from racial discrimination, exercise of the right to vote guaranteed in the Fifteenth Amendment. (Cambron 2022: 184)

Reconstruction was not a complete failure, despite the aforementioned issues. Throughout the late nineteenth and mid to late twentieth century, dozens of Public Land-Grant Universities were established across the U.S. They were established in part through the Morrill Act of 1862. Many of the newly formed colleges focused on teaching agriculture and mechanical trades as a way of revitalizing agronomic industries in the southern parts of the United States which had been decimated by the Civil War. Nevertheless, for decades these institutions adamantly refused to admit any African-Americans. This situation triggered a second round of land grants in 1890. The Morrill Act of 1890 established institutions of higher learning for African-American's which would relieve white institutions of having to admit any Black students. These schools would become known as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU's). In spite of such changes, the number of public schools for whites still outnumbered the number of public institutions for African-Americans. Many towns in the Deep South did not have a Black high school. To make matters worse, African-American grade schools, secondary schools, and colleges were poorly funded, and as a result, they were plagued by unqualified faculty and staff, run-down

facilities, and overcrowding which caused many of the Black schools to be regarded as nothing more than “Negro attendance centers,” where in some of the worst cases, students could hope to do little more than wait hours for a restroom break and then be sent back home. (Charron 2009) After the *Plessy vs. Ferguson* Supreme Court ruling of 1896, segregated schools began to operate under the false pretense that they were “separate but equal”—in reality, segregation would prove to be yet another legalized form of lynching. From a social standpoint, the *Plessy* decision made African-Americans second class across all realms of society. Such legislation would be categorized by the monicker, “Jim Crow.” Under Jim Crow laws, nearly every African-American school of every level would continue to be inadequate and inferior. The NAACP sought to challenge this long-standing tradition of maintaining separate and unequal facilities which they argued was a violation of the Constitution. As an NAACP attorney, Marshall won many important civil rights cases leading up to the *Brown* decision including: *Murray v. Pearson* (1935), *Missouri ex rel. Gaines v. Canada* (1938), *Briggs et al. v. Elliot et al.* (1949), *Sweat v. Painter* (1950), and *McLaurin v. Oklahoma* (1950). These are some of the important cases that helped to eliminate discrimination in institutions of higher education and they also paved the way to the monumental *Brown* decision. At Howard University, Marshall’s mentor Charles Hamilton Houston (1895-1950) took what was considered a grossly underperforming law program and as the program’s Dean, transformed it into one of the most successful law programs in the Nation. Before Houston’s arrival in 1929, the school was unaccredited, the entire faculty and dean were part-time, and according to Marshall, it had gained the nickname “dummies retreat” (Tushnet 2001: 272). Under Houston, Howard gained accreditation from every accrediting agency in the country (Tushnet 2001: 272). Houston instilled in Marshall and all of his law students at Howard that they were not training to be lawyers, but “social engineers”—who would ultimately help to shape American society into the land promised by the United States Constitution. Marshall would reflect years later: “I don’t know anything I did in the practice of law that wasn’t the result of what Charlie Houston banged into my head” (Tushnet 2001: 417). In Marshall’s own

language, the program had become a success because “Charlie saw the big picture” (Cambron 2022: 11). Houston played such an immense role in Marshall’s growth and development that it can never be understated. According to Marshall, Houston would say quite often: “There’s no law on our side? Let’s make some” (Tushnet 2001: 74). Houston also conveyed to his students at Howard that the task would not be easy. Two sayings in particular helped Houston to emphasize the importance of patience and work ethic: “Lose your head and lose your case,” (Tushnet 2001: 273) and “No tea for the feeble, no crepe for the dead” (Williams 1998: 57). “Lose your head and lose your case,” illustrates the importance of having mental fortitude, and “No tea for the feeble, no crepe for the dead” is the “standing, icy comment for Marshall and any other student who complained that he was working them too hard” (Williams 1998: 57). Perhaps Marshall explained Houston’s teaching philosophy best at a public tribute to Houston at Houston’s alma mater, Amherst College in 1978:

Charlie told us at the beginning, “Get your law and get it straight. Get your research and dig deeper. When you plan, plan twice. When you map out your case, take not the two possibilities, but assume two others. You’ve got to do better than the other man. Nothing can we get from the executive side of the government, nothing can we get from the legislative side. If we’re going to get our rights, we’re going to get it when the court moves. The court can’t do it all, but the court can move it on. Without court action in the meantime, we’re dead pigeons” (Tushnet 2011: 274)

Marshall describes Houston’s social engineering process as a gradualist approach—they would try as many civil rights cases as possible at every judiciary level until the cases finally reached the United States Supreme Court.

2. Family influence

Marshall once commented that he believed in simply “doing what he thought was right and letting the law catch up” (Cambron 2022: 254), but where did Marshall’s sense of right come from? To say that Marshall’s moral and ethical values derived entire-

ly from Houston would be a mistake. Before Marshall officially became a “social engineer” he was learning the fundamentals of social justice from his family. Marshall was born in Baltimore, Maryland to two educated and socially conscious parents, Norma Arica Williams and William Canfield Marshall. The Marshall family history is filled with military veterans, entrepreneurs, and activists. Norma’s mother was a teacher at a private African-American academy in Baltimore and Norma’s sister, Avonia was among the first African-American teachers hired to teach in the colored school system. Norma’s father, Isiah Williams served in the Civil War with the U.S. Colored Troops and the Merchant Marines before retiring and opening two small grocery stores in West Baltimore. Isiah Williams is largely remembered for some of the ways in which he advocated for social justice. Williams pressured the Baltimore public school system to allow African-American children to attend white public schools. Williams also organized public demonstrations protesting the Baltimore police department for the beatings of African-Americans. Marshall’s paternal grandfather and namesake, Thurgood “Thorney” Marshall was a Buffalo soldier stationed in Texas before he was issued a medical discharge. The elder Marshall then decided to open his own grocery business in West Baltimore in the basement of his home. Marshall’s mother followed in her mother’s footsteps, becoming a teacher in the Baltimore public school system. Marshall’s father William was a porter for the Baltimore & Ohio railroad company. William was largely self-taught, and he provided Marshall and Marshall’s older brother Aubrey with ample instruction on the fundamentals of argument, American democracy, and social justice. When William Marshall was not busy he would take Thurgood and Aubrey to the local courthouse to observe trials. William also took the two on mini fieldtrips to the local police station, so they could witness the criminal justice system in action and begin to understand early on how it operates. Perhaps, the most important form of instruction imparted to young Marshall by his father was in the area of rhetoric. The elder Marshall insisted that both of his sons know how to argue effectively, encouraging them to be persuasive and not be afraid to engage in debate. According to historian Spencer R. Crew, “Williams...challenged his sons to present their ideas in

a logical, articulate fashion. This had to be the case no matter if the topic was politics or the weather. Their point of view needed soundproof and logical undergirding when presented” (10). This requirement contributed to a number of heated discussions around the dinner table; so much so that the neighbors sometimes complained about the noise. Important lessons learned in the Marshall household motivated him to pursue higher education at Lincoln University, in Chester County Pennsylvania (the oldest HBCU in America) and later, Howard University in Washington, D.C. (the oldest Black law school).

Upon entering law school, Thurgood Marshall already possessed at least some of the necessary key attributes of an effective attorney. His father had tactfully molded him into one, even if it wasn't his original intent. Even as a freshman, Marshall already knew how to be persuasive, he understood the value of social justice, and he realized that equal rights promised to Americans by the Constitution were a long way away for African-Americans. Another important attribute that Marshall acquired which is often overlooked by scholars, is his mastery of traditional language. The traditional language that Marshall used was most often in the form of proverbial expressions used consistently as he communicated with friends, family, and colleagues. Marshall was known for being garrulous, personable, and an excellent storyteller who often spoke with his hands, and the proverbial expressions he used infused his speech with life and color, making his stories and anecdotes exciting and memorable. In addition to proverbial expressions, Marshall also used proverbs, but certainly not to the same extent that he employed proverbial expressions. Nevertheless, this essay is devoted primarily to proverbs due to the multifaceted messages they convey. It also includes some of the phrases Marshall frequented the most, and many of them illustrate some aspect of Marshall's evolving worldview. Additionally, some of them are utterances Marshall grew to be known for over time. By revisiting Marshall's proverbial rhetoric, one is simultaneously encouraged to think about how Marshall's unique philosophic underpinnings might hold up in today's society, however, this study is not a chronologically organized list of every proverb, saying, or expression ever used by Marshall.

It is also important to note the profound influence that Professor Wolfgang Mieder has had on the fields of paremiology and folklore. It was Mieder who first initiated studies pertaining to proverbs and social justice as a response to discovering so many anti-feminist, antisemitic, and even anti-Native American proverbs in literature and popular culture. As Mieder explains:

All of this directed me to my books regarding African-Americans and civil rights, notably Martin Luther King. In my teaching and my writing, I have always felt that ethical values should be part of it, trying to help to make our world a more humane and peaceful place. As I have gotten older, I have noticed that I am much more willing in my writings to take a moral stand and to voice an honest opinion about socioeconomic issues that need addressing. (qtd. in Muñoz 2024: 16)

Mieder’s scholarship regarding social justice illustrates several important concepts:

Firstly, Mieder’s scholarship proves that folklore, paremiology, and American history can be used in tandem to reexamine important people, places, and events. In fact, proverbs, sayings, and proverbial expressions often mark important events in history, functioning as mnemonic devices (Bowden 1996: 442), reminding us of the past and most recent monumental accomplishments of important Americans, such as the election of the nation’s first African-American president. (“*Yes We Can*”: *Barack Obama’s Proverbial Rhetoric* 2009) Secondly, Mieder’s scholarship demonstrates that these disciplines may be used together to better understand the important values, beliefs, and worldviews of significant leaders, some of whose important ideals are in accord with basic principles under which the United States was founded. (“*Right Makes Might*”: *Proverbs and American Worldview* 2019; *The Worldview of American Proverbs* 2020) Thirdly, Mieder’s work is the first to demonstrate that the lens of paremiology offers scholars a unique way to study the Civil Rights Era, because several important leaders used proverbs and proverbial expressions to communicate important messages regarding themselves and the long Civil Rights Movement. (“*No Struggle, No Progress*”: *Frederick Douglass and His Proverbial Rhetoric for Civil Rights* 2001; “*Making A Way Out of No Way*”: Martin Luther

King's Sermonic Proverbial Rhetoric 2010; "'Keep Your Eyes on the Prize': Congressman John Lewis's Proverbial Odyssey for Civil Rights" 2014) Fourthly, works of this nature illustrate that examining the proverbial language of different leaders from the same movement offers scholar's differing perspectives and angles of perception for evaluating important events. Fifthly, examining multiple viewpoints may ultimately lead to a greater awareness of what some of these historical events mean for us in the present. Mieder's groundbreaking paremiological scholarship establishes a strong foundation on which other folklorists, historians, and paremiologist may build. (Summerville 2023: 189-90)

3. Proverbs, proverbial expressions, and proverbial tautologies

Proverbs are defined best by Mieder as: "...concise traditional statements of apparent truths with currency among the folk. More elaborately stated, proverbs are short, generally known sentences of the folk that contain wisdom, truths, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorically, fixed and memorable form and that are handed down from generation to generation" (Mieder 2004: 4). The selected corpus of writings examined for this study yields over two-hundred proverbial expressions and nearly two dozen proverbs. While proverbs contain moral lessons most often in the form of brief complete sentences, proverbial expressions are concise phrases used to help to convey the stark realities of a situation through imagery. Marshall used proverbial expressions profusely—it was simply the way he communicated with people. Marshall could be quite an entertaining speaker when he wanted to be, and some of the expressions he used help to make boring legal talk more accessible to the common folk. For instance, he would use the proverbial expression "to go the whole hog" (Bryan et al. 2016: 389-90) at times to show enthusiasm for people or excitement for important ideas. In an interview, Marshall explains the executive decision made by the NAACP to use sociological and medical data in the courtroom. All members agreed it was the best way to expand the *Brown vs. Board* legal briefs. Marshall says: "We had a meeting in Atlanta, where we decided to go whole hog on this" (Tushnet 2011: 461). Likewise, in describing

the decision to argue the Fourteenth Amendment in nearly every civil rights case leading up to *Brown*, Marshall says: “The new idea was to go for the ‘whole hog,’ by arguing that segregated schools were illegal even if they were equal” (Williams 1998: 175). In describing his close friendship with President Harry S. Truman (1884-1972), Marshall exclaims: “Well, you knew you had somebody to rely on. Who would go the whole hog...It’s a warm feeling, you just can’t put your hands on” (Tushnet 2011: 456; Crew 2109: 75). Perhaps Marshall frequented this particular expression which dates back to 1838 (Bryan et al. 2016: 389-90) because pork was always a staple in the Marshall household. Marshall once cooked pigs’ feet for the singer, actress, and civil rights activist, Lina Horne (1917-2010) at a private party at his home, and Horne would later rave about the experience, saying she had eaten “the best pig’s feet in the world” (Crew 2019: 187). Marshall historian Juan Williams provides readers with another possible explanation for Marshall’s use of the expression:

Working at Gibson Island, [a segregated country club] Thurgood became a popular figure with the powerful whites who frequented the executive watering hole. And Albert Fox, the club’s secretary, who was in charge of all the staff and facilities, regarded Thurgood as a son. Fox and Willie Marshall were drinking partners, and Fox delighted in introducing Thurgood to first-rate whiskey, “a forty-year-old hogshead of old Pikesville bourbon. (Williams 1998: 44)

As a civil rights attorney, Marshall made a tradition of celebrating hard-earned victories, which often involved drinking with friends and colleagues. Based on Marshall’s impressive resume, he had the pleasure of doing this on no less than thirty separate occasions. Perhaps the proverbial expression “to go the whole hog” was Marshall’s way of harkening back to his early years as a waiter and the important friendships extended to him at the Gibson Island Country Club.

Another important aspect of Marshall’s proverbial repertoire are the proverbs which rely entirely on repetition—the tautological type, which involve the deliberate repetition of words or ideas within the same phrase. They are rarely focal points, in and of themselves, in texts regarding Marshall, or in proverb

scholarship, but are nevertheless significant because they embody lessons and principles which largely illustrate three things. Firstly, they depict some of his ideas concerning race and class. Secondly, they depict his legal acumen and skill in logic and reasoning. Lastly, they illustrate the pride he expressed in his ability to connect with other people; especially the Black people from the South he would represent as a National Association of Colored People (NAACP) and Legal Defense Fund (LDF) attorney.

Perhaps Marshall's tautological proficiency was contagious, as the aforementioned example from President Johnson illustrates. Using proverbial tautology consistently and accurately may seem more impressive than stating things literally because it requires a certain degree of proficiency. One must have an expansive mental storehouse of such language in order to be able to use it effectively. One must also be able to match the right proverb or expression to the right situation, and it must be done in a seamless fashion to avoid disturbing the natural flow of conversation. Additionally, proverbs are expected to encompass some moral and ethical instruction. Proverbial tautologies are rhetorical tautologies that have become proverbial through frequent usage. There are differences between common rhetorical tautologies which are common phrases and proverbial tautologies which are regarded as proverbs. The common variety of tautological phrasing simply repeats a statement or idea. Some common rhetorical tautologies in the English language include: "future plans," "new innovation," "personal opinion," and "true facts." Proverbial tautologies by comparison usually contain three or more words, and they generally communicate moral lessons. They are considered proverbs because they have also "gain[ed] currency among the folk" (Mieder 2004: 4). The corpus examined for this study yields several tautological proverbs uttered by Marshall including: "People are people," (Tushnet 2001: 258); "Rules are rules," (Bryan et al. 2016: 650; Crew 2019: 156); "Lawlessness is lawlessness," (Crew 2019: 168); "Anarchy is Anarchy" (Williams 1998: 344), and "To decide not to decide" (Tushnet 2001: 177). Speaking before a legal conference, Marshall says:

When I spoke to this conference, I suggested that the governing principle of a humane society and a good legal system could be summed up in the simple phrase "People are people." It seems to me that the

phrase not only states a universal rule of substantive law, but that it is equally opposite as a guiding principle for the way courts and lawyers should conduct their daily business—a procedural maxim, if you will. If bench and bar are to perform successfully their role in civilized society, they must recognize the worth and importance of every person coming before them.” (Crew 2019: 168)

An inherent feature of most proverbial tautology is that they contain enough identical wording to read the same both forwards and backwards. Such statements are easily interpreted as universal claims to truth—a truth which seems both “profound,” and “permanent,” and thus extremely difficult to refute (Norrick 1991: 126). Sociologist Harvey Sack explains it as an aspect of being category bound:

You consider the distribution of the *tautological proverbs*: things like “women are women,” “boys will be boys.” The occurrence of those things tends to be involved in one way of marking that some activity took place which is category-bound to the named category...But wherever you get a specific occurrence of one of these tautological proverbs you can lock in on something of the sort we’re dealing with. They’re not merely logician’s playthings, and by no means “platitudes.” They do quite a specific task. (Sack 1992: 587-588)

Sack’s description points to the self-referential aspects of proverbial tautology—one is simultaneously defining a category by identifying a person, place, or thing as an exemplar of said category. Literary scholar Sanda Eretescu Golopentia also focuses on some of the ways proverbial tautologies function, highlighting the fact that $X=X$, $Y=Y$ (as semiotic systems) allow speakers to access several different levels of meaning at once:

Uttering one of the proverbs is therefore equal to simultaneously using (communicating in) several languages among which is established what Roland Barthes calls a “dècrochage connotatif” type gradation. The addressee is free to choose among several interpretive levels: the language level, the ethos level, or the “natural semiotic” level. Asked to account for an ethos allusion, the utterer of the proverb can always find refuge in a precise linguistic or

vague semiotic interpretation. In this manner the language “dècrochage” allows a STRATEGIC AMBIGUITY. Mobile, extensible, the proverb rambles through languages, without ever being fixed in one of them. (Golopentia 1973: 149) (emphasis in original text)

The linguistic versatility described by Golopentia held special significance for attorneys like Marshall, who needed to sound authoritative in the courtroom, the outcome of his cases depended on it. Also, as an attorney, Marshall wanted common folk to place all of their confidence in formal legal processes, and to not take the law into their own hands. This is one reason why Marshall was so fond of the proverb “Rules is rules”:

Marshall consistently looked to protect the rights of the individual from unfair application of the laws. But, he did not condone the breaking of the law. As he often said, “Rules is rules,” and when one breaks them, there are penalties that ensue. (Crew 2019: 156)

Marshall also frequented the tautological proverb “Lawlessness is lawlessness” to reiterate his intolerance for rule breaking (Crew 2019: 168). As Norrick points out, the “repetition in wording seems to do more than make a proverb noticeable and memorable: it suggests conviction and it enhances persuasive power” (Norrick 1991: 121). Furthermore, the simplicity of such statements often signifies wisdom—making them equally ideal for common folk speech.

Any word in the lexicon may be used to create what Golopentia calls “frozen idioms” (1972: 122). They remain frozen in the sense that, unlike other proverbs, they generally do not evolve into multiple variations. Instead, innovation lies in the fact that the repeated noun comprises its own “abstract lexical (conceptual) inventory” (Golopentia 1972: 122) of which meaning is primarily conveyed through the very act of performance. For example, Marshall used the tautological proverb “Anarchy is anarchy” with encouraging results. In a 1969 speech given at Dillard University in New Orleans, Marshall was very critical of radical militants who advocated using violent tactics to fight racial oppression. While the topic may have been a sensitive one, it was nothing new to Marshall. In a speech the previous year at

the University of Wisconsin, Marshall was heckled at the podium and his life was threatened by a group of Black Panthers and anti-war protesters who did not agree with his anti-violence, anti-separatist philosophy. Marshall disliked all forms of separatism and once stated: “Let’s stop drawing the line [between] colored and white....Let’s draw the line on who wants democracy for [America]” (Dudziak 2006: 734). In the Dillard speech Marshall would reiterate his message, saying that “...rocks and firebombs would settle nothing because the nation would fall apart if the law did not punish people who used guns and rocks to take over” (Williams 1998: 344). Marshall added for emphasis: “I am a man of law, and in my book anarchy is anarchy...It makes no difference who practices anarchy. It’s bad, and punishable and should be punished” (Williams 1998: 344). The expression caught the attention of the media and made numerous headlines. The headline for the *Washington Star*’s lead editorial read, “Anarchy is Anarchy” (Williams 1998: 344) and also included a political cartoon depicting Marshall as a judge, bashing a rifle-yielding Black Panther over the head with his gavel. The caption reading: “Let’s come to order,” (Williams 1998: 344).

Marshall uses the proverbial tautological phrase “to decide not to decide” in speaking before the Second Circuit Judicial Conference (1978) to explain an often misunderstood power held by the Supreme Court. Marshall says:

I could continue with this summary of what we held last Term, but I think you may be more interested in hearing a description of two fascinating cases from the Second Circuit where we did not hold anything. What makes these cases especially intriguing to me is that it was such a struggle on our part to decide not to decide. Deciding not to decide is, of course, among the most important things done by the Supreme Court. It takes a lot of doing, but it can be done. In the overwhelming majority of cases what appears in the public record is a short, simple order denying certiorari. (Tushnet 20001: 177)

The process of “deciding not to decide” is explained more thoroughly by legal scholars Michael E. Solimine and Rafael Gely:

A public institution that is vested with discretion to decide *whether* to decide the merits of a controversy has considerable power on that basis alone. This is true of the U.S. Supreme Court. For over

80 years, since the passage of the Judges' Bill in 1925, the majority of cases reach the merits docket of the Court through discretionary grants of writs of certiorari. After certiorari is granted, typically the parties will brief the case, oral argument will be held, the Justices will discuss the case at their conference, and eventually then decide the case through the release of a written opinion. On rare occasions, however, the Court interrupts that process by deciding that they do not want to decide the case, after all. In those instances, they dismiss the writ of certiorari as improvidently granted, or DIG the case. (Solimine et al. 2010: 155-56)

By discussing the dismissal process, Marshall hopes to bring attention to a power that Justices rarely discuss or mention in public. Marshall also seeks to highlight differences between what the public sees in the press regarding dismissals and what the process actually entails. Regardless of what some may think, the Supreme Court may exercise the right to "decide not to decide," and such decisions are made at the Justice's own discretion, on a case by case basis.

Another important tautological proverb was used by Marshall in his brief for respondents in *Cooper v. Aaron* (1958). *Cooper v. Aaron* is arguably Marshall's most significant victory of all of the cases directly tied to the epic *Brown* decision. According to one witness: "If *Brown v. Board of Education* provided the foundation for school integration in the 1950s and 1960s, *Cooper v. Aaron* provided the muscle" (Cambron 2022: 153). It is worth mentioning that the aforementioned If/Then statement represents a distinct form of proverbial tautology in and of itself (Golopen-tia 1972: 118-61; Norrick 1991: 126), but more importantly, the If/Then tautological statement communicates that the *Cooper* decision led to the Federal strong-arm enforcement of the initial *Brown* ruling. In contextualizing *Cooper v. Aaron* for readers, historian Cathy Cambron quotes a tautological proverb of British prime minister William E. Gladstone, who said in 1868: "Justice delayed is justice denied" (2022: 152) which was also utilized by several other civil rights leaders, including Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968) (Mieder 2010). Cambron employs the proverb to effectively characterize the rationale behind the ruling which forced the Governor of Arkansas, Orval Faubus to discontinue

postponing the integration of Central High School. On September 4, 1957, Faubus used the state’s National Guard to block the Little Rock Nine from entering the school building. The team of teenage volunteers represented by Marshall consisted of nine students with exemplary attendance records and outstanding grades. The Little Rock Nine included: Ernest Green (b. 1941), Elizabeth Eckford (b. 1941), Jefferson Thomas (1942–2010), Terrence Roberts (b. 1941), Carlotta Walls LaNier (b. 1942), Minnijean Brown (b. 1941), Gloria Ray Karlmark (b. 1942), Thelma Mothershed (1940–2024), and Melba Pattillo Beals (b. 1941). Blocking the teen’s entry to the building was in bold defiance of the *Brown* ruling. President Eisenhower (1890–1969) responded by deploying Federal troops to dispel the National Guard and to protect the students from the angry violent mobs. Faubus and the local school board expected to eventually reverse the *Brown* decision by way of appeal, but with the *Cooper* ruling, the Supreme Court finally ruled that integration measures would no longer be stalled through “legislation, constitutional amendments, or gubernatorial directives” (Cambron 2022: 153). As for violence against the students, Marshall knew that it would not last. Marshall was featured in *Collier’s* magazine (1952) as an up-and-coming political star and told interviewer, James Poling, that in spite of all of his newly found fame and infamy, Marshall intended “to wear life like a very loose garment, and never worry about nothin’” (Cambron 2022: 19; Williams 1998: 193; Poling 1952: 29–32). Marshall used the proverbial expression “to wear life like a loose garment” to insinuate that violence or backlash was never a limiting factor for him. Even as a high-profile attorney, he had dealt with violence all too often. Both Marshall and King had counseled the Little Rock Nine on how to best cope with the violence they experienced daily. (Beals 1994) Marshall intervened on behalf of others to prevent lynchings and barely escaped being lynched himself on several occasions. In a well-written legal brief for respondents in the *Cooper* case, Marshall includes an important tautological proverb that sheds some light on how Marshall viewed insurrection and social unrest. The proverb suggests that what was construed by many to be a “hedonistic, non-worrying philosophy” (Williams 1998: 193) was actually a unique perspective with important theoretical un-

derpinnings. The proverb used in the *Cooper* brief characterizes Marshall's primary argument—that intimidation, scare tactics, and pandemonium should not be allowed to continue to stand in the way of justice. Marshall writes:

The imperviousness of the Rule of Law to arguments of this sort is, after all, the underlying foundation of equal justice under law. For if criminal defendants, home owners, manufacturers, and others can be routed from their lawful rights by a transient emergency, then we have returned to a state prior to civil society, when there was the Hobbesian state of “a war of all men against all men.” This Court reaffirmed this premise of lawful government in *Brown v. Board*. (Cambron 2022: 170)

The proverbial tautological statement “a war of all men against all men” which appears near the end of Marshall's brief was coined by English philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679). Hobbes is considered by some to be the founder of modern political philosophical thought. It was not a proverb when Hobbes first used it in *Leviathan*, but it has since grown to become a useful stand-in for Hobbes's thesis concerning human nature. Political philosopher Gregory S. Kavka sheds more light on the significance of Hobbes's conceptualization:

It is surprising that, in the voluminous literature on Hobbes, his most original and important argument rarely receives detailed examination. I refer to the argument, centered on 13 of *Leviathan*, that the state of [human] nature is a state of war of all against all. There seems to be two main reasons why this argument escapes careful scrutiny. Some apparently regard it as so straightforward, and so obviously correct, as to require little analysis or elucidation. (Kavka 1983: 291)

Kavka notes that Hobbes is rarely discussed or refuted because the concept of “all against all” is so straightforward. Kavka stops short of identifying the fixed tautological form as a potential source of the statement's power:

Others, who accept the common view that the argument is dependent on Hobbes's egoistic psychology, may doubt it is of sub-

stantial interest for those of us not sharing this gloomy view of human nature. I shall argue that these attitudes are not warranted. Hobbes’s argument relies only on assumptions about human beings that are much more plausible than psychological egoism, but it is invalid. Yet, despite its invalidity, it makes a significant and lasting contribution to our understanding of certain important problems concerning human interaction. (Kavka 1983: 291)

Kavka does not agree entirely, nevertheless concedes there is much to be gained from Hobbes. In regard to the special session of the Supreme Court in August of 1958, Marshall would not have referenced Hobbes if Hobbes had not impacted his views. The proverb more than likely helped Marshall to make sense of the widespread agitation in light of the *Brown* ruling. In the legal brief Marshall is reminding the Court that unruly behavior should always be expected, but it should never become a deterrent.

All in all, proverbial tautological phrases did a lot for Marshall’s public image. Each of the aforementioned are used in support of the notion that civil rights would not be won by breaking laws or by supporting racism or separatism. The three-word expressions emphasize Marshall’s stance that due process, in the strictest sense possible, was the only viable option for achieving civil rights. Marshall doesn’t seem to use tautological constructions in many other contexts, perhaps because of the possibility that even the most authoritative proverbial tautology may lose force with overuse. Likewise, employing too many expressions with the very same construction would also likely lessen their significance over time.

4. Presidents and other important leaders

Some products of deliberate modification may be categorized as *anti-proverbs*; especially if the modifications are made with humor or satire as an underlying intention (Litovkina, Anna T and Wolfgang Mieder: 2006). There are at least a couple of instances in which Marshall modifies proverbs to make his own very important statements, but he does so without any comical intentions. As opposed to the satire which may be implied in an anti-prov-

erb, Marshall is bringing the relevance of the original proverb to his audience's attention by way of allusion. In his speech entitled: "The Future of Civil Rights" (1989) Marshall says:

Paraphrasing President Kennedy, those who wish to assure the continued protection of important civil rights should "ask not what the Supreme Court alone can do for civil rights; ask what you can do to help the cause of civil rights." (Tushnet 2001: 219)

Marshall's variation of the Kennedy proverb effectively sets up the closing of the speech where Marshall answers his rhetorical question by emphasizing the importance of following due process. Marshall says:

Today, the answer to that question lies in bringing pressure to bear on all branches of federal and state governmental units, including the Court, and to urge each of them to undertake the battle for civil liberties that remain to be won. With that goal as our guide, let us go forward together to advance civil rights and liberty rights with the fervor we have shown in the past. (Tushnet 2001: 219)

The famous proverb first spoken during Kennedy's inaugural address on January 20, 1961, reads:

And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country. My fellow citizens of the world: ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man. Finally, whether you are citizens of America or citizens of the world, ask of us here the same high standards of strength and sacrifice which we ask of you. (Mieder 2023: 14,15)

According to Mieder, one of the reasons why this particular Kennedy utterance is so significant is because it marks a philosophical moment that Kennedy had been building up to for quite some time. Kennedy touches on some of the very same ideas in several previous speeches, but this time is different because Kennedy had finally achieved the emotional impact he had been hoping for, coining a new proverb in the process.

[Kennedy] starts with a call to his American fellow citizens to follow his trumpet to new action in the name of his New Frontier, but then ingeniously goes beyond the national view by repeating his sententious statement with a call for the citizens of the world. That is indeed a moment of oratory grandeur expressing hope for all people on earth. (Mieder 2023: 14)

Mieder highlights the fact that the Kennedy proverb is an antithetical statement with a parallel structure containing “a figure of repetition known as antimetabole (repetition of words in converse order) (Mieder 2023: 15). In a sense, Marshall piggybacks off of the Kennedy statement, and then takes it a step further in proposing a plan of action for his audience to follow.

Marshall implements a similar rhetorical strategy as he writes a letter to civil rights leader Roy Wilkins (1901-1981) concerning the anniversary of the *Brown* decision and the Nation’s continuing struggles to integrate. In the letter, Marshall borrows the memorable proverb: “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself” from the famous 1933 inaugural address of Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882-1945). It was not a proverb at the time that it was first uttered by Roosevelt, but it quickly became one due to the attention it gained in the press and by way of frequent usage. (Mieder 2025: 138) Roosevelt coined the proverb in his speech as he discussed the Nation’s failing economic condition as the U.S. was reaching the nadir of the Great Depression (1929-1939). In the speech, Roosevelt says:

This great Nation will endure as it has endured, will revive and will prosper. So, first of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance. (Roseman 1938: 11-16)

In the letter to Wilkins, Marshall recognizes that the Nation is at a similar point in regard to civil rights. While many Americans already accepted the Nation’s inevitable turn towards integration, many more were still afraid. Marshall writes:

In some areas of the South effective resistance exists solely because the people in those areas do not yet realize the Constitution is supreme and have fears that desegregation will not work. It is just a matter of time until many of these people clarify their thinking on both points and start toward desegregation. "We have nothing to fear but fear itself." (Long 2011: 341)

Marshall's use of the Kennedy and Roosevelt proverbs illustrates that he knew the importance of quoting the right leaders, at the right time, for the right purposes. Marshall also quoted another important leader who was not a president, Asa Philip Randolph (1889-1979). Randolph is remembered for conferring with nearly a dozen American presidents—more than any other leader alive, all on behalf of the important cause of gaining civil rights for African-Americans.

In a speech entitled: "Group Action in Pursuit of Justice" published in the *New York University Law Review* (1969) Marshall employs a variation of a well-known proverb that was popularized by Randolph. Marshall is speaking in support of group action as a way of making legal representation more accessible to ordinary citizens and he uses the proverb to establish an extended metaphor which further emphasizes his purpose and sets up the conclusion, very similar to the way he used the Kennedy proverb. Marshall says:

On one side, we have the clear need for that kind of group practice which brings legal representations to those persons who have previously been left entirely outside the system. On the other, we have the traditional values of professional responsibility which must not be impaired. We have assumed in the past that the fidelity of the lawyer to his client's interest can be strengthened by the financial bond between them. The client pays the bill, and he ultimately will call the tune. The lawyer, while maintaining proper ethical standards, represents only the interests of the person supplying the retainer. In group practice, the old financial tie is broken. The client no longer pays the bill. And yet, the lawyer's ultimate responsibility must still be to his client. The financial link with an intermediary must not be allowed to warp his responsibility. (Tushnet 2001: 234)

“The client pays the bill, and he ultimately will call the tune” (Tushnet 2001: 234) is a variation of the proverb “He who pays the piper, calls the tune,” (Mieder et al. 2016: 591) and it is one of the proverbs used by Randolph as he argued before the U.S. Senate Committee on Interstate Commerce in 1934. Randolph was arguing in support of revising the 1934 Railway Labor Act because it would greatly increase the chance that the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP) would eventually gain union recognition and collective bargaining rights; thus, making it a much more powerful organization. Due in part to this important moment, Randolph’s organization became the Nation’s first legitimate Black labor union. Randolph said:

“If you eliminate that phase of the bill, permitting the companies to pay the representatives of the company unions, then you really destroy the power of the bill, because if the companies are able to pay the representatives of the company union, then they will be able to intimidate the employees and practically prevent them from joining legitimate and bona-fide unions. So, that I think is basic, because the power over a man’s subsistence is the power over his will, and usually the man who pays the fiddler calls the tunes, so the Pullman Company by paying these representatives of the company union, they make them do just what they want done” (Kersten and Lucander 2014: 62-63; Summerville 2020: 293-94).

If Marshall was to borrow from anyone’s rhetorical playbook, he couldn’t have chosen a more appropriate person, due to the fact that Randolph had been the first advocate for African-American people on the labor front. The proverb was an ode to Randolph in part because Marshall’s father had been a porter and Marshall in his youth had also been a porter for a brief time, and they benefited directly from Randolph’s heroic efforts.

Marshall would use another Randolph quote as he spoke before the Second Circuit Judicial Conference in 1983. In the speech, Marshall talks about *The Guardians Association versus the Civil Service Commission*, a case involving employment discrimination in the New York City police department. Marshall says:

The *Guardians* case was brought by Negro and Hispanic police officers who, although appointed to the force, found themselves the first to be laid off when the times got hard in New York City. They were in the “last hired-first fired” category because their appointments were made in order of test scores. They challenged the tests as not job-related yet having a discriminatory impact. (Tushnet 2001: 194)

The proverbial expression “last hired-first fired” was used by Randolph in the 1930s and later became a widely used slogan by members of Randolph’s March On Washington Movement (MOWM) which protested vehemently to bring attention to unfair employment practices across America.

5. Marshall joins the freedom struggle in Africa

Marshall spent some time in Africa drafting the Kenyan Constitution. Marshall would recount stories about Kenya often, to friends and colleagues alike, as a way of emphasizing Africa as a major “part of the story of his life” (Dudziak 2006: 780). After spending decades in the U.S. interpreting the U.S. Constitution before the Courts, Marshall’s legal services were solicited from Kenyan nationals to resolve several intense ongoing political battles. Legal scholar Mary L. Dudziak explains:

Kenya would not experience an easy path to liberation. Large white-owned farms had depended on African labor. This labor was induced through a brutal colonial regime. In the 1950s, a resistance movement, known as the Mau Mau rebellion, waged guerilla war on the colonial government, white farmers, and African collaborators. Sensational accounts of violence flooded the newsreels, while Britain responded by detaining and torturing thousands of Africans and by bombing their forest hideaways. The colonial government seemed to have reasserted control over the colony in early 1960, but many in Kenya remained wary. Even before Colonial Secretary Ian Macleod announced that African majority representation in politics, and eventually independence, were coming to Kenya, whites reacted against upcoming constitutional talks and the very idea of African political control. Many thought that no safeguards would be strong enough to protect the interests of white settlers in

an African-run government. Some Kenya residents therefore developed elaborate plans for a transfer of white farms to Africans, and the departure of white settlers from Kenya. (Dudziak 2006: 739)

In anticipation of heated land disputes Marshall sought to create a document which would protect the land rights of all citizens including over twenty different Native tribes. Kenya also had a diverse minority population which included thousands of Europeans and East Asians, so the laws had to cover the minorities. Additionally, Marshall sought to “protect the rights of the white minorities which [were] outnumbered about 100 to one” (Dudziak 2006: 745). Interpretation was a very important part of the process of drafting Kenya’s Constitution. In light of political conflict, Marshall made certain that one legal phrase in particular would take on a completely new meaning. As Marshall explains:

When you hear a lot of stories about Africa and you get to a place like Kenya and other countries like that, where they think the same way we do, I was happy to find that the Schedule of Rights that I drew for the Kenyan Government was working very well. In some instances they have a little bit more due process than we have over here. The difference is that where we have one phrase, “due process of law,” they have about three and a half pages of what is due process in their Schedule of Rights. For instance, if somebody takes your land and you don’t like it, you go to the highest court. You don’t go to all the other courts. You go straight in and say, “I don’t like it,” and you do it without cost. (Tushnet 2001: 174)

Reflecting on the expediency of due process in Kenya, Marshall says: “when you can give to the white man in Africa what you couldn’t give the black man in Mississippi. Its good” (Tushnet 2001:446; Dudziak 2006: 778). Dudziak performs a rhetorical analysis of Marshall’s phraseology: “‘when you can give,’ that is, when you have the power to give. ‘what you couldn’t give,’ that is what you didn’t have the power to give” (Dudziak 2006: 778). Dudziak’s analysis insinuates that Marshall viewed the Constitution as a decisive form of empowerment. Through the act of adopting a Constitution, the Kenyan government had gained the

power to grant amnesty to white people, whereas previously they had no power at all. As framer, Marshall viewed the Constitution as a way of working toward democracy and establishing a new culture of nonviolence throughout the country. (Dudziak 2006: 778; Wills 2022)

Marshall uses an important single word phrase (SWP) in describing the experience of watching his Constitution shape the new government:

The white people who remained in Kenya, for the most part, were beautiful. For example, when the panic started, Ian McCleod said, “Well, I don’t see why everybody’s panicking. My mother lives here, and I wouldn’t leave my mother here If I were afraid of something.” Now the interesting thing to me is that the white people who stayed there took part in the government—I remember when the leadership was turned over to Kenyatta. My wife and I were over there as his guests, the independence was declared at midnight. The next morning in Parliament, Jomo Kenyatta said, “We will now attend to the first order of business of the new government. Governor so and so, ”whatever the whole governor’s name was, “stand up,” and this man stood up. He said, “The first order of business is, we’re going to reappoint you as governor.” And that gave everybody the meaning of the word, “harambee,” which means, “pull together,” and the whole government was like that, and it’s like that to this day. Well, I’m glad I had a part in it. (Tushnet 2001:446)

The single-word phrase harambee means “all pull together” in Swahili. It is the country’s motto and it appears on the Kenyan coat of arms featuring two standing lions facing one another, with a red, black, and green shield between them. The lions are wielding short-handled African spears, and harambee is spelled out at the bottom of the shield. An appropriate English translation for the term harambee might include the words: teamwork, alliance, or even synergy. Harambee is a multifaceted concept centered on establishing cohesion and community alliance, which may be considered a hallmark of many African cultures. For instance, the African-American holiday Kwanzaa, created in 1966 by Black Arts Movement (1965-1975) scholar Dr. Maulana Ron

Karenga (b.1941) is centered around seven important multifaceted concepts expressed in single-word Swahili phrases: umoja (unity), kujichagulia (self-determination), ujima (collective work and responsibility), ujamaa (cooperative economics), nia (purpose), kuumba (creativity) and imani (faith). (*Smithsonian*) Likewise, Harambee remains an important concept in Kenya and other parts of Africa. For instance, the Namibian government recently enacted the Harambee Prosperity Plan (2021-2025) which is a series of legislative measures aimed at improving the country socially, economically, and politically following the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020.

Marshall discussed another political phrase that became important during his stay in Africa. Upon his arrival, he found that he and African nationalists would be working under very difficult conditions. Marshall explains: “The restrictions were almost unbelievable. Africans could not hold a meeting in a building. As a result, the only meetings they had were outside (qtd. in Dudziak 2006: 740-41). Marshall describes what it was like when he returned the next day and attempted to enter a meeting of the African Elected Members Organization in Kiambu:

There were two thousand Africans standing out in the field, perfectly quiet, and the leaders were meeting in the building but they couldn’t go in. The leaders were in one building. They were out. They were standing out in that hot sun, all day, waiting for the leaders to come out and report to them. (Dudziak 2006: 741)

Marshall and Tom Mboya desperately wanted to enter the meeting, but due to the restrictions, they were not allowed. Mboya explained to the district officer that they had recently obtained a permit, but the officer informed them that their permit had been revoked. In an epiphanic moment, Marshall realized that there was a possibility that if he continued to press the issue, he might be searched, and if that were the case, he would surely spend the rest of his life in jail because of the money, paraphernalia, and other things he had in his pockets for Mboya and others (Dudziak 2006: 742). With a sudden change of course, Marshall decided to ask the district officer if he could briefly address the large crowd. Marshall explains:

They said, “Nope. No speeches.” I said, “I’m not going to make a speech. Just let me say one word of greeting.” I said, “Okay,” and I jumped up on top of this station wagon that Mboya was driving, and I looked over the crowd, and they all recognized Tom Mboya, and I guess they knew who I was, I don’t know. Well, as I looked at them, I just shouted out real loud one word, “Uhuru!” and pandemonium broke out. They all crowded, cheered, and everything, and the district officer was really mad as all get out. The reason was, the word “Uhuru” means “Freedom Now,” Not tomorrow, but freedom right now. And he said, “I told you not to—” I said, “But I didn’t say but one word.” So he told me where I’d better go right quick, so I did.” (Dudziak 2006:742-43)

As Marshall asserts, the officer was mad as “all get out.” The crowd had responded so energetically because the single-word phrase Marshall uttered was “political dynamite” (Williams 1998: 285). This anecdote illustrates that Marshall had gained more than a basic understanding of the social and political climate in Kenya, and he used that knowledge to keep himself out of prison and transform what had been a motionless atmosphere into a boisterous mini-rally. The story also illustrates that Marshall had gained some basic understanding of the sayings of the people, which was more than likely a deliberate move on his part. Given the crowd’s reaction, the single-word phrase “Uhuru” may be viewed in the same light as many of the proverbs, sayings, and expressions used during fights for Civil Rights in America. Bellowing the phrase at the top of his lungs was Marshall’s show of solidarity between two struggles for freedom—the one in Kenya and the ongoing struggles for freedom in America.

6. Legal expressions and proverbs

In addition to the Randolph proverbs and expressions, Marshall had a storehouse of other legal expressions and proverbs which he employed from time to time. In a letter to Roy Wilkins dated January 26, 1940, Marshall protests the amount of NAACP funding spent on legal defense. According to Marshall, the NAACP should have been allocating more of their funds for this specific purpose. In the letter Marshall exclaims: “When we compare the

money spent for legal defense, we can see that we are getting away with murder” (Long 2011: 60). The proverbial expression “to get away with murder” (Bryan and Mieder 2016: 527) is then followed by more explanation:

Outside of branch and youth work, which is organization work, *what do we do?* Anti-lynching and legal defense and education. What do we justify our existence upon? These items. Our members and Negroes in general want *action*. To get action we must spend money. (Long 2011: 60) (emphasis in original text)

Marshall uses the proverbial expression “to give up the robe for the sword” in his speech on the importance of judicial neutrality (1981). In the speech, Marshall argues that responsibility for lowering the crime rate does not lie solely on the court system:

The tools for solving these problems are in the hands of other branches of government because that is where the Constitution has placed them. That is also where we should leave them. I therefore urge that you politely disregard any suggestion that you give up the robe for the sword. (Long 2011: 189)

As a young lawyer, fresh out of law school, Marshall was sometimes appointed by the NAACP to observe cases to protect judges against charges of racial bias (Williams 1998: 100). In one of such cases a bank president’s eighteen-year-old daughter had been beaten severely in an attempted rape by a Black worker. Consequently, the jury reached a verdict very quickly and the man was sentenced to life in prison. Marshall would later write to his mentor Houston: “He is guilty as the devil” (Williams 1998: 101).

In *Sweatt v Painter* (1950) Marshall helped Herman Marion Sweatt (1912-1982) gain admittance to the University of Texas Law School. The victory was the result of a four-year legal battle with many complex challenges. One determining factor in the case had been Marshall’s meticulous preparation of Sweatt for cross-examination:

The climactic moment came when Sweatt testified he would never go to a segregated law school, even at a newly proposed \$3 million

Jim Crow facility. Sweatt told the judge that any segregated school was inherently unequal. Under intense cross-examination from Texas lawyers, the NAACP plaintiff was unflappable. (Williams 1998: 247)

Afterwards, the opposing counsel commented to Marshall on the mental fortitude of their brave witness and Marshall responded: "Well you know we woodshed our witnesses pretty well... Matter of fact, I expected him to do well. We went out early this morning and filled him full of gin" (Williams 1998: 248). It was a result of Marshall's training under the tutelage of Houston that Marshall would hold mock trials which included rigorous rehearsals for questioning to avoid any costly errors. The proverbial expression "to woodshed the witness" is a euphemism for intense preparation.

One legal proverb Marshall used was derived from his father. In a 1977 interview, Marshall explains why he believes members of his own family would not have put up with Jim Crow laws if they had the formal legal training that Marshall was fortunate enough to receive. Marshall supports this assertion with an illustration of his father's tenacious spirit. Marshall says:

I mean, for example, my father had a flat rule. He believed that every man's house was his castle. He had a flat rule, no man could come in his house without his permission. And he used to say, if anybody ever did, he'd kill him. (Tushnet 2011: 425)

This flat rule even applied to the local police captain, and in turn the captain respected the elder Marshall's wishes:

...the captain of our precinct was a very good friend of my father's, Captain Cook...I can remember, would come to the door and ring the doorbell, and I'd go to the door, and he'd say, "Hey, young man, is your father in?" I'd say, "Yes, come on in." He'd say, "Oh no. No." Then he'd holler in, "Can I come in, Willie?" Father would say, "Yes, come on in, Captain." But he ...believed, that was his castle. (Tushnet 2011: 425)

The proverb, "Every man's house is his castle" was a well-known proverb, even before it was documented in legal texts. From a historical perspective, nearly every civilization dating back to

ancient Rome has some variation of what later became known as the Castle Doctrine. It was ascertained from English folk law by Sir Edward Coke who wrote in 1628: “For a man’s house is his castle...and each man’s home is his safest refuge” (Martin).

Marshall employs several other important legal proverbs that date as far back as ancient Rome or earlier; one of which represents the most basic fundamental principles in legal studies and what many may consider to be the foundation of American democracy. The proverb “Every man has his day in court” was used by Marshall in the closing of a speech entitled: “The Judiciary and Fundamental Human Liberties” presented before the Second Circuit Judicial Conference (1980). Before employing the proverb, Marshall builds up to it carefully:

And once inside the courtroom, each person has an opportunity to be heard, to participate in the legal process and to speak his mind about his fundamental rights. This participation serves to recognize, every day in every court, the moral worth of each individual. Each person should have the sense that through the courts the avenues of government are open to him, that he can state his viewpoint and be fairly heard by a neutral decision maker. (Tushnet 2011: 185)

Marshall goes on to thoroughly explain why he believes it is the most unwavering of all American principles:

There has been a growing recognition that it is vitally important that people have a sense of participation in the decision-making process. It is not enough that the decision be correct; someone must have listened to the claimant and by that listening acknowledged the importance of the individual. (Tushnet 2011: 185)

As his grand finale, Marshall leaves his audience to consider the proverb and ponder its meaning, saying: “Our country prides itself on the fact that every person gets his ‘day in court,’ and that ideal must never be forgotten” (Tushnet 2011: 185).

In a speech presented before the Second Circuit Judicial Conference (1987) Marshall speaks against the practice of detaining those accused of crimes as a preventative measure, utilizing two important Roman legal proverbs in the process. Mar-

shall says: “Preventative detention severely undermines our long established and much vaunted principle that a person accused of a crime is presumed innocent until proven guilty” (Tushnet 2011: 207). The proverb “innocent until proven guilty” is then supported with a brief anecdote depicting the 4th century Roman trial from which the phrase originates:

A Roman prosecutor was publicly trying a case before the Emperor Julian. Midway through the proceedings, the prosecutor realized that the case was in trouble and that the defendant was likely to carry the day and so, unable to contain himself, the prosecutor passionately appealed to the Emperor, “Oh, Illustrious Caesar, if it is sufficient to deny, what will happen to the guilty?” To which Julian replied, “If it suffices to accuse, what will become of the innocent?” (Tushnet 2011: 207)

The statement “If it suffices to accuse, what will become of the innocent?” is widely regarded as a legal maxim. It is used in the title of an essay by legal scholar, Elizabeth E. Joh, in which Joh argues against the consideration of acquitted conduct in sentencing. The title reads, “‘If it suffices to accuse’: *United States v. Watts* and the Reassessment of Acquittals” (1999). Judge John B. Stevens opens a recent op-ed piece about the presumption of innocence with a version of the anecdote depicting Ceasar. Immediately following the Ceasar anecdote, Stevens exclaims in an authoritative fashion: “The U.S. Supreme Court has long proclaimed the standard of presumption of innocence in American jurisprudence as undoubted law, axiomatic law” (Stevens 2021).

In another speech, Marshall explains that a similar legal proverb which also dates back to ancient Rome conveys an important message he learned in his early years. Marshall says:

This, so I was taught, was not to coddle the guilty, but to protect the innocent. I was raised in the days when the prevailing maxim was: “It is better that a thousand guilty people go free than that one innocent person suffer unjustly” (Tushnet 2011: 188).

Several variations of the proverb “It is better that a thousand guilty people go free than that one innocent person suffer unjust-

ly” are analyzed by Vidar Halvorsen (2004). The title of Halvorsen’s essay derives part of its namesake from an interpretation of the Roman doctrine made by William Blackstone in 1769 in which Blackstone states: “the law holds that it is better that ten guilty persons escape, than that one innocent suffer” (Halvorsen 2004). It is unclear how or why the number ten increased to one thousand in Marshall’s interpretation or why Blackstone uses the number ten. However, Halvorsen infers that there may be some level of symbolic significance attached to the number ten. Nevertheless, quantity has no bearing on the overall message emphasizing the Court’s responsibility to protect the innocent.

Marshall used an important proverb derived from British common law in a speech entitled: “The Dangers of Judicial Restraint” (1979). Throughout the speech, Marshall argues that limitations must be placed on the Court’s ability to suppress the collective voice of the press. Likewise, according to Marshall, the Court’s unlimited freedom to restrain pretrial detainees must also be placed in check with careful attention being given to the negative effects that unnecessary detention may have. Marshall states:

As those of you with experience in complex civil rights litigation involving schools, prisons, or mental institutions appreciate, it is sometimes difficult for a federal court to know the difference between administrative convenience and institutional necessity. But we have long since abandoned the notion that the king can do no wrong. Certainly, wardens should not be treated better than royalty (Tushnet 2011: 181).

The tenet from British common law, “the king can do no wrong” (Bryan et al. 2016: 440) or *rex potest peccare* forms the basis of the Doctrine of Sovereign Immunity which states that no sovereign territory or state can be sued without its consent. Furthermore, such territories are also free from any kind of legal wrongdoing. Marshall holds that such philosophy granting complete immunity is outdated, useless, and even harmful.

The antiquated axiom “The king can do no wrong” mirrors another dogmatic phrase analyzed by Marshall in an interview. The phrase is uttered as Marshall is contemplating the nature of

the racism he experienced as a child and the psychological impact that it had on himself and others. Marshall says:

I mean, we had a phrase around school that “white is right.” Now, when I would say it, I was joking. Was the other guy joking? I’m not too sure he was joking. I’m not too sure (Tushnet 2011: 500).

The subject then turns to the importance of “The Doll Test,” the famous experiment performed by the husband and wife team of psychologists, Kenneth and Mamie Clark, who proved through empirical research, that racism was detrimental to the growth and development of Black children because it often led to an inferiority complex. The results of the scientific experiment helped to secure Marshall’s victory in *Brown*. The tautological phrase “white is right” is an anti-proverb derived from the proverb pair “might makes right” and “right makes might.” Mieder categorizes them as a pair because they are both so commonly used. According to Litovkina and Mieder, “We laugh at some anti-proverbs because they skew our expectations about traditional values, order, and rules” (Litovkina and Mieder 2006: 44). Likewise, Mieder (2019) explains that they date back to ancient Rome and may be found in the works of Plato, Plautus, Ovid, Lucan, and Seneca. Furthermore, they have been frequented by the likes of Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865), Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902), Harry S. Truman (1884-1972), and Barack Obama (b.1961). Maintaining a high frequency of usage in popular culture throughout the ages increases the likelihood that anti-proverbs such as “white is right” will eventually appear alongside a source proverb. Mieder brings to light an important statement made by George Cornewall Lewis in *The Influence of Authority in Matters of Opinion* (1849):

In general, proverbs express only empirical laws of human nature—that is to say, being generalizations from partial experience, they are only true within certain limits, and subject to certain conditions. Before, therefore, a popular proverb can be safely used for philosophical purposes as evidence of a general truth, it must undergo a process of analysis; it must be limited according to mental tendencies which it involves, and the circumstances in which it is applicable. In this manner, proverbs which are apparently contradictory may be recon-

ciled, and the partial truth which they contain will be extracted and rendered profitable. (Quoted in Mieder 2019: 265)

Two things may be deduced from Cornewall’s statement to better understand the tautological anti-proverb, “white is right.” First, it was a direct reflection of the conditions Marshall grew up in. Secondly, as Cornewall contends, a proverb does not need to be entirely accurate to gain any degree of currency, nor does it have to be precise to derive any amount of truth from it. Cynical proverbial phrases regarding race were common during the civil rights era, and Marshall grew up hearing them. Marshall’s father would sometimes use phrases such as “that is mighty white of you,” or “that is mighty Black of you,” or call either of his sons “the white man in the woodpile” to expose flaws in their reasoning as they argued politics at the dinner table. In a 1977 interview, Ed Edwin asks Marshall about the prevalence of what Edwin describes as “semantic institutionalizing” in African-American culture. Edwin says:

A tangential question—this complex you’ve mentioned, to what extent, in your earlier years in this activists work, did you find that Negroes were aware of the semantic institutionalizing—such as “that’s white of you,” or “free, white and twenty-one” adapted from the Constitution—with which I, as a white, grew up, hearing it but not knowing what it meant. And used it not knowing what it meant (Tushnet 2001: 499).

Edwin’s question raises the possibility that some people use cynical proverbial phrases regarding race without having any idea about what they mean or where they originate. The popular phrase “free white and twenty-one” emerged in the mid-nineteenth century when voting requirements no longer included property ownership as a prerequisite, citizens only needed to be free, white, and at least twenty-one years of age. In 1963 it would be the title of a low-budget film, a courtroom drama about an African-American man on trial for raping a white woman. Many understand the phrase “free, white, and twenty-one” to mean “obligated and indebted to no one.” Edwin’s description, “semantic institutionalizing” highlights the psychological impact of

promoting white privilege through phraseology. Marshall insists he was only joking whenever he said, “white is right,” but he is not as certain about other people’s motives for using the phrase. Marshall surely understood how white privilege leads to racial injustice. By grade school, he had been involved in several physical altercations with white people who felt they deserved the privilege of calling him the “N-word.” Marshall could also hear officers beating confessions out of Black prisoners because his school in Baltimore was several feet away from the police precinct. Thus, Marshall could not have been entirely joking when he uttered the phrase “white is right.” Regardless of whether Marshall was joking or not, the anti-proverb “white is right” represents historically unfair circumstances in the American legal system—a predicament that Marshall would spend his entire life trying to change. Marshall summarized his rationale for devoting decades of his life to attacking segregated schools in one brief saying: “unless our children begin to learn together, there is little hope that our people will ever learn to live together and understand each other” (Ball, 1998: 235; Crew 2019: 200-01). Marshall may not have been a very strong proponent of public protest, but he was a resilient advocate of unity.

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Index of Proverbs, Sayings, and Proverbial Expressions

(In the order in which they appear)

- (1) To be the right man, at the right time*
- (2) To be a social engineer*
- (3) To bang into someone's head*
- (4) To see the big picture*
- (5) There's no law on our side? Let's make some.*
- (6) Lose your head and lose your case.*
- (7) No tea for the feeble, no crepe for the dead.*
- (8) To be a dead pigeon*
- (9) To let the law catch up*
- (10) To go the whole hog*
- (11) People are people*
- (12) Rules are rules*
- (13) Lawlessness is lawlessness*
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- (16) Boys will be boys*
- (17) To decide not to decide*
- (18) If Brown v. Board of Education provided the foundation for school integration in the 1950s and 1960s, Cooper v. Aaron provided the muscle.*
- (19) Justice delayed is justice denied*
- (20) To wear life like a loose garment*
- (21) All men against all men*
- (22) Ask not what the Supreme Court alone can do for civil rights; ask what you can do to help the cause of civil rights.*
- (23) Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.*
- (24) We have nothing to fear but fear itself.*
- (25) The client pays the bill and he will ultimately call the tune.*
- (26) Last hired-first fired.*
- (27) Due process of the law*
- (28) Harambee*
- (29) Uhuru*
- (30) All get out*
- (31) To get away with murder*
- (32) To give up the robe for the sword*

- (33) *To be as guilty as the devil*
(34) *To woodshed the witness*
(35) *Every man's house is his castle.*
(36) *Every man has his day in court.*
(37) *Innocent until proven guilty*
(38) *If it suffices to accuse, what will become of the innocent?*
(39) *It is better that a thousand guilty people go free than one innocent person suffer unjustly.*
(40) *The King can do no wrong.*
(41) *White is right.*
(42) *Might makes right/ Right makes might*
(43) *To be mighty "white" or "black" of someone*
(44) *To be the white man in the wood pile*
(45) *To be free, white, and twenty-one*
(46) *Unless our children begin to learn together, there is little hope that our people will ever learn to live together and understand each other.*

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[https://doi.org/ 10.29162/pv.42.1.1015](https://doi.org/10.29162/pv.42.1.1015)

Original scientific paper

Received on 12 October 2024

Accepted for publication on 6 April 2025

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TOWARDS A LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF SUBSTITUTION IN ANGLO-AMERICAN ANTI-PROVERBS ABOUT MONEY

Abstract: The recent study is to be seen as a continuation of the author's previous research (conducted alone or with co-authors) which is concerned with the study of various techniques of proverb transformation. The study first addresses the background of anti-proverb research and terminology. It then looks at the most frequent themes covered in anti-proverbs, with a particular focus on proverbs about money. The main focus of this study is on the analysis of substitution, one of the most popular mechanisms of proverb variation in Anglo-American anti-proverbs about money. The Anglo-American anti-proverbs covered in the study were taken primarily from American and British written sources. The study lists many examples of these anti-proverbs and reveals a wide range of techniques employed in them. The study seeks answers to the following questions: What are the most frequent types of substitution; What components of the original proverb are replaced when an anti-proverb is created; How many items are replaced from these; Where are the replaced items; What themes appear in our anti-proverbs?

Keywords: anti-proverb, proverb, transformation, Anglo-American, substitution, money

1. Introduction

1.1. Background of research and terminology

For centuries, proverbs have provided a framework for endless transformation¹. In recent decades, the modification of proverbs has taken on such proportions that we sometimes encounter even more proverb transformations than traditional proverbs. Wolfgang Mieder invented the term *anti-proverb* (or in German *Antispruch*) for such deliberate proverb innovations, also known as alterations, parodies, transformations, variations, wisecracks, mutations, or fractured proverbs. This term has been widely accepted by proverb scholars all over the world as a general label for such innovative alterations and reactions to traditional proverbs: *антипословица* (Russian), *anti-proverb* (English), *anti(-)proverbe* (French) (see the general discussion of the genre of anti-proverbs in T. Litovkina 2005; T. Litovkina and Mieder 2006: 1–54; T. Litovkina 2015; T. Litovkina et al. 2021; Hrisztova-Gotthardt et al. 2023).

Although proverb transformations arise in a variety of forms, several types stand out (which are by no means mutually exclusive), e.g., adding new words to the original text, replacing a single word, substituting two or more words, changing the second part of the proverb, melding two proverbs, adding literal interpretations, reversing word order, and reversing sounds, etc.

Anti-proverbs may contain insightful social commentary (*A condom a day keeps AIDS away* (Mieder 1991: 99) {An apple a day keeps the doctor away}²), but they may also be based on mere wordplay or puns, and they may very often have originated with the sole purpose of deriving play forms such as *A fool and his monkey are soon parted* (Margo 1982) {A fool and his money are soon parted}, but nonetheless, scores of phrases like the one cited above can be found in anti-proverb collections in various

¹ Some parts of this study, in particular the Introduction (including the texts of anti-proverbs), have appeared in T. Litovkina 2005, or have been published in Mieder and Tóthné Litovkina 1999; T. Litovkina and Mieder 2006; T. Litovkina 2015; 2025a; T. Litovkina et al. 2021.

² For the reader's convenience all anti-proverbs in this study are followed by their original forms, given in {} brackets.

languages such as English, German, French, Russian, Hungarian, etc. (see the titles of such anti-proverb collections in T. Litovkina et al. 2021: 11–19).

As Mieder and T. Litovkina emphasised: “It should be noted that while some anti-proverbs negate the “truth” of the original piece of wisdom completely, the vast majority of them put the proverbial wisdom only partially into question, primarily by relating it to a particular context or thought in which the traditional wording does not fit. In fact, the “anti” component in the term “anti-proverb” is not directed against the concept of “proverb” as such.” (T. Litovkina and Mieder 2006: 5). Although the term introduced by Wolfgang Mieder has been accepted by many proverb scholars worldwide, the opinion of scholars who have stated that not all anti-proverbs are opposed to proverbs, and who have suggested avoiding the prefix *anti-* (“against”), for example, by using the prefix *para-* (“beside”), should also be noted (for more, see T. Litovkina et al. 2021; Hrisztova-Gotthardt et al. 2023).

In the vast majority of proverb transformations, the structure of the original proverb is maintained. Sometimes, however, the authors of proverb alterations, twist a proverb so dramatically that only a few words of the original text remain—or that the structure of the parent proverb is completely remodelled. Consider some examples below (Ex. 1a–1b):

- (1a) *If you must rise early, be sure you are a bird and not a worm.* (Esar 1968: 250) {The early bird catches the worm}
 (1b) *A valet’s testimony tells you more about valets than heroes.* (Leo Rosten, in Berman 1997: 189) {No man is a hero to his valet}

As Mieder (1993: 121) states, “Mere proverb allusions run the risk of not being understood, even if they refer to very common proverbs. Nevertheless, such lack of communication is rather rare among native speakers...” However, parodies like the ones above (Ex. 1a, 1b) might be completely unrecognizable to a foreigner. This is one more reason why anyone wishing to communicate or read in any language should have an active knowledge of its most popular proverbs (see T. Litovkina 2000, 2005: 120–141, 2023a, 2023b; T. Litovkina and Mieder 2006: 36–45).

When translated from one language to another, an anti-proverb more often than not will lose its message: the puns, parodies or wordplay characteristic of one language will seldom carry over successfully into another. Nevertheless, there are cases in which an internationally spread proverb inspires parallel anti-proverbs in two or more languages. Here are some examples (Ex. 2a–2d) quoted in T. Litovkina 2005: 22 (for more examples, see also T. Litovkina 2005; T. Litovkina and Mieder 2006: 9–11; T. Litovkina 2015; T. Litovkina et al.: 2021: 32–33):

(2a) English: *To err is human – to totally muck things up needs a computer.* (Kilroy 1985: 220)

(2b) Hungarian: *Tévedni emberi dolog, de igazán összekutyulni valamit csak számítógéppel lehet.* (T. Litovkina and Vargha 2005: 90) {Tévedni emberi dolog}

(2c) Russian: *Человеку свойственно ошибаться, но с помощью компьютера это ему удастся намного лучше.* (Walter and Mokienko 2001: 51) {Человеку свойственно ошибаться}

(2d) German: *Irren ist menschlich, aber für das totale Chaos braucht man einen Computer.* (Mieder 1998: 132) {Irren ist menschlich}

(2e) French: *L'erreur est humaine, mais un véritable désastre nécessite un ordinateur.* (Barta³ 2003) {L'erreur est humaine}

1.2. Anglo-American proverbs and anti-proverbs about money

All's fair game for anti-proverbs—there is hardly a topic that anti-proverbs do not address. Among the most common topics addressed in proverb alterations are women (see T. Litovkina 2005; 2018; T. Litovkina and Mieder 2019, etc.), sexuality (see T. Litovkina 2018: 149–170; T. Litovkina and Mieder 2019: 65–79, etc.), professions and occupations (see T. Litovkina 2005, 2016),

³ The text was supplied by Péter Barta.

marriage and love (T. Litovkina 2018; T. Litovkina and Mieder 2019, etc.), children (T. Litovkina 2024), food (Barta 2007), etc.

Undoubtedly, money is a frequent theme in Anglo-American anti-proverbs.

If we look at the list of 580 Anglo-American proverbs that served as a template for variation in the corpus of anti-proverbs (see T. Litovkina and Mieder 2006: 55–348), we will notice the following: First, there are numerous proverbs in our corpus which contain words such as ‘dollar’, ‘penny’, ‘pound’, ‘mammon’, ‘free’, etc., for example: *A dollar in the bank is worth two in the hand; A penny saved is a penny earned; Take care of your pennies and the pounds [the dollars] will take care of themselves; You can't serve God and mammon; The best things in life are free.* Second, 13 proverbs in our corpus contain the word “money”, e.g.: *Money talks; A fool and his money are soon parted.* Last but not least, there are scores of proverbs that might not contain any of the words listed above, but in their transformations, these words still occur. To illustrate this phenomenon with the following three proverb alterations below, all of which contain the word “money” (Ex. 3a–3c):

(3a) *Blondes prefer gentlemen with **money**.* (Safian 1967: 39) {Gentlemen prefer blondes}

(3b) *Love makes the world go round, but it's the lack of **money** that keeps it flat.* (Safian 1967: 56) {Love makes the world go round}

(3c) ***Money** is its own reward.* (Weller 1982) {Virtue is its own reward}

The 13 proverbs containing the word “money” included in T. Litovkina and Mieder’s collections of anti-proverbs (see Mieder and Tóthné Litovkina 1999; T. Litovkina and Mieder 2006; see also T. Litovkina 2005) are listed below (the list below was first published in T. Litovkina 2025a: 85–86). The actual proverbs are given in italics. Each proverb is followed by a number in parentheses indicating the number of anti-proverbs located for it. This is followed by a short statement concerning the meaning of the proverb in angle brackets (< >).

- *Money talks.* (66) <Money is the most influential and important thing in the world.> (T. Litovkina and Mieder 2006: 227–230)
- *A fool and his money are soon parted.* (47) <Foolish people spend their money without consideration and soon find themselves without any money at all.> (T. Litovkina and Mieder 2006: 61–63)
- *Money [The love of money] is the root of all evil.* (36) <All wrongdoing can be traced to the relentless pursuit of riches.> (T. Litovkina and Mieder 2006: 223–224)
- *Money isn't everything.* (35) <Wealth alone does not bring contentment.> (T. Litovkina and Mieder 2006: 224–226)
- *Money can't [doesn't] buy happiness.* (34) <Financial security does not necessarily mean happiness.> (T. Litovkina and Mieder 2006: 220–222)
- *Time is money.* (15) <Time is as valuable as money.> (T. Litovkina and Mieder 2006: 309)
- *Money doesn't grow on trees.* (12) <It is difficult to get money.> (T. Litovkina and Mieder 2006: 222–223)
- *Money makes the mare go.* (9) <If you have money, you can obtain everything.> (T. Litovkina and Mieder 2006: 227)
- *Lend your money and lose your friend.* (3) (T. Litovkina and Mieder 2006: 197)
- *Money makes a [the] man.* (3) <Money is the most influential and important thing in the world.> (T. Litovkina and Mieder 2006: 226)
- *Money burns a hole in the pocket.* (1) <People with money are likely to spend it.> (T. Litovkina and Mieder 2006: 220)
- *He who marries for money sells his freedom.* (1) <Entering a relationship because of money makes a person dependent.> (T. Litovkina and Mieder 2006: 164)
- *Money makes money.* (1) <Wealth breeds more wealth.> (T. Litovkina and Mieder 2006: 226)

2. Substitution in Anglo-American anti-proverbs about money

The following section is devoted to the analysis of one of the main mechanisms of proverb variation in Anglo-American anti-proverbs about money, namely the substitution⁴ (or exchange, or change, or replacement) of one of the components of the proverb. Main emphasis is laid on the formal features of the alterations, and the themes that emerge in them are only briefly discussed.

The 263 Anglo-American anti-proverbs discussed and analyzed in the present study were taken primarily from American and British written sources⁵. The texts of anti-proverbs were drawn from hundreds of books and articles on puns, one-liners, toasts, wisecracks, quotations, aphorisms, maxims, quips, epigrams, and graffiti, the vast majority of which were published in two collections of anti-proverbs compiled by Wolfgang Mieder and Anna T. Litovkina: “Twisted Wisdom: Modern Anti-Proverbs” (Mieder and Tóthné Litovkina 1999) and “Old Proverbs Never Die, They Just Diversify: A Collection of Anti-Proverbs” (T. Litovkina and Mieder 2006).

2.1. The place of substitution

In Section 2.1. the place of substitution is discussed: changing the second part of the proverb (Section 2.1.1.) and changing the first part of the proverb (Section 2.1.2.). Finally, the substitution of words in various parts of proverbs is discussed (Section 2.1.3.).

⁴ For addition in Anglo-American anti-proverbs about money, see T. Litovkina 2025d, 2025e; for punning in Anglo-American anti-proverbs about money, see T. Litovkina 2025b, 2025c, for repetition, literalization, word order reversal, word class change, and many other humor devices in Anglo-American anti-proverbs about money, see T. Litovkina 2025a, 2025c.

⁵ The vast majority of the examples were found when I was in the USA and Great Britain, being supported by a Fulbright research grant and by a Hungarian State Eötvös Scholarship which enabled me to conduct research at the Department of Anthropology at the University of California at Berkeley (1998–1999) and at Oxford University Press (2003).

2.1.1. Changing the second part of the proverb

Very common are such anti-proverbs in which the second part of the proverb is entirely changed. Three transformations of the proverb *A fool and his money are soon parted* are provided below (Ex. 4a–4b):

- (4a) *A fool and his money **can go places***. (Woods 1967: 53)
 (4b) *A fool and his money **sooner or later wind up in college***. (Loomis 1949: 354)

Phonologically similar words are frequently chosen for this purpose, as in the example below (Ex. 5) (while the word *soon* is substituted by the *saloon*, the *potted* replaces the *parted*):

- (5) *A fool and his money are **saloon potted***. (Safian 1967: 46)
 {A fool and his money are soon parted}

Completing half-stated proverbs has become a party game of sorts, and teachers have also used this method to see whether children still know proverbs or simply to encourage their creative thinking (Ex. 6a–6c). For more on American children's knowledge of proverbs, as well as exercises to teach Anglo-American proverbs, see Monteiro 1968; Stark 1982; Mieder and Holmes 2000); for employment of proverbs and anti-proverbs about money in teaching English as foreign language, see T. Litovkina 2000: 199–205, 2023a: 15–19, 2023b:11–15):

- (6a) *He who marries for money..**better be nice to his wife***. (Stark 1982) {He who marries for money earns it}
 (6b) *Money is the root of..**the bank of America***. (Stark 1982)
 {Money is the root of all evil}
 (6c) *A fool and his money are..**very attached***. (Monteiro 1968: 128) {A fool and his money are soon parted}

Sometimes only one word of the second part of the proverb might be changed (most frequently, the last word, see Section 2.2.1., 2.2.2.), such as in the following transformation of the proverb *A fool and his money are soon parted* (Ex. 7) (for additional examples, Ex. 13a–16d, see Section 2.2.1., 2.2.2.):

(7) *A fool and his money are soon **popular***. (Metcalf 1993: 92)

2.1.2. Changing the first part of the proverb

While changing the second part of a proverb is a common technique in the corpus, changing the first part is relatively rare (Ex. 8, 9a–9d):

(8) ***Television violence** is the root of all evil*. (Liu and Vasselli 1996) {Money is the root of all evil}

The proverb *A fool and his money are soon parted* has provided numerous transformations of this kind (Ex. 9a–9d):

(9a) ***Users and their leisure time** are soon parted*. (Alexander 2004: 160)

(9b) ***A man and his resolution** are soon parted*. (Esar 1968: 677)

(9c) ***The rich man and his daughter** are soon parted*. (Frank McKinney Hubbard, in Prochnow and Prochnow 1988: 160)

(9d) ***A rich man and his daughter** are soon parted*. (Kin Hubbard, in Berman 1997: 141)

Furthermore, replacement of only a segment of the first part of a proverb might also occur in a proverb (Ex.10):

(10) *A fool and **her legs** are soon parted*. (Esar 1968: 638)

Finally, only one word of the first part might be substituted (most frequently the first word) (for numerous examples, see also Sections 2.2.1., 2.2.2., Ex. 12a–12c, 17a–17b, 21d, 22).

2.1.3. Substitution of words in various parts of proverbs

Words might be substituted in various parts of a proverb (Ex. 11a–11b) (for additional examples, see also Section 2.2.3., Ex. 25a–29):

(11a) *Marks' Law of Monetary Equalization:*

*A fool and **your** money are soon **partners**.* (Bloch 1990: 144)
 {A fool and his money are soon parted}

(11b) ***A bald man's hair is soon parted.*** (Christie Davies⁶ 1999)

2.2. How many components are substituted?

In Section 2.2. attention is given to how many components from the original text are substituted in a proverb. The analysis examines replacements in ascending order of quantity: single sound substitutions (Section 2.2.1), single word substitutions (Section 2.2.2), and cases involving two or more word replacements (Section 2.2.3).

2.2.1. Replacing a single sound

The sound (most frequently consonant) is mostly substituted in the initial position (Ex. 12a–12c):

(12a) ***Dime** is money.* (Margo 1982) {Time is money}

(12b) *With corrupt officials, money is the **loot** of all evil.*
 (Esar 1968: 96) {Money is the root of all evil}

(12c) ***Runny** is the **snoot** of all weevils.* (Farman 1989)
 {Money is the root of all evil}

The sound (vowel) in another position (Ex. 13a–13b):

(13a) *A fool and his money are soon **partied**.* (Safian 1967: 28)
 {A fool and his money are soon parted}

(13b) *A fool and his money are soon **potted**.* (Safian 1967: 28)
 {A fool and his money are soon parted}

2.2.2. Replacing a single word

Very popular are such proverb parodies that pervert the basic meaning of a proverb by simply replacing a single word (most frequently the first or last content word).

⁶ This text was submitted to me at Berkeley in May 1999 by professor Christie Davies (Reading, Great Britain) after he had read the collection “Twisted Wisdom: Modern Anti-Proverbs” (Mieder and Tóthné Litovkina 1999).

This type of proverb variation in which the last word is changed is clearly shown in numerous alterations of the well-known proverbs *Money is the root of all evil* and *A fool and his money are soon parted*, in which the last words (such as *evil* and *parted*) are substituted:

Replacing the last word (Ex. 14a–14b):

(14a) *Money is the root of all **wealth***. (Haan and Hammerstrom 1980)

(14b) *A fool and his money are soon **popular***. (Metcalf 1993: 92)

Some anti-proverbs question the truth of a proverb through employing antonyms. See the examples below in which the word *evil* is subsequently replaced by its antonyms, the word *good* (Ex. 15a) and the word *virtue* (Ex. 15b):

(15a) *Money is the root of all **good***. (Ayn Rand, in Clark 1977: 84) {Money is the root of all evil}

(15b) *The love of money is the root of all **virtue***. (Bernard Shaw, in Esar 1968: 255) {The love of money is the root of all evil}

The proverb *A fool and his money are soon parted* is very frequently used for the replacement of one word. Most frequently the last word of it (*parted*) is substituted (most typically based on phonological similarity of the words). Indeed, the selection of words replacing the word “parted” in the transformation of the proverb *A fool and his money are soon parted* is motivated by phonological convergences (Ex. 16a–16d):

(16a) *A fool and his money are soon **partied***. (Safian 1967: 28)

(16b) *A fool and his money are soon **partying***. (Esar 1968: 580)

(16c) *A fool and his money are soon **potted***. (Safian 1967: 28)

(16d) *A fool and his money are soon **spotted**.* (Anonymous 1908: 56)

The first content word is substituted (17a–17b):

(17a) ***Avarice** is the root of all evil.* (Prochnow and Prochnow 1987: 443) {Money is the root of all evil}

(17b) *The **lack** of money is the root of all evil.* (Mieder et al. 1992: 416) {The love of money is the root of all evil}

Replacing a word in another position (18a):

(18) *A fool and his **home-brew** are soon parted.* (Loomis 1949: 354) {A fool and his money are soon parted}

The authors of anti-proverbs very often seek to find a word that is phonologically similar to the one from the original proverb, as demonstrated in some of the examples above (such as the substitution of the last word in the proverb *A fool and his money are soon parted*), as well as in the following examples, which may also be described as paronomastic puns.

There are many different ways of distorting a word on a phonological basis. The most common and popular methods are addition (insertion), substitution, and omission (deletion). The first two basic types of alteration (substitution and addition) will be examined in more detail below, with illustrative examples. (Omission is rarely found in the present corpus.) Replacing a word by substituting one sound (see also Section 2.2.1. above, Ex. 12a–12c, 13a–13b) or a few sounds (Ex. 19):

(19) *A fool and his money are soon **partying**.* (Esar 1968: 580) {A fool and his money are soon parted}

One sound is substituted by two (Ex. 20a–20b):

(20a) *Money doesn't grow on **sprees**.* (Safian 1967: 44, 57)
{Money doesn't grow on trees}

(20b) *Runny is the **snoot** of all weevils.* (Farman 1989)
{Money is the root of all evil}

Addition of one or a few sounds (Ex. 21a–21d):

(21a) *A fool and his **mon**key are soon parted.* (Margo 1982)

{A fool and his money are soon parted}

(21b) *Money makes the **night**mare go.* (New Yorker, June 28, 1956) {Money makes the mare go}

(21c) *Runny is the snoot of all **w**eevils.* (Farman 1989) {Money is the root of all evil}

(21d) ***Mat**rimony is the root of all evil.* (Edmund and Workman Williams 1921: 275) {Money is the root of all evil}

Sometimes, entirely new word compositions can be observed in the anti-proverbs (Ex. 22):

(22) ***Mat**ri-money is the root of all evil.* (Anonymous 1908: 26) {Money is the root of all evil}

Combination of addition and substitution can be clearly demonstrated in the following examples (Ex. 23a–23b):

(23a) *Money is the root of all **id**yls.* (Safian 1967: 45) {Money is the root of all evil}

(23b) *A fool and his money are soon **sp**otted.* (Anonymous 1908: 56) {A fool and his money are soon parted}

2.2.3. Substituting two or more words

Another characteristic mechanism of proverb parody in the corpus of Anglo-American anti-proverbs is the substitution of two or more words. The proverbs which are built on binary structures (Dundes 1975) have become especially popular formulas on which to base multiple proverb variations of this kind, as for example “An X a day keeps the Y away”, “A(n) X in the hand is worth Y in the bush”, “An ounce of X is worth a pound of Y” and “Different X’s for different Y’s.

An Anglo-American proverb most popular for this type of alteration, according to T. Litovkina and Mieder’s data (see 2006), *Old soldiers never die, they just fade away*,⁷ is simply

⁷ For more on this proverb, most popular for variation in the corpus of Anglo-Amer-

reduced in its transformations to the formula “Old X-s never die; they just Y,” in which the words “soldiers” and “fade away” are substituted by whatever seems better to fit the needs of modern times (Ex. 24a–24e):

(24a) *Old accountants never die; they just lose their balance.* (Anonymous 1965: 290)

(24b) *Old farmers never die, they just go to seed.* (Prochnow and Prochnow 1987: 115)

(24c) *Old female lawyers never die; they just lose their appeals.* (Berman 1997: 379)

(24d) *Old lawyers never die, they just lose their appeal.* (Metcalf 1993: 132)

(24e) *Old teachers never die / they just grade away.* (Rogers 1982: 25)

As demonstrated above, the phrasal verb *fade away* from the proverb *Old soldiers never die, they just fade away* is replaced not only by another phrasal verb in one of the transformations above (such as *grade away* in the last example, see Ex. 24e), but also by three words (in the other examples, Ex. 24a–24d). Furthermore, the word *soldiers* is most frequently substituted by one word indicating various professions or occupations (such as *accountants* in Ex. 24a, *farmers* in Ex. 24b, etc.). In Example 24c above, it should be noted that the lawyers are not just lawyers but *female* lawyers. Another anti-proverb in the same mould—omitting the word “female” but most probably referring to it is Ex. 24d. In order to understand these ambivalent puns (as in the cited examples 24c and 24d) one requires the ability to interpret a situation from multiple perspectives.

Attention now turns to anti-proverbs relating to money. The proverb about money most popular for this type of alteration in which two or more words in various parts of the proverb are replaced is, without any doubt, *A fool and his money are soon parted*. In its alterations it is simply turned into the formula “*An X and his Y are soon parted*” in which the words *fool* and *money*

ican anti-proverbs (it has been the basis of 79 anti-proverbs), see T. Litovkina and Mieder 2006: 15–17.

are substituted. This is illustrated by the four examples below. In the first two proverb innovations, the words *fool* and his *money* are replaced by similar-sounding words (i.e. paronyms) *foal* and its *mummy* (Ex. 25a–25b⁸):

(25a) A horse farm made it a habit to bottle-feed its colts when they were only a few days old. Hence: *a **foal** and his **mummy** are soon parted.* (Jennings 1980: 47)

(25b) A Kentucky horse breeder named Schubert invariably has his young colts bottle-fed after they're three days old. He knows that *a **foal** and his **mummy** are soon parted.* (Cerf 1968: 19)

In the next example (Ex. 26), similarly to the previous two anti-proverbs (Ex. 25a–25b), the word *mummy* replaces the word *money*, but instead of the word *foal* the word *mule* appears in the parody. Again, the change of both the words in this transformation is based on phonological similarity:

(26) *A **mule** and its **mummy** are soon parted.* (Farman 1989)

The three examples above (Ex. 25a–25b, 26), in which the substitution of two words is based on phonological similarity, might also be called double paronomastic puns.

Contrary to the previous three examples, the replacement of words in the next two transformations (Ex. 27–28) is not based on phonological similarity:

(27) *A **man** and his **resolution** are soon parted.* (Esar 1968: 677) {A fool and his money are soon parted}

While in the example above (Ex. 27) two words in the proverb's first part are replaced (the *man* and the *resolution* consequently substitute the *fool* and the *money*), in the anti-proverb below (Ex. 28), three words are substituted (in various parts of the proverb):

⁸ These examples could be also discussed in Section 2.4. which addresses word substitution combined with word addition.

(28) *A **widow** and **her** money are soon **courted**.* (Berman 1997: 141) {A fool and his money are soon parted}

The distortion of three or even more words on a phonological basis is extremely rare in the present corpus (Ex. 29):

(29) ***Runny** is the **snoot** of all **weevils**.* (Farman 1989) {Money is the root of all evil}

2.3. Other types of substitution

After analyzing the most frequent types of substitution in anti-proverbs about money, it is also important to mention and exemplify less common types of substitution such as word-order reversal, word class change, and cases when one word is substituted by two (or even more) words.

There is a tradition of parodying individual proverbs by word-order reversal (frequently called metathesis or spoonerism), which questions or even rejects their traditional wisdom. Nouns and verbs are reversed most frequently. Word-order reversal is also a relatively common technique of proverb transformation in the present corpus of anti-proverbs about money.

Two nouns are interchanged subsequently in the following proverb alterations: *happiness* and *money* in the first example (Ex. 30a); as well as *money* and *evil* in the second one (Ex. 30b):

(30a) ***Happiness** can't buy **money**.* (Kandel 1976) {Money can't buy happiness}

(30b) *The love of **evil** is the root of all **money**.* (Esar 1952: 85) {The love of money is the root of all evil}

English has many examples of words with the same form used in both nominal and verbal functions. The twisting of proverbs may cause a change in the word classes. As the word class changes, the written and/or phonetic form of the words may undergo some modification. Extension of the use of some noun to a verbal capacity is shown in the following transformation in which a noun "root" is turned into a phrasal verb "roots out" (Ex. 31):

(31) *Money roots out all evil.* (Rosten 1972: 30) {Money is the root of all evil}

The structure of proverbs usually remains the same in their alterations, the number of words in the alterations, however, may differ (see also some examples above in Section 2.2.3., Ex. 24a–24d). Sometimes one word might be exchanged by two, or even more words (e.g., *parted* and *accepted in the highest social circles*), as in the two examples below (Ex. 32a–32b⁹):

(32a) *A fool and his money are soon **accepted in the highest social circles**.* (Berman 1997: 141) {A fool and his money are soon parted}

(32b) *A fool and his money **can make a lot of trouble before they are parted**.* (Esar 1968: 825) {A fool and his money are soon parted}

Likewise, in the anti-proverb below (Ex. 33) two words (*all evil*) are replaced by four (*the bank of America*):

(33) *Money is the root of...**the bank of America**.* (Stark 1982) {Money is the root of all evil}

2.4. *Combination of substitution with other mechanisms of variation*

Substitution in the present corpus is frequently combined with some other mechanisms of variation such as e.g., repeating words, literalization, extension of the use of word class, rhyme, blending, addition, punning, etc.

This section discusses and exemplifies a single mechanism: addition in combination with substitution. A very popular proverb for this type of variation in our corpus is *A fool and his money are soon parted*. The following proverb transformations (Ex. 34a–37) employ both word exchange and word addition. In

⁹ The Example 32b could be also treated as simultaneous addition of new words and omission of the word “soon”.

the two examples below, new words proceed the proverb (Ex. 34a–34b):

(34a) **Walton's Law of Politics:**

*A fool and his money are soon **elected**.* (Bloch 1990: 224)

(34b) **Marks' Law of Monetary Equalization:**

*A fool and your money are soon **partners**.* (Bloch 1990: 144)

The last example above (Ex. 34b) is a very interesting combination of addition and change of two words (the words *your* and *partners* are employed instead of the words *his* and *parted*), the second of which is based on punning. While the word *parted* in the four examples discussed in Section 2.2.2. above (see Ex. 16a–16d) is substituted by the words belonging to the same word class (such as *partied*, *partying*, *potted*, etc.), in this anti-proverb, it is substituted by a word belonging to a different lexical category, i.e. a paronomastic noun *partners*. In the example below (Ex. 35) addition is employed after the proverb text:

(35) *A fool and his **wife** are soon parted. **See Alimony**.*
(Wurdz 1904)

A similar example, also based on a word change in a proverb, as well as addition following a proverb text is demonstrated below (Ex. 36):

(36) *Money can't buy you **friends**, but it can bring you a **better class of enemies**.* (McLellan 1996: 158) {Money can't buy you happiness}

Addition of words inside the proverb text (*father's*) combined with the substitution of the second part of the proverb (*can go places*) is seen here (Ex. 37):

(37) *A fool and his **father's money** – **can go places**.* (Lieberman 1984: 98) {A fool and his money are soon parted}

In the two transformations of the proverb *Money is the root of all evil* below there are many things in common (Ex. 38a–38b). First

of all, both of them employ word changes based on sound similarity, i.e. in both examples paronomastic punning is employed. In the first example (Ex. 38a), the word *fruit* substitutes the *root* (i.e. sound addition takes place), while in the second (Ex. 38b), *loot* replaces *root* (sound substitution takes place). Additionally, both examples feature the addition of words. In the first one (Ex. 38a) a phrase is appended to the proverb (*as often as the root of it*), whereas in the second (Ex. 38b), an introductory phrase (*With corrupt officials*) proceeds the proverb. Last but not least, in the first example (Ex. 38a) the word *root* from the original proverb is repositioned within the added phrase. Such anti-proverb might be also called repetitive paronomastic pun¹⁰ (in repetitive puns¹¹ punning words are repeated):

- (38a) *Money is the **fruit** of evil, as often as the root of it.*
 (Henry Fielding, in Lieberman 1984: 88)
 (38b) ***With corrupt officials**, money is the **loot** of all evil.*
 (Esar 1968: 96)

As evident in the example below, word repetition and addition might be combined with employing antonyms to one of the words of original in the tail (such as *talks* and *listens*), helping to add the opposite view to a proverb text (Ex. 39):

- (39) *They say money **talks**. But smart money **listens**.* (Mieder 1989: 274) {Money talks}

There are scores of other mechanisms of proverb variation combined with substitution that could have been discussed in Section 2.4.

2.5. Themes emerging in the proverb alterations about money

There is scarcely any aspect of life to which the humor of our money anti-proverbs employing substitution is not related. Among

¹⁰ Some examples of combination of replacement and punning have already been treated above, e.g., in Sections 2.2.2. and 2.2.3., see Ex. 19–23b, 25a–26, 29).

¹¹ For more on repetitive puns in Anglo-American anti-proverbs about money, see T. Litovkina 2025c.

the themes (other than money) emerging in the proverb alterations in which substitution takes place are marriage, baldness, leisure, violence, mother, wife, elections, etc. The following are just a few examples under the topics brought up above, but without further discussion (Ex. 40a–40g):

marriage

(40a) *Matrimony is the root of all evil.* (Edmund and Workman Williams 1921: 275) {Money is the root of all evil}

baldness

(40b) *A bald man's hair is soon parted.* (Christie Davies 1999) {A fool and his money are soon parted}

leisure

(40c) *Users and their leisure time are soon parted.* (Alexander 2004: 160) {A fool and his money are soon parted}

violence

(40d) *Television violence is the root of all evil.* (Liu and Vasselli 1996) {Money is the root of all evil}

mother

(40e) *A mule and its mummy are soon parted.* (Farman 1989) {A fool and his money are soon parted}

wife

(40f) *A fool and his wife are soon parted. See Alimony.* (Wurdz 1904) {A fool and his money are soon parted}

elections

(40g) *Walton's Law of Politics:*
A fool and his money are soon elected. (Bloch 1990: 224) {A fool and his money are soon parted}

Last but not least, many more types of word substitution and examples of anti-proverbs demonstrating them, as well as many more themes emerging in the examples presented could be addressed in Part 2 of this study.

3. Discussion and conclusion

As stated elsewhere (see T. Litovkina 2005, 2015; T. Litovkina et al. 2021), one of the most popular techniques of proverb alteration is perverting the basic meaning of a proverb by simple substitution (or replacement, or change of one of the components of the proverb). The present study, continuing the research of T. Litovkina and her co-authors on the most frequent types of proverb alteration in anti-proverbs (i.e. deliberate proverb innovations, alterations, parodies, transformations, variations, wisecracks, fractured proverbs) (see T. Litovkina 2005, 2015, 2025a–2025e; T. Litovkina et al. 2021, etc.), focuses on substitution in 263 transformations of 13 Anglo-American proverbs about money. Earlier findings (based on the examination of almost 6000 Anglo-American anti-proverbs, regardless of the themes emerging in them) have proven to remain relevant.

The analysis of substitution reveals that word substitution is one of the most commonly employed techniques in the corpus. Most frequently, the replacement of words occurs at the very beginning or the very end of a proverb. Furthermore, altering the second part of a proverb is also one of the most popular techniques in the material, while changing the first part is relatively rare. The findings indicate that the first half of a proverb is more likely to remain constant than the second. Additional trends observed include:

- Sound changes occur more frequently at the beginning of the word than at its end;
- Word-order reversal most often involves nouns;
- The structure of the proverb usually remains the same, the number of words in the alteration, however, may differ.
- One word is changed to several ones more often than vice versa.

Addressing the semantic and pragmatic functions of the changes observed in the analyzed Anglo-American anti-proverbs, several patterns emerge:

- The authors of our anti-proverbs, when replacing a word, very often try to find a word phonologically similar to the one from the original proverb. Such phonologically

based changes most frequently take place for the sake of language play per se.

- The vast majority of anti-proverbs are the products of the playfulness of a solitary author, and they will definitely not catch on. Furthermore, some anti-proverbs analyzed in the study might be treated as nonce phrases, for example: *Monkey is the route to all people* (Rees 1980: 91) {Money is the root of all evil}.
- In rare cases, entirely new word compositions are created. Words such as *matri-money*, the main purpose of creation of which is simply fulfilling a particular stylistic function (see *Matri-money is the root of all evil* (Anonymous 1908: 26) {Money is the root of all evil}), are unlikely to spread in English.
- Words in the corpus are extremely rarely substituted by their antonyms. Furthermore, the changes expressing different, modern views and opinions that take place in the present corpus most frequently adapt to a specific context. Last but not least, only very few of the anti-proverbs question the truth of a proverb entirely and create a completely opposite meaning.

4. Implications for further research

The analysis has emphasized the formal features of proverb alterations about money involving substitution, while only briefly mentioning emerging themes beyond money. A detailed examination of these themes would be valuable. An equally promising avenue for future research would be to investigate the worldview reflected in anti-proverbs about money and how it diverges from that of original money proverbs. Furthermore, since proverbial language is said to reflect the system of values and conventions of a country, it would be useful not only to discuss basic American or British attitudes presented in anti-proverbs about money, but to conduct cross-cultural comparisons involving the United States, Great Britain and other countries (such as France, Germany, Hungary, Russia, etc. in which anti-proverb collections have been published). Finally, it would be also important to conduct semantic and pragmatic analysis of anti-proverbs about money,

along with a detailed exploration of their functions, following the lead of Wolfgang Mieder according to whom “Scholars must also interpret the use and function of anti-proverbs in oral and written contexts and reflect upon the significance of this pre-occupation with anti-proverbs by the folk themselves” (Mieder 2007: 18).

Acknowledgements

The idea to explore Anglo-American anti-proverbs about money arose following the editing of two collections of anti-proverbs in collaboration with Wolfgang Mieder (see Mieder and Tóthné Litovkina 1999; T. Litovkina and Mieder 2006). Sincere thanks are extended to Wolfgang Mieder for such inspiration, constant encouragement, helpful suggestions, and constructive criticism, as well as providing numerous books and articles on proverbs over the years. Gratitude is also expressed to the reviewers of this article and to the editors of *Proverbium: Yearbook of International Proverb Scholarship* for their valuable comments and suggestions.

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Buchbesprechung
erhalten am 4. April 2025
angenommen am 1. Mai 2025

HRISZTALINA HRISZTOVA-GOTTHARDT

Diana Stantcheva und Klaus-Dieter Ludwig. *Nicht auf den Mund gefallen. Phraseologisches Wörterbuch Deutsch-Bulgarisch*. Sofia: Verlag der Neuen Bulgarischen Universität, 2021, 403 S. ISBN 978-619-233-193-1.

Das 2021 erschienene phraseologische Wörterbuch für das Sprachenpaar Deutsch-Bulgarisch wurde vom Autorenduo Diana Stantcheva und Klaus-Dieter Ludwig verfasst. Diana Stantcheva ist promovierte Germanistin und als Professorin für deutsche Sprache und Literatur an der Amerikanischen Universität in Bulgarien tätig. Klaus-Dieter Ludwig leitete vor seiner Emeritierung den Lehrstuhl „Lexikologie und Lexikografie“ am Institut für deutsche Sprache und Linguistik der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Die Forschungsinteressen beider Verfasser liegen unter anderem in den Bereichen Lexikografie und Phraseologie, was sich auch in Klaus-Dieter Ludwigs Co-Autorenschaft zweier weiterer phraseologischer Wörterbücher (Czochralski und Ludwig 1999; Ludwig und Mudīte 2015) widerspiegelt.

Die anvisierte Benutzergruppe des Wörterbuchs und sein Verwendungszweck sind recht weit gefasst. Laut Vorwort (Stantcheva und Ludwig 2021: 6) „richtet sich [das Wörterbuch] an einen breiten bulgarischen Benutzerkreis. Es kann aber auch all denen zunutze kommen, die am Phraseologiebestand der deutschen Sprache und an seinen Äquivalenten im Bulgarischen interessiert sind“. Ebenfalls im Vorwort finden sich Informationen zu der Anzahl der im Band verzeichneten Einträge sowie zu den wichtigsten Kriterien für die Auswahl des behandelten phraseologischen Materials.

Die auf das Vorwort folgenden „Benutzerhinweise“ (Stantcheva und Ludwig 2021: 8-9) dienen dazu, die potenziellen NutzerInnen mit der Struktur des Wörterbuchs und insbesondere mit

dem Aufbau und Inhalt der einzelnen Wörterbuchartikel vertraut zu machen, sodass sie die benötigten Informationen möglichst schnell finden und entsprechend interpretieren können.

Alle in den Wörterbuchartikeln vorkommenden Abkürzungen und Zeichen, wie Kasusbezeichnungen, stilistische Angaben oder spitze bzw. runde Klammern, sind in einer Tabelle (Stancheva und Ludwig 2021: 12) aufgeführt und erläutert.

Angesichts des voraussichtlich breiten Benutzerkreises sind sowohl das Vorwort als auch die Benutzerhinweise und die Tabelle mit Abkürzungen und Zeichen in deutscher und in bulgarischer Sprache verfasst.

Die zahlreichen Wörterbuchartikel bilden den Hauptteil des Bandes (Stancheva und Ludwig 2021: 13-398). Dieser Teil steht im Mittelpunkt der nachfolgenden Analyse, die sich auf folgende lexikographische Aspekte bezieht: Makro-, Mikro- und Mediosstruktur des phraseologischen Wörterbuchs. Da die vorliegende Buchbesprechung im parömiologisch ausgerichteten Jahrbuch *Proverbium* erscheint, wird das Hauptaugenmerk der Analyse auf den im Wörterbuch verzeichneten Sprichwörtern liegen.

Die sog. makrostrukturellen Aspekte betreffen Fragen der Definition und Selektion des im Wörterbuch behandelten Materials, seiner Anordnung und der äußeren Zugriffsstrukturen. Im Vorwort (Stancheva und Ludwig 2021: 6) geben die Autoren an, dass im Wörterbuch „rund 4300 gebräuchliche deutsche Phraseologismen“ verzeichnet sind. Ferner legen sie fest, was sie unter „Phraseologismus“ verstehen, nämlich „eine feste Wortverbindung (mindestens zwei Wörter, höchstens ein Satz), [...] deren Gesamtbedeutung sich nicht aus den Bedeutungen der Wörter dieser Verbindung ableiten lässt“. Die Definition geht jedoch nicht näher auf die verschiedenen Klassen von satzwertigen Phraseologismen ein, somit ist es nicht ersichtlich, welche Selektionskriterien im Fall von Sprichwörtern angewendet wurden. Da Stancheva und Ludwig jedoch anbringen, dass sie sich bei der Auswahl ihres Materials auf allgemeine einsprachige Wörterbücher des Deutschen, auf phraseologische Wörterbücher beider Sprachen und auf das 1999 erschienene phraseologische Wörterbuch für das Sprachenpaar Deutsch-Polnisch (Czochralski und Ludwig 1999) gestützt haben, liegt die Annahme nahe, dass sie aus den eben erwähnten Wörterbüchern kodifizierte

Sprichwörter in ihren Band übernommen haben. Die Durchsicht des Wörterbuches, bei der kein Anspruch auf Vollständigkeit erhoben wird, hat ergeben, dass darin insgesamt etwa 30 Sprichwörter aufgeführt werden. Der Großteil davon ist auch im *Sprichwörterbuch in OWID* kodifiziert, welches eine empirisch abgesicherte Onlinedokumentation aktuell gebräuchlicher deutscher Sprichwörter darstellt. Diese Anzahl fällt im Verhältnis zu der Zahl der im *Sprichwörterbuch in OWID* aufgelisteten Einträge recht niedrig aus. Sollten die Autoren eine neue, bearbeitete Ausgabe ihres Werkes in Betracht ziehen, wäre es durchaus empfehlenswert, den Sprichwortbestand durch weitere Einträge aus dem *Sprichwörterbuch in OWID* zu ergänzen.

Des Weiteren werden mittlerweile als Sprichwörter bzw. als abgeschlossene, feste Sätze etablierte Phraseologismen wie *Man kann nicht auf zwei Hochzeiten tanzen* oder *Gegen Dummheit ist kein Kraut gewachsen* lediglich als sprichwörtliche Redensarten, d.h. als „verbale Ausdrücke“, die erst in einen Satz eingefügt werden, um eine feste Aussage zu ergeben“ (vgl. Röhrich und Mieder 1977: 15) aufgeführt:

- (1) **nicht auf zwei Hochzeiten tanzen können** *umg.*
(Stantcheva und Ludwig 2021: 137)
- (2) **gegen etwas (Akk.) <gegen jemanden> ist kein Kraut gewachsen** *umg.*
(Stantcheva und Ludwig 2021: 166)

Zwar werden die oben genannten Sprichwörter in den Anwendungsbeispielen, die den Gebrauch der Phraseologismen im Kontext verdeutlichen sollen (s. Stantcheva und Ludwig 2021: 8), zitiert, jedoch fehlt in diesen Fällen der Hinweis darauf, dass die Phraseologismen in Frage auch als eigenständige feste Sätze gebräuchlich sind.

Die einzelnen sprichwörtlichen Einträge werden – wie auch in den Benutzerhinweisen erläutert – unter dem entsprechenden Stichwort angeordnet. Als Stichwort gilt in der Regel das erste Substantiv des Sprichworts:

(3) **Zweck**

[...]

Der Zweck heiligt die Mittel.

(Stantcheva und Ludwig 2021: 397)

Wenn das Sprichwort kein Substantiv enthält, fungieren andere Wortarten – wie z. B. Adjektive – als Stichwörter:

(4) **sicher****Sicher ist sicher.**

(Stantcheva und Ludwig 2021: 299)

In wenigen Fällen kann auch ein Buchstabe als Stichwort erscheinen:

(5) **A****Wer A sagt, muss auch B sagen.**

(Stantcheva und Ludwig 2021: 13)

Somit entspricht die Anordnung der Einträge der in der lexikografischen Praxis üblichen Vorgehensweise.

Das Wörterbuch verfügt über keine äußeren Zugriffsstrukturen wie Wortregister. Da die Anordnung unter der jeweils ersten bedeutungstragenden Komponente der (sprichwörtlichen) Einträge einheitlich und konsequent durchgeführt wurde, erweist sich ein Register als nicht unbedingt erforderlich.

Die mikrostrukturellen Aspekte, die bei der Erstellung eines Wörterbuchs zu berücksichtigen sind, umfassen die Anordnung der einzelnen Einträge unter einem Stichwort sowie die Art und den Umfang der lexikographischen Begleitinformationen. Da im vorliegenden phraseologischen Wörterbuch unter einem Stichwort mehrheitlich lediglich ein Sprichwort verzeichnet ist, fokussiert sich die Buchbesprechung auf die Nennform der sprichwörtlichen Einträge und auf die Begleitinformationen. In Bezug auf die Nennform lässt sich feststellen, dass sie in der Regel mit der im *Sprichwörterbuch in OWID* kodifizierten und somit meist verbreiteten Form des jeweiligen Sprichworts übereinstimmt. Varianten einzelner Komponenten stehen in spitzen Klammern:

(6) **Alles <Jedes Ding> hat zwei Seiten.**
(Stantcheva und Ludwig 2021: 297)

Weniger nachvollziehbar ist hingegen, warum mehrere Sprichwörter, die eindeutig die Form eines abgeschlossenen Satzes aufweisen – wie etwa *Der Apfel fällt nicht weit vom Stamm* –, mit einem kleinen Anfangsbuchstaben und ohne Punkt am Ende aufgeführt sind:

(7) **der Apfel fällt nicht weit vom Stamm**
(Stantcheva und Ludwig 2021: 23)

Die meisten traditionellen Sprichwörter gelten ohne Kontext als stilistisch neutral. Dementsprechend enthält lediglich ein sprichwörtlicher Eintrag, nämlich *Rache ist süß!* Angaben zu seiner Stilebene (*umg.*) und seinem Gebrauch (*scherz.*) (vgl. Stantcheva und Ludwig 2021: 244).

Wie die Autoren in den Benutzungshinweisen zum Band nachdrücklich betonen, wird im Wörterbuch den bulgarischen Entsprechungen eine große Rolle beigemessen. Dementsprechend haben Stantscheva und Ludwig großen Wert darauf gelegt, möglichst viele potenzielle Entsprechungen aufzulisten und dadurch verschiedene Übersetzungsmöglichkeiten aufzuzeigen. In erster Linie waren sie bestrebt, totale und/oder partielle Äquivalente für die jeweiligen Praseologismen anzugeben. Wo solche fehlen, bieten sie „umschreibende Übersetzungen oder Bedeutungserläuterungen [...] in bulgarischer Sprache“ (Stantcheva und Ludwig 2021: 9). Im Endergebnis werden zu mehreren Einträgen sowohl Äquivalente als auch umschreibende Übersetzungen bzw. Bedeutungserläuterungen angeführt:

(8) **Lügen haben kurze Beine.**

На лъжата краката/нозете са къси. Всяка лъжа един ден се разкрива.

(Stantcheva und Ludwig 2021: 190)

Angesichts des sehr breiten Benutzerkreises ist dieser Ansatz berechtigt und nachvollziehbar. Im Hinblick auf eine eventuelle Neuauflage des Wörterbuches bestünde jedoch gewisses Opti-

mierungspotenzial: Eine klare Trennung zwischen (sprichwörtlichen) Äquivalenten und umschreibenden Übersetzungen oder Bedeutungserläuterungen wäre sinnvoll, wobei die verschiedenen Typen von Entsprechungen eindeutig markiert werden sollen.

Ferner haben die Autoren Beispielsätze formuliert, die den Gebrauch der jeweiligen Phraseologismen illustrieren sollen. Die deutschen Beispielsätze wurden auch ins Bulgarische übersetzt (vgl. Stantcheva und Ludwig 2021: 9). Im Fall der sprichwörtlichen Einträge wurde dieses Vorhaben nicht so konsequent umgesetzt wie bei den nicht-satzwertigen Phraseologismen. Viele Sprichwörter wurden kontextualisiert (Beispiel (9)), einige jedoch nicht (Beispiel (10)):

(9) Alte Liebe rostet nicht.

Старата любов ръжда не хваща. Старата любов не се забравя.

Alte Liebe rostet nicht: Nach fast drei Jahrzehnten hat er wieder seine Jugendfreundin getroffen und sie geheiratet.

Старата любов ръжда не хваща: след почти три десетилетия той отново срещна приятелката си от младежките години и се ожени за нея.

(Stantcheva und Ludwig 2021: 184)

(10) Man soll die Feste feiern, wie sie fallen.

Човек не трябва да изпуска/пропуска нищо от това, което му предлага животът. Човек трябва да вземе всичко, което му предлага животът. Човек не трябва да пропуска възможността да се забавлява.

(Stantcheva und Ludwig 2021: 82)

Auch in diesem Zusammenhang wäre es wünschenswert, im Zuge einer eventuellen Überarbeitung des Wörterbuches für alle behandelten Sprichwörter kontextualisierte Beispiele anzuführen, da die eigentliche Bedeutung von Sprichwörtern erst im konkreten Kontext erschlossen werden kann.

Zu guter Letzt sei auch die Mediostruktur bzw. das Verweissystem des phraseologischen Wörterbuchs erwähnt. Grundsätz-

lich finden sich in den Wörterbuchartikeln keine Verweise auf andere (verwandte) Einträge. Das Einfügen solcher Verweise – zum Beispiel auf lexikalische Varianten eines und desselben Phraseologismus oder auf synonyme Phraseologismen – wäre ein notwendiger Schritt, um die Benutzerfreundlichkeit des Bandes zu erhöhen. Dadurch ließe sich zugleich Platz für neue Einträge schaffen. So müssten Items wie etwa *jeden Cent (zweimal, dreimal) umdrehen, jeden Euro (zweimal, dreimal) umdrehen, jede Mark (zweimal, dreimal) umdrehen* sowie *jeden Pfennig (zweimal, dreimal) umdrehen* nicht – wie derzeit – separat in vollständigen Artikeln mit Äquivalenten, Übersetzungen und Anwendungsbeispielen aufgeführt werden. Hinsichtlich der begrenzten Anzahl sprichwörtlicher Einträge und des Fehlens synonymen oder antonymen Sprichwörter gilt diese Empfehlung vorerst lediglich für die nicht-satzwertigen Phraseologismen.

Aus den weiter oben erläuterten Gründen standen im Fokus dieser Buchbesprechung die im phraseologischen Wörterbuch verzeichneten Sprichwörter und ihre lexikographische Beschreibung. Dementsprechend beziehen sich die Ausführungen und die wenigen Optimierungsvorschläge mehrheitlich auf die sprichwörtlichen Einträge. Generell lässt sich jedoch festhalten, dass der Band seinen Zweck durchaus erfüllt: Mit rund 4300 Wörterbuchartikeln stellt das Wörterbuch eine umfassende Dokumentation gebräuchlicher deutscher Phraseologismen dar. Die zahlreichen bulgarischen Äquivalente und Bedeutungserläuterungen zeigen verschiedene Möglichkeiten auf, die Aussage eines bestimmten deutschen Phraseologismus im Bulgarischen wiederzugeben, was sowohl für Sprachlernende als auch für Sprachlehrende sowie für Übersetzerinnen und Übersetzer von großem Nutzen sein kann. Die formulierten Anwendungsbeispiele bieten wertvolle Hinweise in Bezug auf den grammatisch korrekten sowie stilistisch und pragmatisch angemessenen Gebrauch der jeweiligen Phraseologismen. Insofern kann das Wörterbuch einem breiten Benutzerkreis als zuverlässiges Nachschlagewerk dienen.

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Aderemi Raji-Oyelade (ed.). *Postproverbials at Work: The Context of Radical Proverb-Making in Nigerian Languages*. Osijek: Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Osijek, 2024, 347 pp. ISBN 978-953-314-217-3, (eBook), <https://naklada.ffos.hr/knjige/index.php/ff/catalog/view/26/32/60>

Aderemi Raji-Oyelade, the editor of this book, has focused scholarly attention on “postproverbials”, proverbs that have been twisted and changed. Postproverbials are what Wolfgang Mieder and others have called “anti-proverbs”, though Raji-Oyelade reflects more on the motivations behind the creation of these derived proverb forms: “Postproverbials are radicalized proverbial utterances which subvert the logic and patterns of conventional proverbs” (Raji-Oyelade 2012:49).

“Postproverbials” is a word Raji-Oyelade coined and introduced in his 1999 article, “Postproverbials in Yoruba Culture: A Playful Blasphemy” (1999). He has used it again in a book and journal articles (2004, 2012, 2022, 2023).

Postproverbials / anti-proverbs have been used since ancient times. The Greek musician, Stratonikus of Athens of the 4th century, used a postproverbial to mock a singer who had been nicknamed “Ox”. He twisted the standard Greek proverb “The ass hears the lyre”, replacing the animal to produce the personalized insult, “The Ox hears the lyre” (Fortenbaugh 2005:386, fn. 665). In this clever way, he compared the singer to an ass by twisting the proverb. The playful transformation of proverbs has “always been part of human history from antiquity” (Olaniyan and Ajayi p. 186). The frequency and popularity of postproverbials will vary across times and places. Raji-Oyelade and these authors believe that postproverbials are a very frequent type of speech in Nigeria today, for reasons they specify.

There are many wonderful books by African scholars containing African proverb collections. Those studies, paremiography, are of vital importance for the advanced study of proverbs. The book being reviewed here is a collection of studies on postproverbials, modified proverbs. The book is the work of Nigerian scholars moving beyond paremiography to paremiology. As such, this book is a welcome addition to the study of proverbs.

This collection of 13 chapters advances the scholarly enterprise of studying the forms and uses of postproverbials. Some of the chapters are built around the analyses of collections of traditional proverbs paired with postproverbials that the authors have designated as related.

Many of the authors point out that there are several trends in Nigerian society that all contribute to the increase in the number and popularity of postproverbials, including the loosening of traditional cultures, the loss of traditional languages, changing attitudes towards gender, a love for humor, the growth of new media, and urban orientation.

Some authors studied new proverbs that were not built on traditional proverbs, though Raji-Oyelade has made it clear that he holds that a postproverbial “must displace or build on an extant structure” (Raji-Oyelade 2012:49).

In several of the articles, the connection between a traditional proverb and the postproverbial that the author paired with it is not clear. As an outsider, I do not have an insider’s understanding of which postproverbials are logically linked to which traditional proverbs. The following examples illustrate this. The first pair of proverbs is clearly linked, with the second one being a postproverbial based on the first:

- (2) “When a child stumbles, s/he bursts into tears; when the elder falls, s/he gets up.”
“When a child stumbles, s/he sets his/her eyes on the destination; when an elder falls, s/he takes a backward glance.” (p. 140, 141)

However, the logical connection between the following pair of proverbs is not clear to me:

- (2) “It has been a long time since the Hausa [a major tribe in Nigeria] has been using bows.”
The partings in the buttocks did not start today.” (p. 242, 243)

I remind myself that that it is difficult to explain proverbs to outsiders, so it is also difficult to explain the similarities between two proverbs.

The following chapters will provide a brief summary of each chapter of the book. In *Òwè Ìgbàlódé: Interrogation of Post-Proverbial Interpretations in Contemporary Scholarship* Toyin Falola examines the knowledge of traditional proverbs that lies behind the creation of postproverbials. He mourns the loss of knowledge of traditional languages and cultures, which leads to the loss of traditional proverbs. He fears that this could lead to “the risk of swimming in a whirlpool of post-proverbials, strong enough to make one forget their original forms” (p. 23). He fears the future will bring an “almost scare incidence of mastery in African proverbs... There has to be a continuous usage of the original proverbs in order to bring it to the bare notice of users... post-proverbials can only arise where there is a proverb to distort, hence, the proverb must be in use” (p. 25).

As people know fewer and fewer traditional proverbs, they will not be able to form postproverbials based on specific proverbs. The loss of proverb knowledge is a process, not an event. Less common proverbs will be lost first. Also, he points out that anecdotal proverbs, proverbs that require knowledge of a piece of folklore, will also be lost early (p. 30).

He does not oppose the creation and use of postproverbials over traditional proverbs. Rather, he wants to have his cake and eat it, too. His stance is both boldly idealistic and realistic. He calls for steps to protect and promote knowledge of traditional proverbs, including in schools. But also, “We encourage the creation of post-proverbials as they are used as part of the plasticity of cultures, adapting to new generations... In preserving the past, encouraging recent creativity, we manifest a cultural collective in motion—always moving, endless, products of adaptations without boundaries” (p. 35, 36).

In *Proverbs, Postproverbials and the African Mythological Imaginary* Adeshina Afolayan brings his ideas as a philosophy professor to the study of postproverbials, citing Derrida, Wittgenstein, Malinowski, as well as African philosophers Adeshina Afolayan, Kwame Anthony Appiah, Olayinka Oyeleye. I found it refreshing to read, “I will not make any attempt at defining what a proverb is” (p. 44). He pointed out that “It is the *function* [emphasis added] of proverbs as culture markers that paremiologists, paremiographers, and philosophers cannot afford to take for granted” (p. 44). This is an important perspective for proverb scholars, whether we study traditional proverb forms or postproverbials. I will quote him to my students. He later goes on to discuss the definition of English “proverb” in contrast to Yoruba *òwe* (p. 48, 49). I will quote him to my students, again, that the concept of “proverb” varies from language to language. He also notes that the concept of “postproverbial” will differ from group to group.

Adaobi Muo in *Recasting Traditional Adages in the Light of Christianity: An Examination of Selected Igbo Postproverbial Expressions* examines ten postproverbials on themes of Christianity. Only one of the traditional proverbs underlying these ten postproverbials is about religion on the surface, a proverb about traditional religion and divination. None of the ten postproverbials are entirely positive, reassuring or urging Christians forward in their practice. There is one that gently admonishes Christians to do better, “When a Reverend Father is eating, he should remember the Reverend Brother” (p. 71), built on “When one is eating, he/she should not forget his/her siblings.” She points out that these postproverbials draw from two cultural streams, one the traditional Igbo and the other Christianity. This “dramatises the substantial input of major drivers of cultural change... [in Nigeria’s] pluri-cultural postcolonial population” (p. 74).

Chiamaka Ngozi Oyeka and Chigozie Bright Nnabuihe studied 39 Igbo postproverbials in their work *Recasting Traditional Adages in the Light of Christianity: An Examination of Selected Igbo Postproverbial Expressions*. It is no surprise that the younger generation uses more postproverbials than the older generation, which uses more traditional proverbs, but it is useful that they have documented this (p. 89). Outsiders often need explanations of traditional proverbs and the same is true for postproverbials.

For example, the following postproverbial is unclear to outsiders: "A person whose father was killed by a mad fellow, when he sights a mechanic takes to his heels" (p. 109). The helpful explanation is that mechanics clothes are dirty so that people may mistake them for madmen (p. 95, 96). This article, like several others in the collection, uses the term "postproverbial" to cover new proverbs, even if they are not based on traditional proverbs (p. 116).

When Damola Adeyefa in *Towards a Methodology for Translating African Postproverbials Òwè Ìgbàlódé: Interrogation of Post-Proverbial Interpretations in Contemporary Scholarship* begins to present his methodology for translating postproverbials, he introduces and applies four structural categories of postproverbials, as proposed by Raji-Oyelade (p. 136). He demonstrates his ideas by translating a number of postproverbials. His approach is appropriately focused on understanding and translating individual proverbs in isolation, a different approach to that used in translating proverbs in literature. He wisely points out that "Researchers translating African postproverbial expressions into foreign languages should consider a literal approach in form of transliteration, which is faithful to the source postproverbials", though cultural explanations are often needed by outsiders (p. 149). The author does not cite any references about how to translate proverbs.

Chinyere T. Ojiakor in *Igbo Postproverbials: The Dynamic Act of the Cultural Deviant* gathered 30 Igbo traditional proverbs and matched them with postproverbials. Some of the pairs are clearly structurally related, such as "Count your teeth with your tongue" and "Count your teeth with your tongue does not mean you are losing any" (p. 165). Other pairs were related by the meaning she (the cultural insider) understood, not structure: "Particles removed from the teeth after food does not fill the stomach" and "He whose monthly salary is not enough, the overtime he puts in will not be enough too" (p. 168). She explained that she was applying postcolonial theory and that the postproverbials she listed "contain subjects and objects which came with the white man or with other cultures outside Igbo land" (p. 163). As an outsider, I studied the 30 proverb pairs, and could identify outside influences in only five of the pairs. She found it easier to gather postproverbials from music and media, gathering 20 twenty from such sources, and only ten in interviews. She concluded, as have others, that postproverbials

are used much more “by the younger generation than by the older generation” (p. 172).

Adeola Seleem Olaniyan and Adeola Mercy Ajayi begin their article *A Comic Wisdom: Taking a Philosophical Interrogation of Baba Suwe's Postproverbials* by arguing for the existence of African philosophy, one not built on a Western framework. They wrote about the use of proverbs and the current usage of proverbs in music. Not only do some musicians use postproverbials, in some cases they also “revive and promote the ancient” styles of music, using proverbs (p. 181). They point out that postproverbials can become so popular that they displace the original proverb in the minds of people (p. 186, 187). Helpfully, they provide a page about the late Yoruba-speaking comic actor Baba Suwe. He was appreciated for his use of proverbs, especially postproverbials. In one famous film, he is asked by students to listen to the beginning of a proverb and then complete the proverb. In one example, he is given the opening “A king’s palace that is set ablaze...” and responds with the humorously practical “...puts the villagers into debt” (p. 192). The authors examine less than 10 traditional proverbs and their postproverbial offspring, but they do so in ways that a cultural outsider, like myself, can understand and appreciate (some of) the richness of Baba Suwe’s humor.

Hauwa Mohammed Sani argues in *Stylo-Semantic Analyses of Humorous Political Postproverbials in Hausa Speech Communities in Northern Nigeria* that her “definition [of postproverbials] can include modern creations, known as neoproverbs, rooted in postmodernity” (p. 204). She clearly states that the 24 postproverbials in her chapter do not have to be derived from “traditional proverbs, either in structurally or semantically, but as newly created and radicalized proverbs that reflect the socio-political situations of a given society” (p. 204). Though few would call them “postproverbials”, the proverbs she selected are similar to postproverbials in that they violate traditional expectations and touch on issues of the immediate time. Her 23 proverbs are all related to current politics in Nigeria, such as “‘Only God can salvage this country,’ an All People Congress party member said when he went to buy food” (p. 216). These new proverbs are formed in patterns similar to traditional proverbs, such as

alliteration, parallelism (p. 224). One of these new proverbs has complete vowel assonance, “*Banza a banza talaka a APC* ‘What a non-entity, a poor man in APC [All People Congress]’” (p. 215). At least seven of the new proverbs are wellerism proverbs, formed with a quotation and an identified speaker, a common form in Nigerian proverbs. Noting the immediate relevance of these proverbs, she describes them as representing a “temporal dialect”, language used only during a limited period of time. Most are not likely to be remembered or used in the future, e.g. “The level of your support for the APC/AC merger is the level of your suffering” (p. 215). This concept of short-term relevance for some proverbs is a fascinating concept for proverb researchers. It goes against the idea that proverbs must be part of traditional language use. It gives a useful tool for studying short-lived proverbs, such as “Dot-com, dot-bomb”, a proverb that arose and was used during an American financial crisis during the late 1990s and early 2000s (Doyle, Mieder, Shapiro 2012:60). It is now almost exclusively used to refer to events of that era. It was a proverb of a temporal dialect.

The chapter *Identity Constructions, Social Correction and Representational Dynamics of Reconstructing Igbo Proverbs Among Digital Natives: A Socio-Pragmemic Analysis* by Uche Oboko and Timothy Ekeledirichukwu Onyejelem is rich in data, with “forty proverbs and their postproverbial forms” which the authors translated and explained. They explained not only the meaning of the postproverbials, but sometimes also the societal changes and values associated with them. In their abstract, they mention Mey’s (2001) “pragmatic act theory” with its five pragmatic acts. They categorized their proverbs into these five categories. In this way, they applied their stated theoretical approach more explicitly than the other authors. The article repeatedly mentions “digital natives” as the creators of the postproverbials, but they did not present data that being a digital native or that using digital media was directly related to producing or using postproverbials.

Kikelomo Olusola Adeniyi and Olatunde Adeyemi Ojerinde in *Nigerian Pidgin Postproverbials: A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Social Realities in Selected NP Postproverbials* wrote about proverbs in Nigerian Pidgin (NP), a language that contains many

elements of both English and Nigerian languages. Those who speak it are transgressing the grammars of at least two languages, so “NP itself is a disruptive phenomenon” (p. 267). This makes Nigerian Pidgin a logical language for the formation and use of postproverbials or transgressive proverbs. The authors analyzed 20 proverbs that they had collected from a Nigerian Facebook page. Only one of these 20 proverbs was explained as being related to an existing proverb (p. 282), so 19 of them are not technically postproverbials by Raji-Oyelade’s definition. The explanations of proverb #15 points out how the proverb cleverly plays with the fact that “chop” means slightly different things in English and in NP (p. 281).

Olayombo Raji-Oyelade in her work *Textile is the Horse of Beauty and Identity: Reading Yoruba Fashion Proverbs and Postproverbials* pointed out that the title of her chapter is a “postproverbial within itself, as it is a way of troping on the original [Yoruba] meta proverb ... ‘proverb is the horse of words, if the word is missing, proverb is meant to hunt for it’. Thus, the idea of textile being ‘the horse of beauty and identity’ suggests that clothing and the concept of dressing are the vehicles of the aesthetics of beauty and the formation of identities” (p. 292). Awareness of traditional proverbs and transgressive creativity produces postproverbials, and also these clever titles. Olayombo Raji-Oyelade collected 10 Yoruba postproverbials from both digital sources and a published collection. She compared the traditional proverbs and their corresponding postproverbials to show that just as young people assert new, disruptive identities by their fashion choices, they also create and use postproverbials about fashion to state new values. It is interesting to me that even in creating new identities, they still use the traditional medium of proverbs, albeit in transgressive ways. She discussed differences between the 10 traditional proverbs and corresponding postproverbial forms. Some of her explanations of the traditional proverb and postproverbials, comparing both the literal and metaphorical levels, are a challenge for readers. I was positively struck by one postproverbial and its translation and explanation:

- (3) Traditional: “A child may have numerous clothes as an elder, but he cannot have as much wardrobe of rags like the elder.”

Postproverbial: “A child may have numerous clothes as an elder, in these days he/she will have more rags than the elder.”

In the traditional form, “‘wardrobe of rags’ represent the accumulation of experience” (p. 295). Today, some young people choose to wear “crazy jeans”, jeans that are torn and patched when they are sold new. Youth wearing crazy jeans will feel superior in fashion. The elders will certainly agree with the post-proverbial saying that the youth have more “rags” (they have literal rags, but no accumulation of experience), and will mock them for their fashion choices and their corruption of a traditional proverb. Using proverbs to mock proverbs, I chuckle at the rag-wearing youth, “It is ever thus.” And a clever youth may reply, “It has been this way too long.”

Peace Sorochi Longdet in *Representation of Gender in Mwaghavul Postproverbials* studied women as portrayed in postproverbials from Mwaghavul, a smaller language community of Nigeria. It is likely that the methodology used in this research skewed the results: “I selected ten pre-published proverbs from the compendium of Mwaghavul proverbs *Bighit Po*” (p. 307). Readers are left with the suspicion that from *Bighit Po*, the author deliberately chose 10 proverbs that portrayed women in certain ways. It is likely that her ten proverbs are not a representative sample of Mwaghavul proverbs about women. The author was wise and alert to choose some proverbs that do not overtly mention “women” or “men”. For example, she included a proverb that referred to women and men as “moon” and “sun” and another that spoke of “neck” and head”. The author grouped the postproverbials into four categories:

- Subverting Traditional Gender Roles
- From Domination to Complementarity
- Women as objects and commodifying the woman’s body
- Portraying women as stubborn and destructive

In the closing, the author observed, “in recent times, the social roles of many Mwaghavul women have changed and continue to change” (p. 315). It would be instructive and fascinating to se-

lect a larger set of proverbs about women and men and interview people about which of these proverbs and postproverbials they use and hear *currently*. As social roles change, how has the use of proverbs changed?

Charles Tolulope Akinsete, in *Postproverbial Irony in Contemporary African Cultural Expression*, studies irony in postproverbials, the two overlapping in the ways they bend expectations and convey truth from unexpected directions. There will certainly be more studies that follow him by studying postproverbials and irony. This is the only chapter to study proverbs from outside of Nigeria and from multiple languages, examining a proverb each from five language communities outside of Nigeria. Raji-Oyelade has noted that the formation of postproverbials is usually not in the first clause of a proverb, but in the following. However, the data in this article show exceptions to this. Perhaps languages with different grammatical patterns and structures form postproverbials in different ways? His chapter concludes with an observation that sums up much of the book by pointing out that postproverbials are “complex but highly advanced cultural expressions in postcolonial African societies” (p. 337).

Some of the authors may have felt pressure to name a theoretical approach for their work. However, within their articles, most did not mention the theory again, nor did they give any evidence that their theory had been relevant in their analysis. Some writers filled many pages explaining the importance of proverbs. Readers of a book about African proverbs already know that their speech communities value and appreciate their proverbs. Adaobi Muo wrote “The phenomenon of postproverbials (or anti-proverbs) is a universal cultural issue” (p. 65). And she is right. As soon as a proverb is formed to say something important, somebody may restate it, maybe for humor, maybe to challenge the message of the proverb, maybe to do both. Adeola Seleem Olaniyan and Adeola Mercy Ajayi agree, writing, “the transformation of proverbs, as against relative fixity of the same, has always been part of human history from antiquity only that it exists in different degrees, mindsets, frequency and popularity” (p. 186). The last part of that is behind the creation of this book, the belief that postproverbials are being created and used more often in Nigeria than in the past. Many of the authors referred

to the “relative fixity” of proverbs, the idea that the traditional forms of proverbs are preserved. They cited Ruth Finnegan for this, but some of them were not aware there is a newer edition of her valuable book *Oral literature in Africa*, now published for free online access in 2012.

In 2019, Raji-Oyelade and Olayinka Oyeley compiled a collection of articles on postproverbials in the journal *Matatu: Journal for African Culture and Society*. Those articles are not as easily accessible as Finnegan’s book, but I have accessed them via ResearchGate.net. In two of the chapters, there is a proverb that counters the widespread high prestige associated with speaking English in Nigeria.

- (4) Nigerian Pidgin: “The one with humongous problems does not pray in English.” (p. 270, 271)
- (5) Igbo: “It is only a person who has never experienced serious challenges in life that still prays in English.” (p. 244)

In both of these proverbs, it is asserted that when there are major problems, people do not pray in English, but rather in a traditional language. In a few words, this postproverbial saying deflates the inflated prestige of English found in much of Nigeria. Using English is often seen as more prestigious than using Nigerian languages, so that praying in a language other than English is seen as significant. It is fascinating that a postproverbial saying like this has been transferred from one Nigerian language to another, showing that this idea is relevant across a wider area. This example shows the power and application of postproverbials and new proverbs. The title of the book is *Proverbials at Work*. In the spirit of these chapters, I remind readers that “Postproverbials work”.

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WOLFGANG MIEDER

INTERNATIONAL BIBLIOGRAPHY OF NEW AND REPRINTED PROVERB COLLECTIONS

For Georgios Tserpes

This annual bibliography of new and reprinted proverb collections might appear a bit meager with its eighteen entries. That is indeed the impression that one gets, but let me take this opportunity to call on all paremiologists and phraseologists to provide me with new collections that appear in their respective countries. It is difficult for me to find out about them and even more involved in obtaining copies. I am more than happy to repay you for your expenses so that I can add these collections to my massive holding of the International Proverb Archive here at the University of Vermont.

Small as this bibliography might be, it contains a number of incredibly valuable publications. There is the important paremiographical work of Emanuele Lelli in Italy, who has provided an Italian translation of Erasmus of Rotterdam's *Adagia* and an equally significant edited volume of *Proverbi, sentenze e massime di saggezza in Grecia e a Roma. Tutte le raccolte da pitagora all'umanesimo* (Milano: Bompiani, 2021). I thank him for making these massive volumes available to me as presents as I sent him copies of my books in exchange.

Due to the generosity of my American brother George Schumm, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at the Ohio State University, I could add an old treasure from 1602 to my archive: Angelo Monosini, *Floris Italicae linguae libri novem. Quinq; de Congruentia Florentini, siue Etrusci Sermonis cum Graeco,*

Romanoque: vbi, praeter Dictiones, Phraseis, ac Syntaxin, conferuntur plus mille Prouerbia, & explicantur. In Quatuor vltimis enodatae sunt pro vberiori copia ad tres Adagiorum Chiliades. (Venetiis: Apud Io. Guerilium, 1604). This Christmas 2024 present is the second oldest volume in my International Proverb Library. As you can imagine, I am incredibly thankful to my dear brother George.

Finally, let me also mention the unique publication by my Greek friend Georgios Tserpes and his colleague Stamatis Zochios: *The Proverbs of the Russian People by V.I. Dal. Translation by Ad. Adamantiou and Selection by B.G. Politis. From the Manuscripts of Hellenic Folklore Research Centre at the Academy of Athens* (Athens: Academy of Athens, Publications of the Hellenic Folklore Research Centre – 38, 2024). I was so excited when I received this book as a present that brings alive the important work of the early Russian paremiographer Vladimir Ivanovich Dal' (1801-1872). Over the years, I have benefitted greatly from Georgios' significant paremiological publications, and it is always a special joy when we meet at international conferences. It is then with much pleasure that I dedicate this bibliography to Georgios Tserpes in Athens, Greece.

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2. Cornelissen, Georg. *Nix für ungut! Wörter und Wendungen vom Niederrhein.* Köln: Greven Verlag, 2024. 180 pp.
3. Erasmus of Rotterdam, Desiderius. *Adagi.* Translated into Italian by Emanuele Lelli. Milano: Bompiani, 2014. 3011 pp.
4. Essig, Rolf-Bernhard. *Dr. Essigs Sprichwort-Apotheke. Für alle Lebenslagen.* Freiburg: Herder, 2024. 191 pp. With illustrations.
5. Floß, Julia. *Hier geht es um die Wurst und andere Redensarten aus der Küche.* Köln: DuMont, 2024. 109 pp.
6. Foerster, Christel. *Klassisch gut. Schiller Zitate.* Leipzig: Buch Verlag Leipzig, 2024. 127 pp.
7. Golluch, Norbert. *Große Zitate berühmter Persönlichkeiten. Woher sie kommen und was wir noch nicht über sie wussten.* München: riva, 2022. 95 pp.

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15. O Móráin, Tomás P. *Stór Seanfhocal. Atá lán le Gaois na nGlúnta. The Best Irish Proverbs. All the Wisdom You'll Ever Need*. Sligo, Ireland: Pádraig Corcoran, 2020. 87 pp. With many illustrations.
16. Soares, Rui J.B., and Georgios Tserpes. *Provérbios Europeus. European Proverbs. Europaikes Paroimies*. Tavira, Portugal: Tipografia Tavirense, 2024. 117 pp.
17. Thamei, Senganglu. *Birds, Beasts, and Blooms. An Illustrated Book of International Proverbs*. New Delhi: Bark-

- weaver Publications, 2024. 44 pp. With many illustrations by Senganglu Thamei.
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WOLFGANG MIEDER

INTERNATIONAL PROVERB SCHOLARSHIP: AN UPDATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

For Kathrin Steyer

Another year has passed and it is with much pleasure and excitement that I offer yet another annual bibliography of international proverb scholarship to the worldwide community of paremiologists, phraseologists, and scholars from a multitude of other disciplines. Once again it is utterly amazing to see what has been published on proverbial matters during this year. Hardly a day goes by that I do not find yet another fascinating publication. As has been the case in a number of years now, I have received incredible help from my dear friend Pete Unseth at Dallas, Texas. Together we make a good team, and I am so very thankful for his untiring assistance.

As always, I have obtained copies of every publication for my International Proverb Archive here at the University of Vermont. By now the library holds about ten thousand books and thousands of copied articles. Quite a few colleagues and students have come to Burlington, Vermont, to work in the archive, and it is always a pleasure to welcome them from distant places. Some have stayed an entire year, while others have visited but for a few months or just a week or two. In any case, I have assembled these rich materials in over five decades to serve the international community of proverb scholars and others. Please do continue sending me your publications as attachments that I can then print out. Even better, please send me hard copies of them and certain-

ly also copies of your newest books. I will be glad to reimburse you for them as well as the expensive postage.

From among the valuable essay volumes that have appeared more recently I might mention Saša Babič, Nataša Jakop, and Rok Mrvič (eds.), *Paremiologija med tradicijo in sodobnostjo / Paremiology Between Tradition and Innovation* (Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, 2024); Sadia Belkhir (ed.), *Proverbs within Cognitive Linguistics. State of the Art* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2024); Anna Gondek, Alina Jurasz, Marcelina Kałasznik, Joanna Szczek, and Krystian Suchorab (eds.), *Interkulturelles und Interdisziplinäres in der Phraseologie und Parömiologie*. 2 vols. (Hamburg: Dr. Kovač, 2024); Aderemi Raji-Oyelade (ed.), *Post-proverbials at Work. The Context of Radical Proverb-Making in Nigerian Languages* (Osijek, Croatia: University of Osijek, 2024); and Damien Villers (ed.), *The Birth and Propagation of Phraseological Units / Naissance et propagation des unités phraséologiques*. *Lexis – Journal in English Lexicology*, 24th issue, 2024. <http://journals.openedition.org/lexis>. They contain numerous exciting articles by different authors that are, of course, also listed individually in this bibliography. But let me also at least mention a few of the truly superb monographs that are listed here: Richard L. Harris, *Wisdom of the North. Proverbial Allusion and Patterning in the Icelandic Saga* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2023); Emanuele Lelli, *A History of the Proverb in Greece and Rome* (Palio Faliero: ETP Books, 2023); Raymond Summerville, *Proverb Masters. Shaping the Civil Rights Movement* (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2024); Grzegorz Szpila, *Od przysłowia głowa nie boli. Zagadnienia współczesnej paremiologii polskiej* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2024); and Luis J. Tosina Fernández, *Paremiology in the Digital Era. Survival, Adaptability, and Prospects for Proverb Scholarship in the 21st Century* (Granada: Editorial Comares, 2024). What an incredibly rich paremiological harvest from around the world!

As has been my custom, I would like to dedicate this bibliography once again to a special friend of the international community of paremiologists and phraseologists. It is then with great pleasure and joy that I dedicate this year's bibliography to my long-time friend Kathrin Steyer (Mannheim, Germany) who has

made invaluable contributions to the study of proverbs and who has been an engaged leader in the European Society of Phraseology. Her commitment, dedication, and service have been exemplary and a model for us all. Among her many publications it is especially her book *Sprichwörter multilingual. Theoretische, empirische und angewandte Aspekte der modernen Parömiologie* (Tübingen: Narr Verlag, 2012) that to this day continues to be an influential publication for the multifaceted aspects of modern paremiology.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY OF HAUSA PROVERBS STUDIES

1. *Introduction*¹

This is a bibliography of paremiological and paremiographic publications concerning the Hausa language. Hausa is one of the major languages of the world, as well as one of the so-called Islamic languages. It is the third largest indigenous language in Africa, after Arabic and Swahili. It is classified as a West Chadic language of A.1 group. The Chadic language family, part of the Afro-Asiatic language phylum, comprises some 170 languages, of which Hausa is the largest and the most important (Newman 2013: 2-3).

Hausa is used as the first language (mother tongue) by around 50.7 million people (Eberhard et al. 2022), mainly residents of northern Nigeria and southern regions of the Republic of Niger. It is also spoken in diasporas, including in Sudan. It is important to note that Hausa is a vehicular language in West Africa. At least 26.2 million people use it as a second language (Eberhard et al. 2022) for the purpose of interethnic communication. The vehicular function of Hausa has developed mainly due to commercial contacts (Pawlak 1998: 7-8).

¹ References to this paragraph which are not included in the following bibliography: Eberhard, David M., et al., editors. *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*. 25th ed., SIL International, 2022, <https://www.ethnologue.com/>, retrieved on 3 July 2024
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Hausa is one of the most thoroughly researched African languages with a relatively large number of resources and extensive academic literature. The same applies to literature on proverbs in this language (known as *karin mǎgana*, literally ‘folded speech’, pl. *karin mǎgàngànū*²). The academic interest in Hausa proverbs dates back to the first modern descriptions of the language. The first paremiographic work on Hausa proverbs was published by a German missionary F. Schön (1885). In the earliest period, European scholars compiled numerous collections of Hausa proverbs containing interpretations of their meanings, often along with semantically equivalent proverbs in English or German (Fletcher, 1912; Kirk-Greene, 1966; Merrick, 1905; Mischlich, 1906; Prietze, 1904; Rat-tray, 1913; Robinson, 1905; Tremearne, 1913; Whitting, 1940). The first collection of proverbs compiled by Hausa paremiographers was an anonymous leaflet (Karin Magana “Iya Magana Ma Da Ransarsa!” [Proverbs. “Knowing How to Speak Brings Luck”], 1958). Later, Yunusa (1977) collected over 1500 proverbs and attached interpretation (all in Hausa) to about a third of them. In addition to the above, there are more recent collections, published in Nigeria, which contain a few thousand Hausa proverbs each (unfortunately) without any explanation of their meanings (i.a. Danhausa, 2012; Danyaya, 2007; Haruna, 2017; Malumfashi & Ibrahim, 2014). At least two lexicons were also compiled by Nigerian scholars (Moussa, 2004; Nafiou, 2014). Some researchers attempted to develop methods of classifying Hausa proverbs according to various lexico-semantic criteria (Abdulkarim, 2015; Aminu, 2003; Dikko, 2017; Piłaszewicz, 1983: 28–36; Sadi & Sadiq, 2009; Satatima, 2016; Zajac, 2023). To date hundreds of works have been published on various aspects of Hausa proverbs.

2. List of bibliographical entries

The Hausa bibliography lists publications in English, Hausa, French, Polish, German, Spanish and Russian. It comprises books and articles, a few of them dating back to the end of 19th century. Some works covering more languages than just Hausa

² Despite some culturally-motivated differences in understanding the term *karin mǎgana*, it is considered the equivalent of the English term *proverb* and its counterparts in other languages.

were included. In addition, some works on Hausa folklore and genres closely related to proverbs (such as *kirari* ‘epithet’) were listed. However, some others were excluded, since the intention was to limit bibliography to the proverbs studies, and not to extend it too much towards various issues in Hausa phraseology and style in oral and written literature. Efforts were made to include as many publications as possible, although the author is aware that the list of entries is not complete. The hope is that it will be of use to Hausa scholars as well as international community of paremiologists.

The list includes two dictionaries of the Hausa language (Abraham 1962; Bargery 1934). The reason for this is that these two old publications include countless proverbs and sayings associated with many lexical entries. For the same reason, some old grammars and textbooks of Hausa were included, written by European scholars, which present a number of Hausa proverbs as linguistic data.

A special place in the bibliography is occupied by the canonical work of Hausa literature – the novel “*Magana jari ce*” [‘Ability to tell stories is a valuable possession’] (Imam 1940) which is the ultimate example of the use of proverbs in Hausa literature as it contains at least 265 proverbs³. The use of proverbs and stylistic devices in the text was analysed in various publications which are also included in the list.

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