

PROVERBIUM

Yearbook of International Proverb Scholarship



43:2026



THE JOSIP JURAJ STROSSMAYER UNIVERSITY OF OSIJEK

**FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
AND SOCIAL SCIENCES**

Proverbium 43 (2026)

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 43:2026

Published by the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences,
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 with further encouraging news about the journal's growing recognition and reach. In 2026, *Proverbium* has been elevated in the SCImago Journal Rank to Q3, a milestone that confirms its stable position within international humanities scholarship and, in particular, the fields of paremiology, linguistics, and folkloristics. We warmly thank our readers who follow our work, cite our articles, and recommend *Proverbium* in their own teaching and research. In addition, *Proverbium* has recently received important quality-control labels that further strengthen its profile as a trusted venue for proverb studies. The journal has been awarded the Diamond Open Access Certificate (Fully Diamond OA) as well as the status of Hrčak Certified Journal. The quality of *Proverbium* has also been formally acknowledged in Croatia and Hungary, where the journal has recently been ranked among the highest-level scientific publications in the humanities. In Croatia, the National Council for Science, Higher Education and Technological Development has classified *Proverbium* as an A1 scientific journal, placing it in the top category of scholarly outlets. In Hungary, *Proverbium* is ranked at level A in Linguistics and Ethnography in the Hungarian Science Bibliography database of scientific publications, which confirms its importance as a reference journal for regional and international scholarship.

Our efforts to increase the visibility and discoverability of paremiological work are reflected not only in these recognitions but also in our editorial infrastructure. Alongside the DOI identifiers, we have now introduced the Universal Decimal Classification (UDC) subject identifiers for all articles in this volume.

UDC is an internationally used bibliographic classification system that organizes knowledge across disciplines by assigning structured numerical codes to subject areas, making it easier for libraries and databases to index and retrieve materials by topic. By including UDC codes, we ensure that articles in *Proverbium* are more readily searchable in library catalogues and digital repositories, thereby enhancing their long-term visibility and facilitating interdisciplinary access to paremiological research.

The preparation of Volume 43 has once again brought numerous editorial and organizational challenges, ranging from a significant number of submissions to the careful coordination of peer reviews across several countries and languages. These challenges have been successfully overcome thanks to the expertise and dedication of our esteemed reviewers, who meticulously read all submitted papers and helped us select those that best contribute to the advancement of proverb scholarship. We extend our sincere gratitude to Azra Abadžić Navaey, Saša Babić, Péter Barta, Elke Cases, Fionnuala Carson Williams, Christian Grandl, Myriam Huéscar Villa, Ivana Jozić, Tamás Kispál, Anna Konstantinova, Outi Lauhakangas, Marcos Mac Coinnigh, Ana Mansilla, Yoram Meital, Matej Meterc, Wolfgang Mieder, Goran Milić, Draženka Molnar, Boško Pešić, Leonard Pon, Aderemi Raji-Oyelade, Manuel Sevilla Muñoz, Grzegorz Szpila, Anna T. Litovkina, Katalin Vargha, and Damien Villers for their invaluable work on this volume. We are particularly grateful to our reviewers for their support in addressing one of the most pressing challenges currently facing scholarly publishing: the unethical use of artificial intelligence tools in academic writing. As of this issue, the Editorial Board of *Proverbium* has adopted a Code of Conduct regarding the use of AI in scholarly publishing, which clearly defines acceptable and unacceptable uses of AI-based assistance in research, writing, and review. This policy is important because it protects the integrity of scholarly work, promotes transparency and accountability, and ensures that the originality, authorship, and methodological soundness of paremiological research remain at the forefront of our editorial practice.

The 43rd volume of *Proverbium* once again reflects the diversity and richness of contemporary proverb studies. The contributions in English, German, Russian and Spanish languages

cover a wide range of topics and approaches, from historical and philological analyses of traditional proverb collections to corpus-based studies of modern proverbial expressions, from comparative research on regional proverb traditions to explorations of proverbial creativity in literature, media, and everyday communication. Volume 43 also arrives at a moment when many of us are rethinking our research practices, and our relationship to digital tools. The contributions collected here offer concrete materials for those reflections: they show how traditional sources can be revisited with new methods, how corpora can illuminate familiar proverb themes in unexpected ways, and how proverb scholarship can respond to contemporary ethical and technological concerns without losing sight of its humanistic foundations. We hope that this issue will be read not only as a collection of individual case studies, but as an invitation to imagine what paremiology can become in the years ahead.

With these thoughts, we leave the pages of Volume 43 in your hands. We are grateful for the trust you place in *Proverbium* as readers, authors, and reviewers, and we look forward to seeing how the ideas developed here will be taken up, challenged, and transformed in future work.

Melita Aleksa Varga and Hrisztalina Hrisztova-Gotthardt

<https://doi.org/10.29162/pv.43.1.1203>
UDC 811.511.141'373.7:81'42:821.511.141-342"15/20"=112.2
Origineller Forschungsbeitrag
erhalten am 23. Februar 2026
angenommen am 3. Mai 2026

ERZSÉBET DRAHOTA-SZABÓ

SPRICHWORT – WAHRWORT UNGARISCHE SPRICHWÖRTER ZUR REFORMATIONSZEIT UND HEUTE

Abstract: Sprichwörter sind bekanntlich historisch und kulturell gebunden – sie erfüllen in unterschiedlichen Epochen und in unterschiedlichen Kulturen jeweils eine andere pragmatische Funktion. Ihre Verwendung hängt des Weiteren auch von der jeweiligen Textsorte ab. Die Zeit der Reformation gilt als Blütezeit der Sprichwörter: Man hat an ihrem Wahrheitsgehalt fest geglaubt, sie dienten als Wegweiser im Alltag. In diese Zeit wird im Aufsatz zurückgeblickt, wobei die Fabeln des ungarischen Schriftsteller-Predigers Gáspár Heltai als Basis für die Untersuchung dienen. Auf Grundlage der Fabeln wird eine Sprichwörtersammlung zusammengestellt. Die Forschungsfrage ist erstens, was für eine pragmatische Rolle den Sprichwörtern in den Fabeln zugeschrieben werden kann. Zweitens wird der Frage nachgegangen, ob diese Sprichwörter der Zeit standhalten konnten, d. h. immer noch bekannt und gebräuchlich sind, oder mittlerweile archaisch wirken oder sogar gänzlich verschwunden sind.

Schlüsselwörter: Sprichwort, Realien-Spruchwort, Fabel, pragmatische Funktion, textkonstitutive Rolle

1. Einleitung

1.1. Thema und Ziele

Noch bevor Thema und Ziele des Aufsatzes genannt werden, soll ein Zitat von Manó Kertész (1922: 3–4), des berühmten ungarischen Forschers der Phraseologie, als Motto für den Aufsatz stehen:

In der Sprache eines jeden Volkes schlummert die Geschichte von Jahrtausenden. Sie offenbart, wer wir sind, woher wir kamen, mit wem wir in Berührung traten und was wir über zeitlose Epochen hinweg lernten. [...] Die flüchtige Zeit wandelt das Schicksal und die Lebensumstände der Völker; sie reißt eine Vielzahl von Institutionen nieder, um auf deren Trümmern neue zu errichten. Die Sprache jedoch beugt sich nicht stets der zerstörerischen Kraft der Zeit. Vielmehr bewahrt sie vermöge ihrer konservierenden Kraft die Erinnerung an längst vergangene Zeiten in einzelnen Wörtern, Wendungen, Redensarten und Sprichwörtern – freilich in einer Bedeutung, die sich den gewandelten Verhältnissen entsprechend verändert und weiterentwickelt hat.

(Die Übersetzung aus dem Ungarischen ins Deutsche hier wie auch die weiteren Übersetzungen im Aufsatz stammen von mir – E. D.-Sz.)

Eine ähnliche „Lebensgeschichte“ kann auch den Fabeln zugeschrieben werden, zumal die folkloristischen Gattungen Sprichwort und Fabel auf vielfache Art und Weise miteinander verbunden sind. Wie auch Grzybek (1988: 39) feststellt:

Das wechselseitige Verhältnis von Sprichwort und Fabel ist mehr als einmal Gegenstand folkloristischer oder literaturwissenschaftlicher Untersuchungen gewesen. Meistens stand dabei in der einen oder anderen Weise die Frage nach einem möglichen genetischen Zusammenhang beider Genres im Vordergrund, wobei zum einen Fabeln als Veranschaulichungen oder “Elaborationen” von Sprichwörtern angesehen worden sind, zum anderen hingegen Sprichwörter als “Kondensat”, als “Schwundstufe” von Fabeln aufgefasst worden sind.

Grzybek zählt eine Reihe wissenschaftlicher Arbeiten auf, welche diesen genetischen Zusammenhang thematisieren. In diesem

Aufsatz wird allerdings nicht jene – zweifelsohne interessante – Debatte weitergeführt, sondern die pragmatische Funktion, die textkonstitutive Rolle von Sprichwörtern in Fabeln, genauer in den Fabeln von Gáspár Heltai (1958, 2011), steht im Mittelpunkt. Die Forschungsfragen sind die folgenden:

1. Was für eine pragmatische Rolle kann den Sprichwörtern in den Fabeln zugeschrieben werden?
2. Wo werden die Sprichwörter platziert? Kommen sie in den Fabeltexten oder öfter in den von Heltai hinzugefügten Auslegungen vor?
3. Dominieren im Korpus die monosemantischen oder die polysemantischen Sprichwörter? Wie hängt dies mit der Texteinbettung und der pragmatischen Funktion der Sprichwörter zusammen?
4. Sind die von Heltai verwendeten Sprichwörter auch heute noch bekannt und geläufig? Wirken sie bereits archaisch oder sind sie aus dem Sprachgebrauch verschwunden? Welche Sprichwörter leben als Redewendungen weiter? – Es wird dabei auch nach den Gründen gesucht.
5. Kommen im Korpus sog. Realien-Sprichwörter vor? Inwiefern hängt die Weitertradierung mit der Kulturspezifik zusammen?

Die aufgestellten Fragen hängen miteinander wesentlich zusammen, so werden manche zusammen beantwortet.

1.2. Das Korpus

Sprichwörter haben in unterschiedlichen Epochen eine jeweils andere Funktion. Darüber hinaus ist die „soziale Funktion“ der Sprichwörter nicht nur an die Epoche, sondern auch an die Kultur gebunden. Wie auch Fleischer (1997: 77) betont: „das Sprichwort [ist] in ausgeprägter Weise historisch fixiert“. Die soziale Funktion, der pragmatische Wert von Sprichwörtern ist also zeit- und kulturspezifisch. Somit kann man zu interessanten und aufschlussreichen Erkenntnissen gelangen, wenn man ältere Texte als Korpus heranzieht, wie es auch hier der Fall ist. Wir blicken in die Zeit der Reformation, in die Blütezeit, in das goldene Zeitalter der Sprichwörter zurück. Sprichwörter hatten nämlich da-

mals im wahrsten Sinne des Wortes die Funktion, Menschen in ihren Handlungen wie auch moralischen Haltungen und Überzeugungen zu beeinflussen.

Gáspár Heltai (geboren um etwa 1510, gestorben 1574 in Nagydisznód, auf Rumänisch Cluj-Napoca, auf Deutsch Klausenburg) ist einer der bedeutendsten protestantischen Schriftsteller-Prediger des 16. Jahrhunderts, dessen Schriften als Phraseologismen-Sammlungen schlechthin betrachtet werden können. Er war darüber hinaus auch noch Verleger und Buchdrucker, hatte sogar eine Papiermühle, und war auch ein hervorragender Übersetzer. Heltai stammt aus dem ethnisch und sprachlich vielfältigen Siebenbürgen (heute ein Gebiet in Rumänien), genauer aus Heltau (heute: Cislădie). Heltai hat also den Namen seiner Geburtsstadt für sich übernommen. (Sein ursprünglicher Name war wahrscheinlich Kaspar Helth.) Da er sächsischer Abstammung ist, kann Deutsch als seine Erstsprache betrachtet werden. Er hat an der Universität in Wittenberg Theologie studiert, zur Zeit von Luther und Melanchthon.

Auf Grundlage der Fabeln von Heltai habe ich eine Sprichwörterammlung zusammengestellt, die aus 56 Sprichwörtern besteht. Manche Sprichwörter kommen in mehreren Fabeln vor, sodass die Zahl der Sprichwort-Vorkommnisse insgesamt 74 beträgt. Das gesamte Korpus kann aber hier – wegen des begrenzten Umfangs des Aufsatzes – nicht hinzugefügt werden; dies wird in einer weiteren Publikation ermöglicht und nachgeholt.

Die Anzahl der Lemmata und der Items hätte noch größer werden können, wenn ich auch die Sprichwort-Implikationen aufgenommen hätte. An manchen Stellen werden nämlich durch Redewendungen sowohl inhaltlich wie auch formal Sprichwörter impliziert, z. B. in der Fabel „Egy valamelly farkasról“ [Über einen Wolf]. In der Fabel, die hier – aus Platzgründen – nur in der deutschen Übersetzung aufgeführt wird, versucht der Wolf der Reihe nach mehrere Tiere zu fangen und zu fressen. So trifft er auf zwei Pferde:

Und er sprach zu der Stute: „Meine Schwester, wie gut, dass ich dich hier gefunden habe! Heute werde ich mich an dir satt essen, denn ich werde dich fressen.“ Die Stute antwortete: „Es sei so, mein Herr Wolf! Aber mit mir werdet Ihr nicht recht satt werden, denn ich bin sehr hager; doch seht, mein Sohn ist fett genug, den

gebe ich Euch. Bevor Ihr mich aber fressen würdet, erweist mir um Gottes willen die Barmherzigkeit: Gestern trat ich mit einem meiner Hinterläufe in einen Dorn. Ich bitte Euch, zieht den Dorn aus meinem Fuß, damit Ihr später wieder Nutzen von mir haben könnt.“ Der Wolf sprach: „So heb deinen Fuß hoch!“ Und als er herantrat, um den Dorn herauszuziehen, versetzte die Stute dem Wolf einen solchen Schlag vor die Stirn, dass er sogleich rücklings hinfiel und das Bewusstsein verlor. Die Stute aber lief samt ihrem Fohlen davon. Nach geraumer Zeit, als der Wolf wieder auf die Beine gekommen war, sah er, dass weder Stute noch Fohlen da waren. Da sprach er: „Das geschieht dir recht, du alter Hund! **Du hast weder Salbe noch Arzneibüchse, und doch hast du dich zum Wundarzt gemacht**“.¹

Die markierte Textstelle (im ungarischen Original: „Sem ired, sem szelencéd, azért mégis orvos borbélyá tetted magadat.“) impliziert ein Sprichwort, das bei Margalits (1897: 359) in mehreren Varianten belegt ist: *Ha se szelencéd hozzá, se írod, ne borbélykodj.* [Wenn du weder Büchse noch Salbe dazu hast, sollst dich nicht als Wundarzt (wörtl.: Barbier) betätigen.]; *Ha nincs íred és szelencéd, miért teszed magad borbélylyá (sic!).* [Wenn du weder Salbe noch Büchse hast, warum machst du dich zum Wundarzt (wörtl.: zum Barbier).].

1.3. Zu den Gattungen Sprichwort und Fabel

1.3.1. Zum Sprichwort

Es gibt viele Sprichwort-Definitionen (vgl. Drahot-Szabó 2021: 135–138). Daher ist es ratsam, eine Arbeitsdefinition anzugeben. Ich arbeite konsequent mit der Definition von O. Nagy (1976: 12): Das Sprichwort [ung. *közmondás*] ist

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

¹ Die Hervorhebungen hier wie auch in den folgenden Textbelegen stammen von mir – E. D.-Sz.

immer mehr oder weniger geschichtlich gebunden ist und deshalb auch eine gesellschaftlich determinierte Weltsicht widerspiegelt.

In Bezug auf die Analyse der Fabeln ist es wichtig hervorzuheben, dass Sprichwörter – innerhalb der referentiellen Phraseologismen – zu den propositionalen Phraseologismen gehören (vgl. Burger 2010: 36–42). Dies bedeutet, dass sie semantisch eine Aussagefunktion, und syntaktisch gesehen Satz- bzw. Textfunktion haben. Sprichwörter sind *Topoi*, d. h. topische Formeln – sie können sich an den Text ohne weitere lexikalische Elemente anknüpfen. In den Fabeln bzw. in den von Heltai hinzugefügten Auslegungen gibt es doch vielfach typische, textsortenspezifische „Verknüpfungen“ (s. unter 1.4.).

1.3.2. Zur Gattung Fabel und zu Heltais Fabeln

Unter Fabel wird heute eine 'lehrhafte Tiergeschichte' verstanden. Das Wort selbst leitet sich vom dem lateinischen *fābula* 'Erzählung, Sage, Rede' ab, und jenes Wort ist wiederum eine Ableitung von *fāri* 'sagen' (s. Kluge 1989: 197).²

Die Figuren in Heltais Fabeln sind in der überwiegenden Mehrheit ebenfalls Tiere. Die Reichen und Mächtigen werden von Löwen, Wölfen, Füchsen, Wildschweinen, Adlern, Geiern, Falken usw. verkörpert, die Armen von Lämmern, Hasen, Rehen, Ziegen oder von kleineren Vögeln, z. B. von Tauben, Schwalben, Nachtigallen, Lerchen usw. In manchen Fabeln sind die agierenden Figuren Menschen oder Pflanzen. In einer Fabel (mit dem Titel „A kezekröl, lábakröl meg a gyomorról“ [Über die Hände, die Beine und den Magen]) spielen die Körperteile die Hauptrolle.

Die Grundlage von Heltais Fabeln sind diejenigen des altgriechischen Fabeldichters Äsop. Heltai hat die deutsche Übersetzung von Stainhöwel verwendet, die 1539 erschienen ist, unter der Bearbeitung von Sebastian Brandt. Heltais Fabeln sind

² Vgl. auch DUW (2023: 580): (*die Fabel* = 1. 'lehrhafte, oft satirische Erzählung in Vers oder Prosa, in der Tiere nach menschlichen Verhaltensweisen handeln und in der eine allgemein anerkannte Wahrheit, eine praktische Lebensweisheit o. Ä. veranschaulicht wird'; 2. 'erfundene, fantastische Geschichte'; 3. (Literaturwissenschaft) 'einer Dichtung zugrunde liegende Handlung in ihren wesentlichen Zügen'. (Vgl. noch die Wörter *fabelhaft*, *fabeln*, *fabulieren* usw.)

das erste Mal im Jahre 1566 in Klausenburg erschienen, und danach mehrfach publiziert worden. Obwohl sein Werk den Titel „Száz fabula“ [Hundert Fabeln] trägt, hatte es ursprünglich 128 Texte enthalten. Dazu kommt noch, dass die alten Auflagen beschädigt worden oder eben nur in Fragmenten erhalten geblieben sind. So mussten die Herausgeber die Fabelsammlung rekonstruieren, und haben dies jeweils nach anderen erhaltenen Originalen und nach anderen Prinzipien getan. So ist auch zu erklären, dass die Fabeln in den unterschiedlichen Ausgaben nicht immer in derselben Reihenfolge nacheinander folgen und werden somit auch nicht einheitlich nummeriert. Heltais Sprache wurde von den Herausgebern in unterschiedlichem Maße modernisiert, woraus sich auch viele Unterschiede ergeben. Aus den genannten Gründen und besonders wegen der uneinheitlichen Nummerierung der Fabeln bzw. weil die Fabeln in der von mir zu dieser Forschung verwendeten elektronischen, d. h. leicht verfügbaren Version (s. den ersten Titel unter Primärliteratur) nicht mit Nummern versehen sind, gebe ich jeweils den Titel der Fabel an.

Bei Heltais Fabeln handelt es sich keineswegs um eine bloße Übersetzung. Aus Sicht der Untersuchung erscheint es als relevant, aus dem Vorwort zu zitieren, das Heltai zu den Fabeln geschrieben hat:

HELTAI GÁSPÁR
MINDEN JÁMBOR OLVASÓKNAK
kéván Istentől mind lelki s mind testi jókat

Szerető uraim és szerelmetes atyámfiai! Im mind egybegyűjtöttem és egybeszedtem jónéhány fabulákat, régieket és újakat. Mi okból műveltem légyen ezt, minden jámbor olvasó megértheti az értelmekből, mellyeket minden fabula mellé szerzettem és utána vetettem. Senkinek e munkámmal nem akartam ártani. Senkit nem akartam bosszantani, senkit is megkissebbíteni: És azt vélem, hogyha valaki e fabulákat jó szívvel meg akarja olvasni, bizony sok jó hasznót vehet belőlek. Mert noha e fabulák embertől kitalált dolgok, de azért ugyan velejesekek és különb-különb szép és hasznos tanulságok vagynak benne.

[GÁSPÁR HELTAI
ALLEN FROMMEN LESERN
wünscht von Gott sowohl seelisches als auch leibliches Wohl

Meine verehrten Herren und geliebten Brüder! Seht, ich habe etliche Fabeln, alte wie auch neue, zusammengetragen und gesammelt. Aus welchem Grunde ich dies getan habe, vermag ein jeder redlicher Leser aus jenen Deutungen zu entnehmen, die ich einer jeden Fabel beigelegt und nachgestellt habe. Mit diesem meinem Werk beabsichtigte ich keineswegs, jemandem Schaden zuzufügen. Weder wollte ich jemanden kränken, noch jemanden herabsetzen. Und ich bin der Überzeugung: So jemand diese Fabeln wohlwollenden Herzens lesen möchte, wird er gewisslich großen Nutzen aus ihnen ziehen. Denn obgleich diese Fabeln von Menschen ersonnen wurden, so sind sie dennoch gehaltvoll und bergen vielerlei schöne und nützliche Lehren in sich.]

Heltai hat also die Fabeln selbst ergänzt, mit dem Ziel, für die Leser die Aussage und die Lehre zusammenzufassen, damit die Moral eindeutig erfasst wird. Somit ergibt sich die Forschungsfrage, wo die meisten Sprichwörter vorkommen, d. h. in den Fabeln selbst oder in den hinzugefügten Auslegungen [ung. *értelem* bzw. *értelme*, d. h. ihr Sinn 'Sinn der Fabel'].

1.4. Zur Identifizierung der Sprichwörter

Die Sprichwörtersammlung wird – wie vorhin erwähnt – aus Platzgründen in einem weiteren Beitrag publiziert und so wird auf die Beschreibung ihres Aufbaus (z. B. auf die Auswahl der Lemmata) hier verzichtet. Die bei der Zusammenstellung verwendete Methode soll allerdings doch kurz erläutert werden. Die Identifizierung der Sprichwörter erfolgte im ersten Schritt auf Grundlage der formalen und semantischen Merkmale der Sprichwörter. Dies wurde insofern erleichtert, dass Heltai die Sprichwörter vielfach mit einer einleitenden Formel in den Text einbettet, z. B.: *Azért szokták mondani közbeszéddel* [Deshalb sagt man in der Gemeinsprache ('mit einem Gemeinspruch')]; *Azért mondották a régiek, hogy* [Deshalb haben die Alten ('unsere Vorfahren') gesagt, dass]; *Igy szóltak a régi magyarok is* [So haben auch die alten Ungarn gesagt]; *Erre mondották a régi jámborok* [Darauf haben die alten Frommen gesagt] usw. Solche Anmerkungen betrachte ich als Beweise dafür, dass es sich um Sprichwörter handelt, auch dann, wenn dies mit Hilfe von Wörterbüchern nicht eindeutig nachgewiesen werden kann. Es

geht eben auch darum, zu erschließen, welche Sprichwörter aus dem Sprach- und Kulturgut bereits ausgestorben sind. Aus dieser Zielsetzung heraus wurden des Weiteren phraseologische Lexika herangezogen, in einem ersten Schritt das Lexikon von Margalits (1897). Seit dem Erscheinen dieser Sammlung sind bereits 129 Jahre vergangen – unsere Gesellschaft, unser Lebensstil usw. hat sich verändert, wie auch unsere Sprachverwendung. Deshalb habe ich im nächsten Schritt versucht, die Sprichwörter im Lexikon von O. Nagy (1976) nachzuweisen. Zu guter Letzt wurde untersucht, ob die Sprichwörter auch in neueren Lexika – Forgács (2003) und T. Litovkina (2005) – nachzuweisen sind. Durch den Vergleich der Lexika kann eine gewisse Tendenz über die Weitertradierung der Sprichwörter wahrgenommen werden.

1.5. Zur Übersetzung der Textbelege

Nach den ungarischen Sprichwörtern wird ihre wörtliche deutsche Übersetzung in eckigen Klammern angegeben. Falls es weitgehende oder partielle phraseologische Äquivalente im Deutschen gibt, werden auch diese – zur Verständnissicherung – aufgeführt. Die Übersetzung der Belege ins Deutsche war allerdings vielfach mit Schwierigkeiten verbunden: Die Sprache der Fabeln ist nämlich in vielerlei Hinsicht altertümlich. Um den Stil des Originals bewahren zu können, hätte der Stil der sog. Erbauungsliteratur verwendet werden sollen. In den Fabeln kommen z. B. analytische Vergangenheitsformen vor, die es im heutigen Ungarisch gar nicht mehr gibt.

Im heutigen Ungarisch werden zwei bestimmte Artikel verwendet, wobei die Regeln eindeutig sind: Vor konsonantisch anlautenden Substantiven wird der bestimmte Artikel *a*, vor vokalisches anlautenden Wörtern *az* verwendet. In Heltais Fabeln steht allerdings auch vor Wörtern, die mit einem Konsonanten anlauten, vielfach der Artikel *az*. Diese Eigentümlichkeit geht in der Übersetzung ebenfalls verloren.

Bei der Übersetzung traten nicht nur grammatische, sondern auch lexikalische Schwierigkeiten auf. Es gibt in den Fabeln bereits veraltete oder zumindest veraltende Wörter bzw. auch solche, deren Bedeutung im Laufe der Zeit einen Bedeutungswandel durchgemacht hat. Mit einem Beispiel verdeutlicht: Das Wort *együgyű* bezieht sich heute vorwiegend auf jemanden, der

schwache geistige Fähigkeiten besitzt, der hilflos, unbeholfen ist; die deutschen Äquivalente wären *einfältig*, *beschränkt*, *albern*, *naiv*, *blöd* oder sogar *primitiv* (s. Halász et al. 2003: 281). Geht man allerdings von der Etymologie des Wortes aus, so schimmert die ursprüngliche Bedeutung durch: Auf der Basis der ersten Komponente *egy* 'eins' und der zweiten Komponente *ügy* 'Sache' bezieht sich das Wort auf einfache (hier ebenfalls: *ein* + *Fach*), schlichte Menschen (s. Pusztai 2003: 253), die reinen Herzens nach Gottes Worten gelebt haben. *Együgyüképpen* bedeutet also im Kontext der Fabeln nicht 'auf dumme Weise', wie wir es heute verstehen würden. Der Ausdruck *einfältigen Herzens* hat den Sinn 'reine Ehrlichkeit, ohne jeglichen Hintergedanken; arglos' – hier hat also *Einfalt* ebenfalls die herkömmliche Bedeutung.³

Családos ember bezieht sich heute auf jemanden, vor allem auf einen Mann, der eine Familie hat [*család* = *Familie*]. In Heltais Fabeln bezeichnet es jedoch einen Hausherrn, der nicht nur Frau und Kinder, sondern auch Bedienstete, d. h. eine Dienerschaft, ein Gesinde hat.⁴

Die Übersetzung stößt manchmal wegen fehlender Lexik auf Schwierigkeiten, so beim Sprichwort *Egyik kutya, másik eb*. ('die sind gleich schlecht, böse gesinnt'). *Kutya* und *eb* sind weitgehende Synonyme, der Unterschied ist nur stilistisch: *eb* ist ein wenig archaisch, und daher klingt es gewählter bzw. in der Amtssprache wird es statt *kutya* verwendet (z. B. *ebadó*, d. h. *Hundesteuer*) (vgl. Pusztai 2003: 241). *Eb* hat im Deutschen kein Äquivalent. Daher kann das obige Sprichwort – zwangsläufig – so übersetzt werden: *Der eine ist Hund, der andere Köter*. Da das ungarische Sprichwort negativ konnotiert ist, kann der deutsche Phraseologismus *dasselbe in grün* = 'so gut wie dasselbe' (s. Duden 2013: 294) nur als ein partielles Äquivalent, als ein

³ Zu *Einfalt* und *einfältig* s. Duden 2001: 173: „Substantiv und Adjektiv haben den Sinn des Schlichten, Arglosen bis ins Nhd. erhalten, jedoch herrscht jetzt [...] die abschätzende Bed. »Dummheit; dumm« vor“.

⁴ Die ungarischen Wörter *család* ('Familie') und *cseléd* ('Diener, Magd') gehen auf das slawische Wort *čel'ad* zurück, in der umfassenden Bedeutung für 'Familie, Diener, Mägde', d. h. *család* und *cseléd* sind durch Bedeutungs differenzierung, durch Spaltung der Form und der Bedeutung entstanden (s. Lengyel 2000: 347).

ideographisches (und zugleich stilistisches) Synonym betrachtet werden.⁵

2. Zu den pragmatischen Funktionen der Sprichwörter

Die Sprichwörter haben in den Fabeln von Heltai eine mehrfache Funktion. Erstens fallen sie durch ihre volkstümliche Färbung auf, d. h. sie sind stilbildend. Zweitens sollen die pragmatischen Funktionen hervorgehoben werden, denn darin zeigt sich die wesenhafte Verbindung zwischen Fabel und Sprichwort. Drittens treten sie in vielfältigen textkonstitutiven Rollen auf, die von den beiden anderen Funktionen nicht zu trennen sind.

Es wird an erster Stelle auf Fleischer (1997: 218–221) zurückgegriffen, der unter pragmatischen Funktionen der Phraseologismen ihre „speziellen Wirkungsmöglichkeiten“ versteht, nämlich „zur Unterstützung der Intentionen des Senders“. In Bezug auf die Phraseologismen allgemein listet er sechs Funktionen auf. Phraseologismen können laut Fleischer (1997):

1. „Indikatoren des sozialen Verhältnisses zwischen den Kommunikationspartnern sein“
2. „die emotional betonte Einstellung des Senders zu dem mitgeteilten Sachverhalt indizieren und emotionale Wertungen (positive wie negative) auf den Empfänger indirekt übertragen“
3. kritische Ironie, negative emotionale Wertung oder scherzhafte Distanzierung ausdrücken
4. eine euphemistische Wirkung haben
5. „die Wirkung einer Argumentation durch Anschaulichkeit und Einprägsamkeit, durch emotionale Akzentuierung einer Ansicht unterstützen“
6. die Ausdrucksweise rationalisieren.

Welche Funktion von den oben aufgezählten dominiert, hängt m. E. erstens von der Art des Phraseologismus, zweitens von der Textsorte ab. Konkreter: Da Sprichwörter sich durch besondere formale und semantische Merkmale auszeichnen, werden sie hauptsächlich in der Funktion 5 und 6 verwendet. Dies trifft besonders für die Textsorte Fabel zu. Bei der Funktion „Ra-

⁵ Zu den Äquivalenztypen im phraseologischen Bereich s. Drahot-Szabó 2021: 45–117.

tionalisierung der Ausdrucksweise“ schreibt Fleischer (1997: 220): „Wenn in Phraseologismen ‘bestimmte Verhaltensweisen, Handlungsmuster, Interaktionsprobleme und Problemlösungen, Situationen des Alltagslebens‘ erfasst und, auf einfache, allgemeingültig-anerkannte und bewährte Formeln‘ gebracht werden (Koller 1977: 80), so liegt darin prinzipiell eine Kommunikationserleichterung“. Ich stimme Lüger (2013: 201) zu, wenn er sagt, dass „phraseologische Ausdrücke [...] polyfunktional“ sind:

Zu dieser semantisch-pragmatischen Vielfalt wird meist auch die Fähigkeit gerechnet, als Mittel zur Textbildung dienen zu können. Dabei versteht man den Begriff *Textbildung* üblicherweise so, daß Aspekte wie Kohäsion, Kohärenz oder die Sequenzierung von Äußerungen im Vordergrund stehen. Mit anderen Worten: Phraseologismen/Phraseme sorgen für Zusammenhänge, für semantische Verflechtungen und satzübergreifende Strukturen.

Im Zusammenhang mit den pragmatischen Funktionen der Phraseologismen soll noch auf Koller (1977: 72–73) verwiesen werden. Er führt folgende Funktionen auf:

1. Handlungsanweisung, Situationsorientierung, Situationsbewältigungsmuster
2. Ideologem-Funktion
3. Einverständnisherstellungs- und Bestätigungsfunktion
4. Anbiederungsfunktion
5. Übertragungsfunktion (Plausibilitätsargumentation)
6. Vereinfachungsfunktion
7. Argumentations-Ersparungsfunktion
8. Unschärfefunktion
9. Emotionalisierungsfunktion
10. Wertungs- und Bewertungsfunktion
11. Anschaulichkeitsfunktion.

In dem untersuchten Korpus sind die Anbiederungsfunktion und die Unschärfefunktion nicht charakteristisch, doch alle anderen treffen zu. Ich bin der Ansicht, dass diese in den Fabeln nicht getrennt werden können, und man braucht sie auch nicht zu trennen.

Was die komplexe textkonstitutive Funktion der Sprichwörter betrifft, so sei auch auf Christophe (2004) verwiesen, der bei

der Untersuchung verbaler Phraseme in literarischen Texten von einer komplexen textgestaltenden Funktion spricht, und bei der doppelten Leistung der Phraseme eine interne und eine externe Kohärenz unterscheidet. Unter interner Kohärenz versteht er die syntaktische und die semantische Kohärenz (Christophe 2004: 25), unter externer Kohärenz die pragmatische Kohärenz, „das heißt die bei der Textproduktion zu erfüllenden Bedingungen, die den Text für den Leser kommunikativ kohärent machen“ (Christophe 2004: 28). In Bezug auf die pragmatische Kohärenz sagt er (Christophe 2004: 28–29): Phraseme fungieren „oft als ‘Code’, das heißt als Verstehenshinweis, als Kommentar oder auch als Metasprache. Durch die Phraseme wird es dem Leser möglich, den Text und dessen Sinn pragmatisch einzustufen.“ Diese komplexe Leistung zur Herstellung der internen wie auch der externen Kohärenz ist auch den Sprichwörtern eigen, die in den hier untersuchten Fabeln vorkommen. Dies trifft also auch auf Heltais Fabeln zu: „da Kohärenz eigentlich erst ab dem Augenblick besteht, wo der Text gelesen wird, dienen Phraseme vom Standpunkt des Lesers als Meilensteine der Erzählung: Sie machen auf den Kern der Aussage aufmerksam“ (Christophe 2004: 33).

Ich würde allerdings noch weitergehen, den Bereich der externen Kohärenz ausweiten und dabei auf zwei wichtige Punkte verweisen. Erstens: Erweitern wir unseren Horizont in die Richtung der globalen Intertextualität, so soll betont werden, dass Sprichwörter elementare Teile der gemeinsamen Textwelt einer Kultur sind. Als relevante Teile der Kultur, die als Makrotext aufgefasst wird, sind sie für alle weitgehend bekannt und erleichtern so die Kommunikation. Sie tragen dazu bei, dass nicht nur die Textbedeutung im engeren Sinne, sondern auch der Textsinn erfasst wird.⁶ Zweitens soll noch hervorgehoben werden, dass bei der Textrezeption nicht nur die sog. bottom-up-Prozesse eine Rolle spielen, d. h. es reicht nicht aus, den sprachlichen Input zu verstehen. Textrezeption ist ein aktiver, produktiver Vorgang, bei dem die top-down-Prozesse eine ebenfalls wichtige Rolle spielen, d. h. das Weltwissen (das Alltagswissen, das Erfahrungswis-

⁶ Zu den globalen und lokalen Intertextualitätskonzepten s. z. B. Drahota-Szabó 2013: 37–46.

sen) des Rezipienten ist auch relevant.⁷ Bei der Textrezeption vergleicht der Rezipient das Verstandene, d. h. die Textbedeutung, mit seinem Wirklichkeitsmodell, das er auf Grundlage seiner bis dahin gesammelten Welterfahrungen gebildet hat. Er fragt sich, ob seine Textinterpretation mit diesem Wirklichkeitsmodell zu vereinbaren ist. Auf der Basis der Sprichwörter ist diese Kontrastierung problemlos: Die Sprichwörter bekräftigen sein Wirklichkeitsmodell und so auch die Textrezeption; sie erleichtern die Erfassung des Textsinns.

3. Zur Platzierung der Sprichwörter in den Auslegungen der Fabeln

In den Fabeln von Heltai haben Sprichwörter eine textkonstitutive Rolle, sie dienen als persuasive Kommunikationsmittel, als „subsidiäre Maßnahmen“ (Bezeichnung von Lüger 2001: 83). An dieser Stelle sollen die Forschungsfragen Nr. 2 und Nr. 3 beantwortet werden (s. unter 1.1.). Die Hypothese, nach der die meisten Sprichwörter in den von Heltai hinzugefügten Auslegungen vorkommen, kann zahlenmäßig eindeutig bewiesen werden: Nur 4 Sprichwörter werden in den Fabeln selbst platziert, die anderen 70 kommen jeweils in den Auslegungen vor. (In vielen Fällen sind Heltais Auslegungen sogar länger als die Fabel selbst.)

Was den Anteil der monosemantischen und der polysemantischen Sprichwörter betrifft: 28 monosemantischen Sprichwörtern (Items) stehen 46 polysemantische gegenüber. Gerade diese hohe Anzahl der polysemantischen Sprichwörter ermöglicht Heltai, die Sprichwörter verschiedenartig und auf kreative Art und Weise in seine Texte einzubetten.

Bevor auf die Platzierung der Sprichwörter in den Auslegungen der Fabeln eingegangen wird, sei auf Burger (2010: 118) verwiesen:

Da Sprichwörter in der Regel All-Sätze sind, eignen sie sich in argumentativen Zusammenhängen als „Schlussregel“, die einer Behauptung als Stütze dienen kann. Dass Sprichwörter argumen-

⁷ Zur Textbedeutung und zum Textsinn s. z. B. Drahota-Szabó 2022: 80–81; zur Textrezeption, zu den bottom-up- und zu den top-down-Prozessen s. z. B. Drahota-Szabó 2022: 106–110.

tativ verwendet werden, indem sie als Stütze für Argumente oder Begründung für Handlungen dienen, steht beim heutigen Sprichwort-Gebrauch sicherlich nicht mehr im Vordergrund.⁸ In älteren Texten jedoch ist gerade dies ein zentraler Funktionsbereich des Sprichwortes.

Wo auch immer das Sprichwort in den Auslegungen der Fabeln vorkommt, fungiert es als eine „moralisch-religiöse Maxime“ (Bezeichnung von Burger 2010). Möchte man sich die Texteinbettung der Sprichwörter genauer anschauen, so können in den Fabeln bzw. in den Auslegungen folgende Möglichkeiten erschlossen werden: 1.) die Lehre der Fabel wird von Heltai angegeben, und das Sprichwort folgt danach als Bekräftigung der Moral; 2.) umgekehrt: bei der Formulierung der Lehre wird vom Sprichwort ausgegangen, das dann noch weiter erläutert wird; 3.) mehrere Sprichwörter werden in den Text eingebettet, um der Lehre der Fabel noch mehr Nachdruck zu verleihen – dabei können zwei synonyme Sprichwörter den Rahmen der Auslegung bilden; 4.) das Sprichwort wird literalisiert und ermöglicht eine doppelte Lesart; 5.) das Sprichwort wird „dramatisiert“, d. h. wird als Frage-Antwort in den Text eingebettet. Von diesen Möglichkeiten der Texteinbettung können hier – wegen des begrenzten Umfangs – nur einige auffallende Typen durch je ein Beispiel dargestellt werden.

3.1. Häufung von Sprichwörtern

Die Häufung der Sprichwörter kann in Heltais Fabeln als eine oft verwendete persuasive Strategie betrachtet werden. Manchmal folgen die synonymen Sprichwörter direkt nacheinander. In der kurzen Auslegung der folgenden Fabel kommen drei – bzw. mit dem lateinischen vier – Sprichwörter vor:

E fabulával mutatá meg a bölcs Esopus e világi dúsoknak és kegyetleneknek hamisságát és kegyetlenségét, hogy azok nem gondolván

⁸ Heute werden die Sprichwörter oft spielerisch verdreht, parodiert. Zum Sprichwortgebrauch heute, zu den sog. Sprichwort-Persiflagen (anders genannt: Antisprichwörter) und zu ihren Arten, d. h. zu den externen und zu den internen Modifikationen s. Drahota-Szabó 2021: 135–159. Zu den Antiproverbien in fünf Sprachen s. Hrisztova-Gotthardt et al. 2018.

sem az Úristennel, sem annak igazságával, a szegény ártatlanokat minden ok nélkül megnyomorítják. **Vesztett nevét költik az ebnek, csakhogy megölhessék. Vagy megette a hájat az eb vagy nem, de mindenképpen pálcát keresnek neki. Pauper ubique iacet.** Vagyis: **A szegény mindenhol az porban hever.** Jaj e nagy hamisságnak! Jaj bizony!

(Auslegung der Fabel „A farkasról meg a bálványról“ [Über den Wolf und das Götzenbild])

Durch diese Fabel hat der weise Äsop die Falschheit und Grausamkeit der Mächtigen und Prasser dieser Welt offenbart, die weder den Herrn Gott, noch seine Gerechtigkeit achten und die armen Unschuldigen ohne jedwede Ursache in Elend und Trübsal stürzen. **Man gibt dem Hunde einen bösen Namen, um ihn erschlagen zu können. Es mag der Hund das Fett gefressen haben oder nicht – man sucht für ihn dennoch mit aller Gewalt den Stecken. Pauper ubique iacet.** Das heißt: **Der Arme liegt allenthalben im Staube darnieder.** O weh dieser großen Falschheit! Ja, wahrlich, o weh!

= 'wer bestraft werden soll, für den findet sich immer ein Vorwand'; 'die Armen sind immer und überall arm und in Unterdrückung'

3.2. *Literalisierung*

Sprichwörter können nach ihren Lesarten monosemantisch oder polysemantisch sein. Die monosemantischen Sprichwörter können auf Grundlage ihrer Komponenten interpretiert werden. Die polysemantischen Sprichwörter haben zwei Lesarten: Die erste Lesart ergibt sich aus der Summe der Bedeutungen der Komponenten, und die zweite Lesart ist eine idiomatische (s. z. B. Drahota-Szabó 2021: 138–140). Die polysemantischen Sprichwörter können doppelt in den Text eingebettet werden, und zwar durch Literalisierung. Dies bedeutet, dass im Text sowohl die phraseologische, d. h. idiomatische, als auch die wörtliche Bedeutung des Sprichwortes erscheint, wodurch zwei Isotopien eröffnet werden. Dieses Spiel, d. h. die doppelte Texteinbettung, kann durch die Auslegung der Fabel „A hollóról meg a rókáról“ [Über den Raben und den Fuchs] verdeutlicht werden:

E fabula arra tanít, hogy mértéket tars és erőd vagy tehetséged szerint kezdjed és vidd a te dolgaidat. És hogy erődnek fölötté semmit ne kezdj. Ha valakit látsz, ki jeles és csodálatos dolgokat cselekszik, ne légy te majomtermészetű, hogy te is mindjárt utánozzad azt. Egyedül nincsen erőd hozzá, hogy végre vihessed azt. **Sok saru vagyon a vargamesternél, de bizony nem mindenik illik lábadra. Ki kicsiny, ki nagy.** Ha azt mondod: én is ember vagyok, amaz is csak ember, úgy vagyon. *Ez is Mátyás, amaz is Mátyás, de azért mégis más Mátyás király és más ismét Mátyás kovács.* Így vagyon. Bizony.

Diese Fabel lehrt uns, dass der Mensch sich stets der Mäßigung beflleißige, und seine Vorhaben nach dem Maße seiner Kräfte und Gaben beginne und vollbringe. Über sein Vermögen hinaus aber soll er nichts unterfangen. So du jemanden erblickst, der herrliche und wundersame Taten vollbringt, so hüte dich, von affenartiger Natur zu sein und ihm sogleich nachzueifern. Du hast alleine keine Kraft dazu, solches zu deinem Ehrenruhme zu Ende zu führen. **Wohl finden sich gar viele Schuhe beim Schustermeister, doch fürwahr, nicht ein jeder ist deinem Fuße angemessen. Der eine ist zu klein, der andere zu groß.** Sprichst du nun: ‚Ich bin doch auch ein Mensch, wie jener dort‘, so mag dies wohl wahr sein. *Dieser heißt Matthias, jener ist ebenfalls Matthias, doch ist ein gewaltiger Unterschied zwischen dem Könige Matthias und dem Schmiede Matthias.* So ist es. Fürwahr.

3.3. „Dramatisierung“ des Sprichwortes

Die sprichwörtlichen Weisheiten werden oft als Frage-Antwort in den Text eingebettet; dabei wird sich auf „die Alten“ [*a régiek*], d. h. auf die alten Weisen, berufen.

E fabula először azt jelenti, melly igen ritkán találtatik egy hív barátja avagy rokonsága az embernek az emberek között. Azért szokták mondani közbeszéddel: **Mikor barátjára az embernek szüksége vagyon, akkor ötven is reáfér egy fontnyi mértékre.** Ennekutánna arra tanít e fabula, hogy kiki mind ő maga lászson dolgához és másra ne bizza azt. Mert legott megcsalatkozik. **Másnak nem fáj a te fejed.** Bizony nem gondol vele, mert nem övé. Ezokáért, ha üszöd az sárban dől, te magad fogd a farkát és te magad emeljed

erősen. Mert ha temagad hozzá nem nyúlsz, bizony kétség nélkül odahal az sárban. Ha ezokáért a gazda azt akarja, hogy jó előmenetele legyen az ő dolgának, szükséges, hogy ő maga legyen a szolga. Ezért mondták a régiek: Micsodától hízik igen a ló? Feleltenek: Az családós embernek szemétől, azaz, ha ő maga szünetlen látja, mint bánnak az szolgák az lovakkal. Mert ha a gazda ő maga nem lát hozzá, csakhamar olyan leszen az ló, hogy minden oldalcsontját megszámálhatod. Ismét mitől zsírosodik igen a szántóföld? Felelének a régiek: Az ganéjtől, melyet a gazda saruival viszen reája. Evvel azt jelentették, hogy ha a gazda gyakorta megyen a szántóföldre és ugyancsak megnézi, miképpen szántanak, miképpen vetnek és boronálnak az béresek, tehát nyilván jó gabonája leszen. Így vagyon! (Auslegung der Fabel „A pacsirtáról meg annak fiáról“ [Über die Lerche und ihre Jungen])

Diese Fabel bedeutet zuvorderst, wie gar selten ein getreuer Freund oder ein wahrhafter Verwandter unter den Menschenkindern zu finden sei. Daher pflegt man im gemeinen Volksmund zu sagen: Wenn der Mensch eines Freundes bedarf, so gehen ihrer wohl fünfzig auf ein Pfund Maß. Hiernächst lehrt uns diese Fabel, dass ein jeder selbst nach seinem Amte und seinen Geschäften sehe und solche nicht Fremden anvertraue. Denn gar bald wird er betrogen. **Einem anderen schmerzt dein Haupt nicht.** Wahrlich, er trägt keine Sorge darum, denn es ist nicht sein eigen. Darum, wenn deine Färse im Schlamme versinkt, so greife selbst nach ihrem Schwanze und hebe sie mit aller Kraft empor. Denn so du nicht selbst Hand anlegst, wird sie ohne Zweifel im Morast verenden. Will demnach der Hausherr, dass sein Werk wohl gedeihe, so ist es vonnöten, dass er selbst sein eigener Diener sei. Darum sagten bereits die Alten: Wovon wird das Ross so feist? Und sie antworteten: Vom Auge des Hausherrn; das heißt, wenn er stetig selbst darauf achtet, wie das Gesinde mit den Pferden umgeht. Denn so der Herr nicht selbst danach sieht, wird das Ross alsbald so hager, dass du all seine Rippen zählen magst. **Wovon wiederum wird der Ackerboden so fett? Die Alten antworteten: Von dem Dünger, den der Hausherr an seinen eigenen Schuhen darauf trägt.** Damit meinten sie: Wenn der Herr häufig auf das Feld hinausgeht und mit eigenen Augen schaut, wie die Knechte

pflügen, säen und eggen, so wird er gewisslich eine reiche Ernte haben. Also so ist es!

Das Sprichwort *Mikor barátjára az embernek szüksége vagyon, akkor ötven is reáfér egy fontnyi mértékre* ist eine Lehnwendung, die auf dieses deutsche Sprichwort zurückgeht: *Freunde in der Not gehen hundert/tausend auf ein Lot.* (= 'in Notzeiten hat man wenige oder keine Freunde'; s. Duden 2013: 237).⁹

3.4. Sprichwörter und Argumentationsstruktur

Die Platzierung der Sprichwörter hängt vom Wesen her mit ihrer pragmatischen Funktion zusammen. Die vielfältigen Rollen in der Argumentation seien durch den oben (unter 3.3.) aufgeführten Text dargestellt, wobei der Text in einem ersten Schritt in nummerierte Sätze gegliedert wird:

- (1) Diese Fabel bedeutet zuvorderst, wie gar selten ein getreuer Freund oder ein wahrhafter Verwandter unter den Menschenkindern zu finden sei.
- (2) Daher pflegt man im gemeinen Volksmund zu sagen: Wenn der Mensch eines Freundes bedarf, so gehen ihrer wohl fünfzig auf ein Pfund Maß.
- (3) Hiernächst lehrt uns diese Fabel, dass ein jeder selbst nach seinem Amte und seinen Geschäften sehe und solche nicht Fremden anvertraue.
- (4) Denn gar bald wird er betrogen.
- (5) **Einem anderen schmerzt dein Haupt nicht.**
- (6) Wahrlich, er trägt keine Sorge darum, denn es ist nicht sein eigen.
- (7) Darum, wenn deine Färse im Schlamme versinkt, so greife selbst nach ihrem Schwanze und hebe sie mit aller Kraft empor.
- (8) Denn so du nicht selbst Hand anlegst, wird sie ohne Zweifel im Morast verenden.
- (9) Will demnach der Hausherr, dass sein Werk wohl gedeihe, so ist es vonnöten, dass er selbst sein eigener Diener sei.

⁹ Lot ist eine alte, kleine Gewichtseinheit. (Das ungarische Wort *lat* geht auf das deutsche Wort *Lot* zurück; etwa der 32. Teil von Font, ungefähr 17 Gramm, genauer 1,75 Dekagramm; s. Pusztaí 2003: 794.)

(10) Darum sagten bereits die Alten: **Wovon wird das Ross so feist?**

(11) Und sie antworteten: **Vom Auge des Hausherrn;** das heißt, wenn er stetig selbst darauf achtet, wie das Gesinde mit den Pferden umgeht.

(12) Denn so der Herr nicht selbst danach sieht, wird das Ross alsbald so hager, dass du all seine Rippen zählen magst.

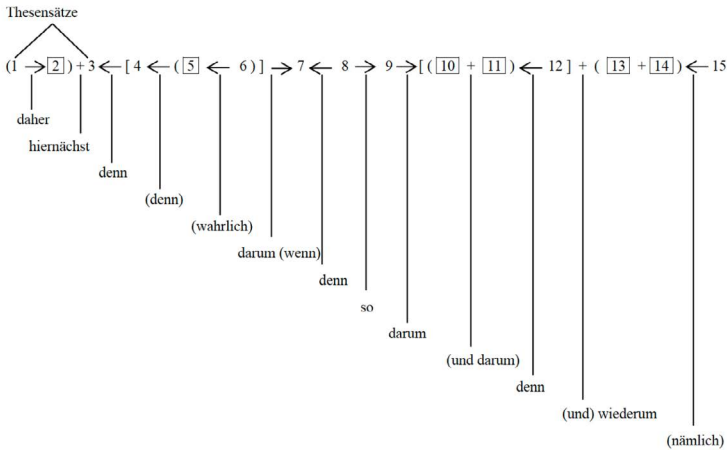
(13) **Wovon wiederum wird der Ackerboden so fett?**

(14) Die Alten antworteten: **Von dem Dünger, den der Hausherr an seinen eigenen Schuhen darauf trägt.**

(15) Damit meinten sie: Wenn der Herr häufig auf das Feld hinausgeht und mit eigenen Augen schaut, wie die Knechte pflügen, säen und eggen, so wird er gewisslich eine reiche Ernte haben.

Der erste Satz ist ein Thesensatz, in dem Heltai die erste Lehre der Fabel mit seinen eigenen Worten formuliert. Im zweiten Satz wird dies durch ein Sprichwort bekräftigt. Der dritte Satz ist – dem ersten ähnlich – wiederum ein Thesensatz, in dem die Moral frei formuliert wird. Alle weiteren Sätze sind mit diesem Knoten verbunden. Im vierten Satz gibt Heltai einen Grund an, im fünften wird dies durch ein Sprichwort untermauert. Im sechsten Satz wird der Inhalt des vorangehenden erläutert; der siebte Satz folgt aus dem sechsten; der achte enthält wieder eine Erklärung. Die Gedankenkette wird im neunten Satz mit einer Folgerung weitergeführt, die auf den zweiten Thesensatz zurückverweist. Im zehnten und elften Satz wird das bis dahin Ausgeführte wiederum mit einem Sprichwort bestätigt. Im zwölften Satz wird das vorangehende Sprichwort literalisiert, d. h. die Argumentation wird auf wörtlicher Ebene weitergeführt. Im dreizehnten und im vierzehnten Satz kommt wieder ein Sprichwort vor, wobei es – ähnlich wie in den Sätzen zehn und elf – „dramatisiert“ wird, d. h. als Sprechakt-Frage und als Sprechakt-Antwort erscheint. Dieses Sprichwort wird im fünfzehnten Satz mit eigenen Worten gedeutet.

Möchte man die inhaltlich-logischen Relationen unter den Sätzen linear schematisch darstellen, so würde man dieses Schema erhalten:¹⁰

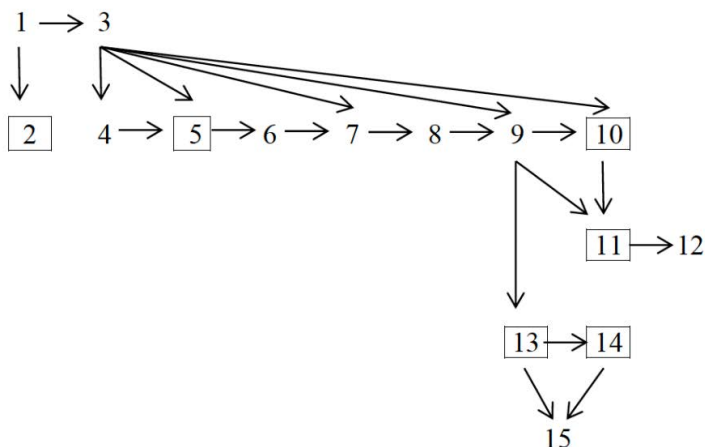


Der Darstellung kann entnommen werden, dass im Text die konsekutiven und die kausalen Relationen dominieren: Dies resultiert daraus, dass Heltaí das Sprichwort entweder als Fazit der Argumentation einsetzt, oder in seinen Ausführungen vom Sprichwort ausgeht. Das Sprichwort, das im dreizehnten und vierzehnten Satz zweigeteilt wird, weist auf den neunten Satz zurück. Da aber der neunte Satz mit dem dritten als Thesensatz eng verbunden ist, verbinden sich die Sätze dreizehn und vierzehn mittelbar auch mit dem dritten. Im neunten wird einerseits die bis dahin ausgeführte Lehre zusammengefasst, andererseits fungiert der Satz als Ausgangspunkt für die Aussage im fünfzehnten Satz.

Diese komplexe inhaltlich-logische Struktur kann durch ein Netz-Diagramm dargestellt werden:¹¹

¹⁰ Zu den inhaltlich-logischen Relationen und zu ihrer Darstellung s. Deme 1965: 294 und Békési 1982: 47–48.

¹¹ Die Richtung des Pfeils gibt jeweils an, von welchem Satz zu welchem Satz die inhaltlich-logische Verknüpfung ausgeht, d. h. ob es sich um anaphorische oder kataphorische Relationen handelt. Zur Verwendung des Netz-Diagramms in der Textolo-



4. Zur Weitertradierung der Sprichwörter

Nun soll das „Schicksal“ einiger ausgewählter Sprichwörter kurz unter die Lupe genommen werden. Dies ist eine interessante Frage, zumal die Fabeln von Heltai 1566 erschienen sind – seitdem sind also 460 Jahre vergangen. Geht man der Frage nach, ob die Sprichwörter, die zur Reformationszeit geläufig waren, auch heute noch bekannt sind oder sogar Verwendung finden, so soll erneut darauf verwiesen werden, dass Sprichwörter historisch fixiert sind. Wir können O. Nagy (1976: 9) zustimmen:

Unser Schatz an Redensarten und Sprichwörtern befindet sich in einem steten Wandel und in beständiger Bewegung: Einerseits bereichert er sich fortwährend um neue Elemente, andererseits – obgleich die bewahrende Kraft der Sprache mit magnetischer Wirkung auf die Bestandteile des Ausdrucksschatzes einwirkt – stößt er jene Wendungen kontinuierlich aus und gibt sie dem Vergessen anheim, die infolge der universellen menschlichen Entwicklung sowie der Gestaltung der spezifischen Verhältnisse unseres Volkes unzeitgemäß und veraltet erscheinen. Folglich kann man von den Redensarten und Sprichwörtern ebenso wenig

gie s. bereits Rozgonyiné Molnár 1978. Zur Darstellung des ungarischen Originaltextes s. Forgács, E. 1997: 58–61.

wie vom Volke selbst als von Phänomenen sprechen, die unabhängig von der fortschreitenden Zeit oder den sozialen und wirtschaftlichen Veränderungen existieren.

Der andere Gesichtspunkt, den es bei der Charakterisierung der Redensarten, insbesondere aber der Sprichwörter, zu beachten gilt, ist jener, dass der Ausdrucksschatz unserer Sprache – von einigen in der Gegenwart geläufig gewordenen Wortverbindungen abgesehen – noch in der Ära jener Klassengesellschaften entstanden ist, die durch den unversöhnlichen Gegensatz der sozialen Schichten geprägt waren. Klasseninteressen und Klassenstandpunkte konnten auch in unseren Sprichwörtern nicht zu einer harmonischen Einheit verschmelzen. Unser Sprichwörterschatz trägt als historisches Gebilde auch in zahlreichen seiner heute noch lebendigen Elemente die Merkmale der gegensätzlichen Weltanschauungen sowohl der arbeitenden als auch der unterdrückenden Klassen. (Hervorhebungen im ungarischen Original – E. D.-Sz.)

So ist es kein Wunder, dass z. B. dieses Sprichwort bereits veraltet ist: *Cseresznyét az úrnak, magvát a tányérnak / a parasztnak.* [*Kirsche dem Herrn, Kern dem Teller / dem Bauern.*] = 'alles Gute bekommen die Reichen, die Herren, und den Armen bleibt nur das Schundige/Wertlose'; vgl. O. Nagy 1976: 124, Beleg 142). Doch Sprachwandel ist bekanntlich ein langer Prozess, d. h. viele Sprichwörter wirken eine lange Zeit lang archaisch, bevor sie gänzlich aussterben.

Manche Sprichwörter enthalten – nach unserem heutigen Verständnis – Stereotype und Vorurteile, z. B.: *Az asszonyi átlatoknak hosszú az hajok, de igen rövid az eszök.* [*Die Weiber haben lange Haare, aber kurzen Verstand.*] Dieses Sprichwort wird heute in dieser verkürzten Form verwendet: *Hosszú haj, rövid ész.* [*Langes Haar, kurzer Verstand.*] Der Verwendungsbereich hat sich erweitert: Das Sprichwort kann sich heute sowohl auf Frauen als auch auf Männer beziehen und hat eine scherzhafte Färbung.

Es hängt vor allem von außersprachlichen Faktoren ab, ob ein Sprichwort weitertradiert wird. Dabei können aber auch sprachliche Gründe im Hintergrund stehen oder eben beides. Dies verdeutlicht das nächste Sprichwort: *Megnéz a lábadoznak kaptáját, ne kívánj nagyobb sarut.* Die deutsche Übersetzung der Fabel

(Auslegung der Fabel „A hollóról meg a rókáról“ [Über den Raben und den Fuchs]):

Besinne dich eines Besseren. Gott der Herr ist weise, und so wusste er wohl, wie er dich erschaffen und womit er dich beschenken sollte. Begnüge dich also mit dem, was dir gegeben wurde. Suche nicht nach eitlem Ruhm und Lobpreis. **Schau auf den Leisten deines Fußes und begehre keinen größeren Schuh.** Denn jene, die dich gar sehr rühmen, lieben dich nicht; und wenn sie könnten, wahrlich, sie würden versuchen, dir den Käse aus dem Mund zu stehlen. Es gibt kein schädlicheres Tier als den Heuchler und den Schmeichler. So verhält es sich gewiss.

Dieses Sprichwort wird bereits von O. Nagy (1976: 592, Beleg 132) als archaisch bezeichnet: *Nem lehet minden sarut egy kaptára verni.* [Man kann nicht jeden Schuh auf einen Leisten schlagen, d. h. 'anfertigen'.] = 'man darf nicht alles und jeden in gleicher Weise beurteilen, man muss die unterschiedlichen Merkmale beachten'.¹² Das Substantiv *kapta* wird heute nicht mehr verwendet, und das Sprichwort ebenfalls nicht. Das Wort *kapta* ist eine verkürzte, veraltete Form von *kaptafa* [*Leisten*, d. h. *Schuhleisten*], das allerdings als unikale Komponente sogar in zwei Phraseologismen weiter verwendet wird. Erstens in der Redewendung *egy kaptafára (húz/készít valamit valaki)* [etw. wird von jmdm. auf denselben Leisten [Holzleisten, wörtl. *Leistenholz*] gezogen/angefertigt] = 'auf die gleiche Art und Weise; nach demselben Muster' (s. Forgács 2003: 342). Zweitens ist dieses Sprichwort zu erwähnen: *(A) szuster maradjon a kaptafánál.* [Der Schuster soll beim Leisten bleiben.] = 'alle sollten sich mit solchen Sachen beschäftigen, in denen sie sich auskennen und sie sollten nichts machen, wovon sie nichts verstehen' (s. Forgács 2003: 638). Vgl. auch im Deutschen: *Schuster, bleib bei deinem Leisten!* = 'tu nichts/rede nicht über etw., wovon du nichts verstehst' (s. Duden 2013: 673).

Bei den Sprichwörtern kann zudem auch noch ein anderer Entwicklungsweg beobachtet werden, indem aus Sprichwörtern Redewendungen ausgeschieden werden. Dieses Sprichwort wird

¹² Das Wort *saru* bezeichnet eine Art Sandale, einen einfachen Schuh, bei dem die Sohle mit Riemen, mit Spangen an den Füßen befestigt wird (s. Pusztai 2003: 1170).

heute in dieser Form nicht mehr verwendet: *Nem jó nagy urakkal egy tálból cseresznyézni, mert a magokkal kilövöldözik az ember szemét.* [Es ist nicht gut, mit den Herren aus einer Schüssel Kirschen zu essen, denn sie schießen einem mit den Steinen das Auge aus.] (Vgl. Forgács 2003: 709.) Doch das Sprichwort lebt in dieser Redewendung weiter: *nem cseresznyézik egy tálból valakivel valaki* [man isst Kirschen aus einer Schüssel nicht mit jmdm. zusammen] = 'jmd. hat mit jmdm. nichts gemein; sie sind nicht gleichrangig' (vgl. Forgács 2003). Wird man überraschenderweise von jemandem geduzt, zu dem man keine vertraute Beziehung hat, so kann man seine Empörung so ausdrücken: *Mikor ettünk egy tálból cseresznyét? / Mikor ettünk cseresznyét egy tálból?* [Wann haben wir aus einer (und derselben) Schüssel gemeinsam Kirschen gegessen?].¹³

Eine weitgehend ähnliche Entwicklungsgeschichte kann auch im Deutschen nachgewiesen werden. Die Redewendung *mit jmdm. ist nicht gut Kirschen essen* ist in der deutschen Umgangssprache auch heute noch geläufig in der Bedeutung 'mit jmdm. ist nur sehr schwer auszukommen; mit jmdm. sollte man sich besser nicht anlegen' (s. Duden 2013: 405–406). Zur Herkunft findet man im Duden (2013: 406) Folgendes: „Die Redensart hat sich aus einem Sprichwort (»wer mit Herren Kirschen essen will, dem werfen sie die Stiele in die Augen«) entwickelt [...]“.

Manche Sprichwörter werden zwar also als Sprichwörter nicht mehr verwendet, doch leben sie in verkürzter Form, d. h. als Redewendungen, weiter. Diesen Prozess mag auch das Sprichwort in der Auslegung der Fabel „A rókáról meg a gólyáról“ [„Über den Fuchs und den Storch“] verdeutlichen: *Az agg rókának is a végén az csávában találják meg az bőrét.* Die Fabel in deutscher Übersetzung:

Diese Fabel mahnt einen jeden Menschen, dass er fromm sei und alle Arglist und allen Betrug fahren lasse, auf dass er in Frömmigkeit und Lauterkeit mit seinem Nächsten handle. Denn so er auf

¹³ Zur Entwicklung des Sprichwortes s. Forgács 2021: 311–314.

Sinnverwand ist dieser Phraseologismus: *Nem őriztünk együtt disznót!* (s. Forgács 2003: 121). Vgl. auch in der deutschen Umgangssprache: *Wo haben wir denn zusammen Schweine gehütet?* = 'seit wann sind wir denn so vertraut miteinander, (dass wir uns duzen)?' (Duden 2013: 677).

Verschlagenheit und Falschheit baut, wird es ihm zu nichts nütze sein. Denn der Herrgott ist rein und gerecht, und Er hat einen Gräuel an aller Unwahrhaftigkeit und Tücke. Darum fängt Er die Listigen in ihrer eigenen List und ergreift die Tückischen in ihrer Bosheit. Wie solches sowohl die alten Exempel als auch die heutigen offen kundtun. [...] Wie verschlagen und arglistig du auch seiest, du wirst dennoch deinen Meister finden. **Auch dem alten Fuchs wird am Ende der Balg in der Lauge gegerbt.** Darum handle ein jeder Mensch einfältigen und guten Herzens an seinem Nächsten. Also geschehe es.

= 'jeder Übeltäter wird irgendwann gefasst'

Heute gilt das obige Sprichwort bereits als veraltet, aber die Redewendungen *csávába kerül/esik valaki* = 'jmd. gerät in eine schwierige Situation, in eine Notlage' [*jmd. gerät/fällt in die Gerberlohe*], *csávában van valaki* [*jmd. ist in der Gerberlohe*], *kihúzza a csávából valakit valaki* [*jmd. zieht jmdn. aus der Gerberlohe*] und *kimászik a csávából valaki* [*jmd. kriecht/steigt aus der Gerberlohe*] sind noch sehr geläufig (s. Forgács 2003: 104). Dieser Phraseologismus ist ein treffendes Beispiel dafür, dass man die Herkunft, die ursprüngliche Bedeutung einer Wendung nicht kennen muss, um sie kommunikativ korrekt verwenden zu können. Die Komponente *csáva* [(*die*) Beize; (*die*) Gerb(er)brühe] kommt aus der Fachsprache der Gerber. Es ist eine laugenartige Flüssigkeit (ung. *cserzölé*, *cserlé* [(*die*) Lohe, (*die*) Lohbeize, (*die*) Lohbrühe, (*die*) Gerb(e)brühe, (*die*) Gare]; s. Halász et al. 2003: 209), zu der man auch Hundekot verwendet hat und daher auch gestunken hat. Wäre jemand in diese Gerbbrühe hineingefallen, so wäre das äußerst unangenehm gewesen und hätte im übertragenen Sinne eine Erniedrigung bedeutet (vgl. Bárdosi 2015: 100–101; O. Nagy 2011: 82–83). Interlinguale Synonyme in der deutschen Umgangssprache sind: *in die Tinte geraten* = 'in eine missliche Lage geraten'; *in der Tinte sitzen* = 'in einer misslichen Lage sein' (s. Duden 2013: 752); *in der Patsche sitzen/stecken* = 'in einer Notlage, in Verlegenheit sein' (s. Duden 2013: 559).

Verwandt ist der Phraseologismus *cserben hagy valaki valakit*. Das Schlüsselwort der Wendung ist das Substantiv *cser*; die Äquivalente im Deutschen sind (*die*) Lohe, (*die*) Gerberlohe, (*die*) Gerbrinde (s. Halász et. al 2003: 208; *cserben* = *cser* + *-ben*

als Lokativ-Suffix). Die Wendung hängt also ursprünglich mit dem Gerben (Lohen) zusammen. Für die Gerbbrühe (*Lohbeize*, *Lohbrühe*, *Gare*; s. Halász et al. 2003: 209), die aus der Rinde der Loheiche (Zerreiche) angefertigt wurde, hat man in die Erde Gruben gegraben, und das Fell, den Balg manchmal sogar Monate lang darin liegen lassen. Was dann am Ende versehentlich unten in der Gerbergrube geblieben ist, war völlig wertlos. Daher kommt die heutige phraseologische Bedeutung (vgl. Bárdosi 2015: 100–101; O. Nagy 2011: 84–85). Im Deutschen sagt man in dieser Bedeutung: *jemanden im Stich lassen* = 'jmdn. (in einer Notlage) allein lassen, jmdm. nicht helfen' (s. Duden 2013: 716).

Es gibt auch in Heltais Fabeln solche Sprichwörter, die heute – wegen der gänzlich veränderten gesellschaftlichen Umstände – nicht mehr gebraucht werden. In der Auslegung der Fabel „Egy férfiúról és annak két feleségéről“ [Über einen Mann und seine beiden Ehefrauen] geht es um das Dilemma, eine alte oder lieber eine junge Frau zu heiraten, denn beide Möglichkeiten bergen Gefahren in sich. Es spricht vieles dagegen, eine junge Frau zu nehmen, denn es heißt: „Ha iffia veszen, avval sem illik egybe. Mert az tehén és az borjúhús nem fő egyforma puhára egyazon fazokban. Innét vagy: hogy **az illyen agg emberé leszen a bárány, de bizony más volt a kos.**“ [Wenn er eine junge Frau nimmt, mit der passen sie auch nicht zusammen. Denn das Kuh- und das Kalbfleisch kochen nicht gleich weich in demselben Topf. Daher kommt es: **einem solchen alten Mann kommt das Lamm zu, obwohl der Stier ein anderer war.**] Auf Grundlage des Kontextes kann dem Sprichwort diese Bedeutung zugewiesen werden: 'solch ein alter Mann wird der Vater des Kindes sein, auch wenn nicht er das Kind gezeugt hat'. Das hervorgehobene Sprichwort wird heute nicht mehr gebraucht; es wird weder im Wörterbuch von Forgács noch in dem von T. Litovkina aufgeführt. Bei O. Nagy (1976: 666, Beleg 238) steht es noch als landschaftlich verwendet: *Tehenes emberé a borjú.* [Dem gehört das Kalb, der Kuh hat.] = 'der wird für den Vater gehalten, dessen Frau das Kind geboren hat'. O. Nagy (1976: 692, Beleg 29 und 1976: 325, Beleg 53) gibt dazu sogar mehrere – ebenfalls mundartlich gebrauchte – Synonyme an: *Akié a tyúk, azé a tojás / a tojás is azé.; Enyém a tyúk, tehát a tojás is.* [Wem das Huhn gehört, dem gehört auch das Ei; archaisch: Das Huhn gehört

mir, somit auch das Ei.] = 'das Kind gehört dem Mann, dessen Frau es geboren hat'; Akárki kakasa csinálta, az én tyúkom tojta. [Wessen Hahn es auch immer gemacht hat, mein Huhn hat es gelegt.] = 'das Kind gehört auch dann zur Familie, wenn nicht der Ehemann der Vater ist'. Diese Sprichwörter sind heute nicht mehr in Gebrauch.

In manchen Sprichwörtern, die in Heltais Fabeln vorkommen, werden Gewalt und Prügel als unumgängliche Mittel zur Züchtigung empfohlen, wie z. B. in der Auslegung der Fabel „Az emberről meg a bálványról“ [Über den Menschen und über das Götzenbild]: „Item nux, asinus, mulier, familia, non faciunt fructum nisi vapulent. Vagyis: **Az diófa, az szamár, az gonosz asszonyember és az házínép veretlen nem terem gyümölcsöt.**“ [Der Walnussbaum, der Esel, das böse Weib und das Gesinde bringen ohne Schläge keine Frucht.] In dieser Form wird das Sprichwort nicht mehr verwendet, zumal Prügel als Erziehungsmittel sogar gesetzlich verboten sind. Das Sprichwort lebt in dieser Form weiter: (A) *pénz számolva/számlálva, (az) asszony verve jó.* [wörtl.: *Das Geld ist gezählt, das Weib ist geschlagen gut*, d. h. 'das Geld, die genaue Summe soll durchgezählt/kontrolliert werden, das Weib soll geschlagen werden']. Forgács (2003: 577) führt an zweiter Stelle noch diese Bedeutung auf: 'manche Ehemänner sichern ihre „Autorität“, ihr „Ansehen“ in der Familie – bedauerlicherweise – mit Schlägen'. Ich bin allerdings der Meinung, dass diese Bedeutung bereits veraltet ist bzw. nur noch mit scherzhafter Konnotation verwendet wird. Typisch ist diese Bedeutung: 'das ausgezahlte Geld sollen beide Parteien sorgfältig durchzählen' (vgl. Forgács 2003).¹⁴

¹⁴ O. Nagy (1976: 56, Beleg 715) führt auch noch dieses archaische, scherzhafte Sprichwort an: *Az asszonyt (a fiatalasszonyt) az első ingében kell megverni.; Első pendelyben kell megverni / kézhez tanítani az asszonyt.* [Die Frau (die junge Ehefrau) soll in ihrem ersten Hemd geschlagen werden; In ihrem ersten Unterrock soll die Frau geschlagen / gedrillt werden.] = 'es ist am besten, wenn der Ehemann direkt nach der Heirat beginnt, seine Frau zu zähmen'. O. Nagy fügt (1976) hinzu, dass es sich um eine veraltete Auffassung handelt.

5. Sprichwörter als intertextuelle Elemente der Kultur, verstanden als Makrotext

Sprichwörter sind tief in unserem mentalen Lexikon verankert. Sie können verschiedene Netzverbindungen aktivieren – kulturspezifische Sprichwörter aktivieren vor allem das kulturelle Netz.¹⁵ Die kulturspezifischen Phraseologismen bezeichne ich als Realien-Phraseologismen (ausführlicher s. Drahota-Szabó 2013: 172–214). Kulturell geprägte Sprichwörter fungieren nicht nur als textuelle Elemente in den jeweiligen Texten, sondern sind auch intertextuelle Elemente der Kultur, indem die Kultur als Makrodiskurs betrachtet werden kann. Wenn in einem ungarischen Sprichwort z. B. der Name von einer allgemein bekannten ungarischen Persönlichkeit vorkommt, so ist dieses Sprichwort Ausdruck der Wir-Identität, des gemeinsamen kulturellen Gedächtnisses, es ist sozusagen ein „gemeinsamer Nenner“.¹⁶ Diejenigen Phraseologismen, die auf die Volkssagen über König Matthias [ung. *Mátyás király*]¹⁷ zurückgehen, sind Teile des ungarischen kulturellen Gedächtnisses und sind – nach meiner Terminologie – Realien-Phraseologismen. Diese Phraseologismen setzen ein ganzes kulturspezifisches Assoziationsnetz in Bewegung. Würde man Ungarn darum bitten, König Matthias mit einem Attribut zu versehen, so würden sie höchstwahrscheinlich antworten: „Matthias, der Gerechte“. Dieses Bild ist nämlich durch allgemein bekannte Anekdoten über ihn entstanden. So ist es nicht verwunderlich: Das wohl bekannteste Sprichwort, das sich auf König Matthias bezieht, wird – oft mit einer scherzhaften Konnotation – auch heute noch verwendet: *Meghalt Mátyás király, oda az igazság*. [*König Matthias ist gestorben, die Gerechtigkeit ist hin.*]. O. Nagy (1976: 470, Beleg 496) gibt diese Bedeutungen an: a) 'über Jahrhunderte hinweg hatten die Armen, die Unter-

¹⁵ Zum mentalen Lexikon bzw. zu den Netzverbindungen s. Kovács 2013: 169–203.

¹⁶ Die Bezeichnung „gemeinsamer Nenner“ [im ungarischen Original *közös nevező*] für die – nach meinem Terminus Realien-Phraseologismen – stammt von Lajos (2007: 102).

¹⁷ König Matthias, d. h. Mátyás Hunyadi [auf Deutsch Matthias Corvinus] war zwischen 1458 und 1490 ungarischer König. Laut zahlreichen Volksmärchen und Sagen soll er sich, als einfacher Mensch verkleidet, des Öfteren unter das einfache Volk gemischt haben, um mit eigenen Augen zu sehen, wie die Menschen leben, was für Sorgen sie haben.

drückten keinen Patron'; b) (in redensartlicher Verwendung) 'man kann sich um Gerechtigkeit, um Wiedergutmachung an niemanden mehr wenden' (vgl. noch Bárdosi 2015: 355). Man kann Forgács (2003: 481) zustimmen, wenn er nur die zweite Bedeutung angibt, denn die erste Bedeutung ist auch meines Erachtens bereits verblasst.

In dem untersuchten Korpus kommt (sogar in zwei Fabeln) auch ein Sprichwort vor, dessen Entstehungsgeschichte mit König Matthias verbunden ist:

Azt mondják közbeszéddel: *A gebét nem illeti a hintószekér.* Tehát mindenki megelégedjék az ő állapotjával és tovább ne nyúljon annál, se ne kíváncsozzék többre, mint amire az Isten az ő szent és bölcs akaratjából elrendelte. Mert bizony módja vagyon az Isten akaratjának. Ámbátor nem is kívánod, az Isten azért megismer tégedet és ha tetszel néki és nagyobb tisztre avagy tisztességre vagy méltó, bizony megtalál. Ne tolakodj oda, mert mihelyt magad kívánsz valamit, máris nem vagy méltó rája. Azért ha odatolod magadat, nyilván úgy kezdesz járni, mint ama számár. Mert **Mátyás király, Mátyás kovács, mindenik Mátyás, azért különbség vagyon a két Mátyás között.** *Magistratus virum monstrat.* Vagyis: *A tisztség az ember próbája.* Így vagyon.

(Auslegung der Fabel „A számárról meg a kutyáról“ [Über den Esel und den Hund])

Man sagt mit einem Gemeinpruch: *Einem alten Klepper gebührt der Prunkwagen nicht.* Ein jeder also begnüge sich mit seinem Stande und strecke sich nicht weiter, noch begehre er nach Höherem, als wozu ihn Gott in Seinem heiligen und weisen Ratschluss bestellt hat. Denn fürwahr, Gottes Wille hat seine wohlgefügte Ordnung. Ob du es auch nicht begehrest, Gott kennt dich wohl, und so du Ihm gefällt und eines höheren Amtes oder der Ehre würdig bist, wird Er dich wahrlich finden. Dränge dich nicht hinzu, denn sobald du selbst nach etwas trachtest, bist du dessen schon nicht mehr würdig. Wenn du dich aber vordrängst, wird es dir ergehen wie jenem Esel. **Denn obgleich der König Matthias heißt und der Schmied Matthias heißt, und ein jeder ein Matthias ist, so waltet doch ein gewaltiger Unterschied zwischen den beiden Matthias.** *Magistratus virum monstrat.* Das heißt: *Das Amt ist des Mannes Prüfung.* So ist es.

= 'obwohl ihre Namen gleich sind, gibt es einen großen Unterschied zwischen ihnen, d. h. gleiche Namen bedeuten nicht gleichen Rang oder Wert'

Hinter diesem Sprichwort steckt folgende Anekdote (Szép 2024: 40; Übersetzung und Hervorhebung durch Fettschrift von mir – E. D.-Sz.):

DER MATTHIAS-TAG

Diese kleine, scherzhafte Begebenheit ist ebenfalls um den großen König herumgewachsen, weshalb sie es verdient, in dieses Buch gepflanzt zu werden. Wahrlich, bis zu jener Zeit hatten die Ungarn keinen Herrscher, den das Volk so sehr geliebt hätte wie König Matthias. Denn das Volk liebte Matthias so sehr, wie die Taube den reinen Weizen liebt. Diese süße Liebe leitete auch die Schritte jenes wackeren Schusters aus Buda, der sich eines Morgens zum königlichen Palast aufmachte und geradewegs zum König hinaufgehen wollte. – Was begehrt du, guter Mann, vom König? – fragte der Soldat, der am Tor Wache hielt. – Es ist Matthias-Tag, edler Herr Ritter, – sagte der Schuster – ich bin nur gekommen, um Seiner Majestät als meinem Namensvetter zu gratulieren, da man mich ebenfalls Matthias König nennt. Da lachte der Soldat: – **Es gibt wohl einen gewissen Unterschied zwischen einem Matthias König und dem König Matthias; genau so viel, wie zwischen einem Schuster und einem König besteht.** Der Schuster musste vom Palasttor wieder von dannen ziehen, doch als die Sache König Matthias zu Ohren kam, ließ er sogleich ein Paar gelbe Stiefel bei Matthias König bestellen.

Das Sprichwort basiert auf einem Sprachspiel: König Matthias und der Schuster sind nach ihrem Vornamen Namensvetter, und zudem kann *Király* [*König*] im Ungarischen auch Familienname sein. Familiennamen werden allerdings im Ungarischen nicht nachgestellt, sondern stehen vor den sog. Vornamen, d. h. Vornamen im wörtlichen Sinne sind im Ungarischen die Familiennamen.

Mit diesen Beispielen wollte ich veranschaulichen, dass beim „Überleben“ eines Phraseologismus, sei es eine Redewendung oder ein Sprichwort, mehrere Umstände eine Rolle spielen. Selbstverständlich brauchen die Ungarn die obige Anekdote nicht zu kennen, um diesen Phraseologismus zu verstehen oder

evtl. auch selbst zu verwenden. Sie kennen allerdings alle den Namen von König Matthias und dieser Umstand trägt dazu bei, dass dieser Phraseologismus weiter tradiert wird.

6. Fazit und Ausblick

Es wurde von der engen Verwobenheit von Sprichwort und Fabel ausgegangen, denn beide lehrhaften Gattungen formulieren Lebensweisheiten, menschliche Verhaltensnormen. In den Fabeln, und insbesondere in den von Heltai hinzugefügten Auslegungen, d. h. in dem sog. „Sinn“, werden menschliche Schwächen wie Bosheit, Überheblichkeit, Gier, Hochmut usw. an den Pranger gestellt, mit der Absicht, zu Bescheidenheit, zu Genügsamkeit usw. zu erziehen. Diese lehrhafte Tendenz hängt selbstredend mit den protestantischen Ideologien zusammen, die auch Heltai vertreten hat. In der Moral der Fabeln werden vor allem die inneren menschlichen Eigenschaften wie Mäßigkeit, Ehrlichkeit, Friedfertigkeit und Arbeitsamkeit als Tugenden dargestellt. Den Armen wird empfohlen, sich damit zufrieden zu geben, was sie haben; die Reichen werden vor der Ausbeutung der Armen gewarnt, denn sie werden für ihre bösen Taten noch büßen müssen.

In Bezug auf die pragmatische Funktion der Sprichwörter kann zusammenfassend festgestellt werden, dass sie in der Argumentationsstruktur der Fabeln – besonders in den Auslegungen – eine äußerst relevante Rolle spielen. Als Fazit stimme ich Lüger (2001: 83) zu, der nach der Analyse „argumenationsspezifischer Leistungen“ von Phraseologismen auf Grundlage zweier Reichtagsreden das Ergebnis wie folgt zusammenfasst:

Bezüglich der Argumentationsstruktur werden vor allem Phraseologismen mit Satzstatus als subsidiäre Maßnahmen eingesetzt, um in prägnanter Form Plausibilität und Überzeugungskraft der Beweisführung zu unterstreichen, damit möglichen Einwänden zu begegnen und so die Realisierungschancen des mit einem Text verbundenen Ziels zu verbessern.

Die Zeit, in die wir durch die Fabeln zurückblicken konnten, ist eine längst vergangene. Dadurch ergab sich die Forschungsfrage, welche Sprichwörter mittlerweile archaisch wirken oder sogar ausgestorben sind bzw. welche immer noch im Gebrauch sind

oder – aus den Sprichwörtern ausgeschieden – als Redensarten heute noch verwendet werden. Die Ergebnisse sollen natürlich relativiert werden, zumal sich Kodifizierung in einem Wörterbuch und Sprachgebrauch nicht unbedingt vollständig decken. Eins lässt sich allerdings festhalten: Unser Lebensumfeld hat sich seit Heltais Zeit in vielerlei Hinsicht grundsätzlich verändert. Damit lässt sich erklären, dass manche Sprichwörter während der Jahrhunderte verschwunden sind. Doch diejenigen, die allgemeine ethische Normen versprachlichen, sind heute noch gültig und im Gebrauch (z. B. *Jótett helyébe jót várj!* [vgl. *Wie du mir, so ich dir.*]; *A szerencse forgandó.* [vgl. *Glück und Glas, wie leicht bricht das.*]; *Lassan járj, tovább érsz!* [vgl. *Eile mit Weile.*]; *Gyakorlat teszi a mestert.* [Übung macht den Meister.]; *Aki másnak vermet ás, maga esik bele.* [Wer andern eine Grube gräbt, fällt selbst hinein.] usw.). Um diese Feststellung untermauern zu können, wären Untersuchungen zeitgenössischer Korpora und Häufigkeitsuntersuchungen notwendig – dies könnte das Ziel einer weiteren Forschung sein. Soviel darf allerdings auch auf Grundlage dieser Untersuchung zum Schluss hinzugefügt werden, dass die im Titel des Aufsatzes formulierte These, nämlich „Sprichwort – Wahrwort“, weiterhin gültig ist.

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PROVERB - TRUE WORD

HUNGARIAN PROVERBS IN THE REFORMATION PERIOD AND TODAY

Abstract: It is a well-established fact that proverbs are historically and culturally situated; they fulfill distinct pragmatic functions across different eras and cultures. Furthermore, their application is significantly influenced by the respective text genre. The Reformation period is widely regarded as the golden age of proverbs, a time when their truth value was firmly believed, and they served as essential moral compasses in everyday life. This article revisits this period by utilizing the fables of the Hungarian writer-preacher Gáspár Heltai as the basis for the investigation. Based on these fables, a collection of proverbs is compiled. The research primarily aims to identify the pragmatic roles attributed to proverbs within these fables. Secondly, the study examines the diachronic endurance of these expressions: whether they have withstood the test of time and remain in common usage, or if they have become archaic or vanished entirely from the linguistic landscape.

Keywords: proverb, realia-proverb, fable, pragmatic function, text-constitutive role

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<https://doi.org/10.29162/pv.43.1.1200>

UDC 811.111'373.7:81'42:305=111

Original scientific paper

Received on 20 February 2026

Accepted for publication on 30 April 2026

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PROVERBS AND GENDER STEREOTYPES: A COGNITIVE-DISCURSIVE PERSPECTIVE ON THE PROVERB *BOYS WILL BE BOYS*

Men of quality do not fear equality
Anonymous

Abstract: The paper presents a cognitive-discursive study of the gendered proverb *Boys will be boys* with the focus on its actional and meta-linguistic dimensions. The main aim is to explore the discursive dichotomy of the dictum, i.e. its role in 1) perpetuating gender stereotypes about men and reinforcing gendered expectations in Anglo-American society, and, more recently, in 2) reflecting and promoting change catalyzed by the gender equality movement. The material comprises 400 examples, including texts from online articles, opinion pieces, blogs, social media posts, and memes spanning the past twenty years. The research methods applied were Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Sociocognitive Discourse Studies (SCDS) methodology, complemented by the linguo-cultural method, stylistic analysis, sampling and corpus methodology. The comprehensive analysis of the linguistic, cognitive, and discursive profiles of the dictum *Boys will be boys* suggests that the gender stereotype embedded in the proverb is being challenged and redefined in discourse, both via canonical and recycled (modified) use, resulting in anti-proverbs. The anti-proverbial derivations attest to significant shifts in social norms and encapsulate sociopolitical change.

Key words: *Boys will be boys*, gendered proverbs, anti-proverbs, gender stereotypes, discourse-gender dyad, sociopolitical discourse

1. Introduction

Language-gender studies have evolved into a fertile and expansive field of research since their formal emergence in the 20th century, stemming from feminist linguistics. More specifically, contemporary research has shifted its focus towards the discourse-gender dyad. This analytical vantage point is relevant for the inquiry into the discursive use of “gendered language”, which, according to Jule, perpetuates “the historical patriarchal hierarchy ... that has existed between men and women, where one (man) is considered the norm, and the other (woman) is marked as other – as something quite different from the norm” (Jule 2018: 20). Conversely, the tendency to deploy gender-inclusive language seeks to promote gender equality, eradicate gender bias, and avoid stereotypes.

My observations of the use of proverbs in the discourse of contemporary sociopolitical movements indicate that their agenda can be transmitted via two discursive modes: reflective and actional (Konstantinova 2022b: 144–45). The former encompasses texts intended to critically assess sociopolitical reality; the latter includes texts designed to encourage civic engagement or to function as a call to action. Proverbs as a rhetorical strategy of the sociopolitical discourse concerning gender inequality have been found to possess significant *actional* potential; indeed, paremias serve as a transformative and quite frequently rectifying discursive force (Konstantinova 2023).

In light of Zykova’s perspective on phraseology and gender studies, the paremiological repertoire of a language is regarded as a “cultural cross-section of a given people,” which reveals its two salient dichotomous characteristics: 1) long-term preservation of culturally significant knowledge, and 2) immediate responsiveness or sensitivity to current sociocultural shifts. The paremiological landscape, therefore, provides a lens through which to examine the concepts of masculinity and femininity as well as the deeply entrenched gender stereotypes associated with them (Zykova 2014). This fine-tuning to change accounts for the *actional* potential of proverbs.

Being a gendered phrase underscoring patriarchal domination in society, the proverb *Boys will be boys* is inextricably connected with the concept of “masculinity” (and also “toxic mascu-

linity”); it has continuously been in the spotlight of sociopolitical discourse on the issue of gender inequality and feminist activism for equal rights. Several activists have advocated for the ban of the dictum from common parlance (see, e.g., Meyer 2014; “Why ‘Boys Will Be Boys’ but Not ‘Girls Will Be Girls?’” 2018). It can be argued that within this arena, its actional capacity turns the dictum into a *proverb in-action*.

Thus, the article attempts to provide a perspective on how paremiological inquiry can contribute to our understanding of gender and power/dominance relations in society through the investigation of the discourse-level phenomena of the language-gender dyad. The main goal was to explore the discursive dichotomy of the proverb *Boys will be boys*, i.e. its role in the perpetuation of gender stereotypes about men and reinforcement of gendered expectations in Anglo-American society, and its recent discursive use to reflect and promote change catalyzed by the gender equality movement. To achieve this objective, the following tasks were performed: first, the linguistic, cognitive, and discursive profiles of the proverb were examined with special focus on its actional and metalinguistic dimensions; second, the instances of canonical and non-canonical (modified) use were delineated; and, third, the anti-proverbial recycling of the dictum was analyzed.

2. Methods and empirical data

The overarching methodological framework for the conducted study is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) which is an interdisciplinary research movement that regards language as social practice and considers the context of language use fundamental to understanding power and dominance dynamics. As Fairclough and Wodak argue, discursive practices may exert major ideological and political influence determining the way power is distributed in societies (Fairclough and Wodak 1997: 258). CDA analysts address these issues by exploring “the role of discourse in the re(production) and challenge of dominance, i.e. the enactment of social power by elites, institutions or groups”, which results, among other effects, in *gender inequality* (Van Dijk 1993: 249–250). Their primary concern lies in the examination of dis-

cursive structures and strategies that enable the perpetuation of social dominance.

More specifically, for the purposes of the present research, the collected data was analyzed through the lens of Sociocognitive Discourse Studies (SCDS), which is a multidisciplinary type of CDA that relates discourse structures to social structures through a *cognitive interface*, i.e. a “communicative Common Ground and the shared social knowledge” (Van Dijk 2017: 28).

The three-profile approach suggested by Konstantinova (2021) was implemented. This methodological perspective has proved relevant in case studies of individual proverbs as it helps to organize observations into linguistic, cognitive, and discursive “folders”, elucidating the cognitive processes in which communicative goals are correlated with specific verbal and/or non-verbal packaging in actual discourse (Konstantinova 2022a, 2023).

Linguocultural and stylistic analyses were employed as auxiliary methods for the examination of the empirical material. For sampling the instances of discursive use of the proverb *Boys will be boys* and its modifications, the corpus linguistics methodology (the iWeb corpus search); Google and Yahoo searches were applied. The collected corpus mainly includes texts from online articles, opinion pieces and essays, blogs, social media posts, and memes (approximately 400 contexts) spanning the past twenty years.

3. Theoretical framework

The present research is grounded in the following theoretical underpinnings: the cognitive-discursive paradigm in proverb studies and Sociocognitive Discourse Studies with a focus on the discourse-gender dyad. A synthesis of these frameworks is expected to provide a deeper insight into the “discursive valence” of a proverb.

The research is based on the postulate that proverbs belong to the group of linguo-cultural items that constitute core elements of the cognitive base (“background knowledge”) shared by a linguo-cultural community. Since they are *mental representations* (frames) of valuable experience, their cognitive function is interconnected with their cultural function, i.e., the conveyance

of cultural meanings, stereotypes, prescriptions, etc. Research has systematically proved that “*cognitive processes and representations* cause and control all human action and interaction and hence also *all language use and discourse*” (*italics added* – A.K.) (see, e.g., Van Dijk 2017: 30).

It has been noted that the discursive deployment of some proverbs goes beyond their didactic or other pragmatic purposes; they develop a repertoire of novel social meanings evolving into socially endorsed “reference points”. Such adages provide social actors with epistemological and axiological foundations for processing reality (Konstantinova 2023, Moreno 2025). They, therefore, become *metalinguage*, i.e. they are used as linguistic tools (with their well-known and universally recognized key wording and imagery supported by a solid cultural background) to introduce and explain existing or new sociopolitical phenomena. Quite paradoxically, as it may seem, this metalinguistic quality becomes even more evident in modified proverbs (especially, anti-proverbs) due to the structural and semantic corrections traditional texts undergo to convey change.

The metalinguistic dimension of proverbs often manifests itself in their use as *speech formulae*. In other words, they engage in “proverbsplaining”. In Baranov and Dobrovolskiy’s theoretical framework, certain idioms serve “as verbal commentaries on communicators’ actions” in discourse. The authors of the seminal work *Aspects of the Phraseological Theory* point out that speech formulae (or “pragmatic idioms”) are idioms with a fixed pragmatic value and a context-dependent meaning that are used to manage social interaction (Baranov and Dobrovolskiy 2008: 78). Thus, their primary function is to comment on non-trivial aspects of communication, which shifts discourse to a *metalevel* moving from simple transmission of information to the level of subjective evaluation (Baranov and Dobrovolskiy 2008: 82).

Another tenet underpinning the present study is that language “is not just a reflection of society, but is involved in the construction and perpetuation of social realities” (Jule 2018: 19). It is, therefore, argued that proverbs, especially gendered dictums, have to be studied through the lens of their actional potential. It follows, then, that to explore the language-gender dynamics we must focus on discourse – the interface and critical

mechanism that not only reflects and preserves stereotypes but also encapsulates and drives change.

The systematic study of gender within sociolinguistics and discourse analysis began in the early 1970s, catalyzed largely by second-wave feminism. As noted by Tannen, it is now an interdisciplinary field spanning gender and women's studies (Tannen 2015: 639). Historically, language-gender research has focused on two primary linguistic domains: the phonological variations in the speech of men and women, and the distinct conversational styles manifested during gendered interactions (Wodak 2017: 1). One of the milestones in this field was the work of Robin Lakoff, whose pioneering insights laid the foundation for feminist linguistics by seeking to expose linguistic gender inequality and provide a framework to eradicate gender bias (see, e.g., Lakoff 1973, 1990). Discourse-gender dyad research operates on the premise that attention to *actual* language use can “denaturalize an assumed male privilege and the patriarchal system that secures it” (Jule 2018: 22) and thus focuses on power-gender dynamics.

Critical Discourse Analysis and, specifically, Sociocognitive Discourse Studies outlined earlier establish a rigorous conceptual basis for the investigation of top-down relations of dominance and bottom-up relations of acceptance/resistance. As Van Dijk points out, “an analysis of *strategies of resistance and challenge* is crucial for our understanding of actual power and dominance relations in society” and “such an analysis needs to be included in a broader theory of power, *counter-power* and *discourse*” (*cur-sive added – A.K.*) (Van Dijk 1993: 250). Moreover, a comprehensive understanding of how dominance and gender inequality are perpetuated and reproduced in discourse calls for a rigorous study of the *social and mental representations (or constructs)* held by social actors.

Thus, consolidating these invaluable research frameworks, mine is a paremiologist's approach aiming at exploring the metalinguistic function of proverbs in discourse, i.e. their role in reflecting and verbalizing social change.

4. Analysis of the material

4.1. Linguistic profile of the proverb

In the case of the proverb *Boys will be boys*, it is essential to begin with its general dictionary meaning which, according to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, is “expressing resignation regarding an (undesirable) aspect of the behavior of a boy or young man, as being supposedly characteristic of his age or sex” (“Boys will be boys” 2025).

Due to its grammatical and lexical minimalism, the proverb under discussion has a very categorical tone. Its interpretation, however, largely depends on the speakers’ cultural (stereotypical) background knowledge. In other words, the proverb is a gendered phrase encapsulating a social stereotype and is characterized by discursive ambiguity (which will be discussed further), i.e. it allows for various interpretations.

As far as the origin of the proverb is concerned, several authoritative sources provide different dates. It is believed to have derived from the Latin proverb *Children (boys) are children (boys) and do childish things* (*Sunt pueri pueri, pueri puerilia tractant*) (Ammer 2013: 52). According to *A Dictionary of American Proverbs*, the phrase *Boys will be boys* was first recorded in English in 1589 in *Censure of Martin Junior* (Mieder et al. 1992: 65). However, the date was corrected to 1832 in a more recent *Dictionary of Authentic American Proverbs* (Mieder 2021: 55).

The Oxford English Dictionary cites the phrase as first used in R. Griffith’s *Letters Henry & Frances* (ed. 3) vol. VI in 1770 (“Boy, n.1 and int.” 2025). Gary Martin, the author of the Meanings and Origins section at the major British resource *The Phrasefinder* (<https://www.phrases.org.uk/>), supports the claim that the earliest reference of the phrase to be found is “in a series of letters between a British couple, Richard Griffith and Elizabeth Griffith, prior to their marriage in 1751, published in 1770,” which, unfortunately, do not clarify its current meaning (Martin 2024).

An independent French researcher Pascal Tréguer traced the earliest citation of the proverb to a 1721 publication *The Apothecary’s Defence of Dr. Bentley, in Answer to the Spy. Together with some Observations, Moral and Critical, upon the Fable of the Jackdaw in Peacock’s Feathers; Particularly address’d to the Author of the Spy* (Tréguer 2021).

Speaking about linguistic (and also semantic) companions of the dictum *Boys will be boys*, it is worthwhile to mention that *The Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs* links the proverb to the quotation “Youth will be youthful (when you haue saide all that you can)” from *Plain Man’s Pathway to Heaven* by A. Dent 1601 (Speake 2015: 33). The dictum *Girls will be girls* is a bona fide proverb recorded in *The Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs* and *A Dictionary of American Proverbs* (Mieder et al. 1992: 251) with years 1826 and 1870-73 listed as the earliest references respectively. The meaning ascribed to the saying in *The Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs* is analogous to that of *Boys will be boys* (Speake 2015: 33).

In contrast to *Boys will be boys*, there is certain “somber silence” accompanying the expression *Girls will be girls* (DG 2020) resulting in linguistic and also discursive asymmetry; while the former has been in active use, the latter has lacked cognitive and pragmatic salience. The following are the trends in the use of the two counterparts in printed materials (1800-2022) as reflected in Google Ngram Viewer graphs:

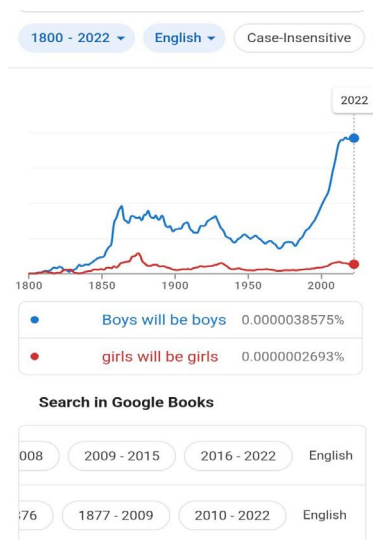


Figure 1. Frequency comparison of the proverbs *Boys will be boys* and *Girls will be girls* from 1800 to 2022. Chart generated by Google Books Ngram Viewer, books.google.com/ngrams, screenshot captured by author on 30 Dec 2025.

In light of the discursive performance of the phrase *Boys will be boys*, the proverb *Boys (Lads) will be men* documented in *The Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs* (1949) with its first known citation dating back to 1641, is of particular interest as well (Smith 1949). As will be demonstrated further, *Boys will be men* has recently been deployed in discourse as an anti-proverb rather than a proverb per se.

4.2. Cognitive profile of the proverb

This section should be prefaced with the caveat that the distinction between the cognitive and discursive profiles is rather nominal and is necessitated by the aims of the present study. As has been noted earlier, from a cognitive standpoint, proverbs are mental structures or linguistic symbols representing recurrent life situations. Therefore, it can be argued that cognitive profiling of proverbs is fundamental for their case studies bearing in mind that their cognitive characteristics and function reveal themselves in their actual use in discourse, i.e. the environment wherein ideas and practices that shape meaning occur.

The following analysis adopts the term “cognitive-discursive valence” of the proverb implying its polysemanticity (several distinct “semantic vectors”) and the structural-semantic modifications observed in discourse. From the cognitive perspective, *Boys will be boys* has morphed into “a paremiological matryoshka doll” revealing previously implicit or euphemized meanings attached to this phrase in the mentality of some social actors. The following semantic vectors constituting its valence are:

- *Boys will be boys* as a social and cognitive construct, i.e. solid stereotype, a pillar of the patriarchal society and mindset.
- *Boys will be boys* as a stigma, i.e. a gendered phrase perpetuating harmful mentality, distorting the concept of masculinity, and, thus, creating gendered expectations.
- *Boys will be boys* as a speech formula, i.e. a pervasive statement with an exculpatory function.
- *Boys will be boys* as a marker of shifts in social norms and a catalyst for change.

4.3. *Discursive profile of the proverb*

The cognitive profile of the proverb *Boys will be boys* provides the prerequisites for its recent discursive currency and performance. From a structural-semantic point of view, all the examples in the empirical material can be subdivided into canonical (non-modified) and modified texts. The semantic vectors enumerated above are represented by both types.

As the analysis has revealed, cases of structural-semantic modification are rather scarce (which stands in opposition to the discursive trend of another ubiquitous gendered proverb *A woman's place is in the home*) (Konstantinova 2023). The dictum *Boys will be boys* is predominantly applied as a solid stereotype or speech formula.

4.3.1. *Boys will be boys* as a social and mental construct

A number of books, well-argued essays, articles, and posts stress that it is a deeply rooted stereotype with multiple facets (Brandt 2016; Faulkner 2019; DG 2020).

Some examples underscore *Boys will be boys* as a pillar of patriarchal society and mindset. In the following simplistic yet powerful posts, the concepts of patriarchy and masculinity are explained in several emblematic lines, including the dictum in question:

(1)



Figure 2. Intersectional Memes and Feminist Dreams. "Patriarchy Also Known As." *Facebook*, 28 July, 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1L9NEkf-Stn/>, retrieved on 13 Sept. 2025. Repost of @NeoBaepii.

(2)



Figure 3. Daphni Claire. "When does a man reach the magical age of being totally accountable for his actions?" *Facebook*, 15 May, 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1ELHmacbn1/>, retrieved on 13 Sept. 2025.

4.3.2. *Boys will be boys* as a stigma

Another discourse surrounding the proverb follows the semantic vector *Boys will be boys* as a stigma, and is based on the belief that it perpetuates a harmful stereotype (Figure 2), and is indicative of a double standard, i.e. it justifies more severe standards of behavior applied to women than to men (Figure 3).

Authors argue that the phrase *Boys will be boys* imposes a regulatory script rather than acknowledging men's individuality (Schiller 2019). Furthermore, this "arbitrary definition" of masculinity is inherently damaging; it sustains a social framework wherein boys who deviate from these norms are labeled abnormal ("Why 'Boys Will Be Boys' but Not 'Girls Will Be Girls?'" 2018).

Australian feminist author Clementine Ford in her book *Boys Will Be Boys: Power, Patriarchy and the Toxic Bonds of Masculinity* supports the latter view noting that such a mindset traps men in a narrow definition of masculinity which punishes vulnerability (Ford 2018). Drawing on psychological research, Smith discusses the deep-seated misogynistic blind spots within "boys will be boys" culture, noting that "innocently naughty behavior" has historically been regarded as a male prerogative. This double standard suggests that while boys have always been granted the "entitlement to experimentation and innocent risk-taking," girls have been denied such societal leniency (Smith 2018).

4.3.3. *Boys will be boys* as an exculpatory speech formula

As the analysis of the material suggests, the pervasiveness of men's misconduct towards women masks its harmful impact and frequently leads to its normalization in society. The dictum *Boys will be boys*, therefore, frequently serves as a ready-made argument to absolve the male population of "youthful indiscretions" and, consequently, prevents society from improving. The pragmatic scope of the dictum within this semantic vector includes

- an excuse for benign male mischief.

Online communities have shared narratives focusing on the silly or mischievous aspect of men's interactions and conduct featuring the proverb. In a social media post, for instance, a netizen leaning on the "woke-broke" opposition offers some socially appropriate uses of the proverb:

(3)



Figure 4. goosegoblin (formerly known as doomsneigh). “Broke: using ‘boys will be boys’ to defend abusive and predatory behaviour...” *Reddit*, 25 Oct. 2019, reddit.com, retrieved on 14 Oct. 2025.

- Sexual violence normalization.

Within this framework, the proverb serves as a rhetorical tool to neutralize harassment or bullying and minimize the gravity of an offense. In the gathered collection of examples, of special interest is a set of Internet memes involving legal context and referring directly or implicitly to adverse rulings in sexual harassment cases (including the allegations raised during the Associate Justice confirmation hearing of Brett Kavanaugh, Figure 5):

(4)



Figure 5. u/i_am_the_walrus_1984. “Boys Will Be Boys.” *Reddit*, 23 Sept. 2018, www.reddit.com/r/PoliticalHumor/comments/9i24xp/boys_will_be_boys/, retrieved on 14 Oct. 2025.

(5)



Figure 6. “The Parent Rap.” The Simpsons, season 13, episode 2, 20th Century Fox, 2001. *YARN*, [taylor.getyarn.io/yarn-clip/f2bbd0ee-e61d-4f1c-aa02-23a3a1ae4a3d/gif](https://yarn.getyarn.io/yarn-clip/f2bbd0ee-e61d-4f1c-aa02-23a3a1ae4a3d/gif), screenshot captured by author on 30 March 2025.

(6)



Figure 7. Saul Goodman “Your Honor, My Clients Pleads, Boys Will Be Boys” image macro. *Imgflip*, uploaded by uploader3215273, May 2022, imgflip.com/i/6g3ee3, retrieved on 30 March 2025.

A chilling real-life instance of the proverb deployment in a criminal context emerged during the 2017 court trial for the brutal rape and murder of Aboriginal woman Lynette Daley. One of the defendants, Adrian Attwater, explained the events to the police stating: (7) “*These things happen ... girls will be girls, boys will be boys*” (Williams 2017).

- The Trump extension and the *Trump will be Trump* corollary.

The proverb *Boys will be boys* has been widely deployed by the media, political commentators, online essayists, bloggers, and members of Donald Trump’s inner circle as a discursive tool to rationalize his conduct and minimize its impact. This exculpatory rhetoric gained significant prominence during the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign in the wake of the release of the 2005 *Access Hollywood* recording.

Trump's critics argued that the descriptions of his treatment of women heard on the tape constituted an admission of sexual assault. He himself and his proponents utilized the related phrase "a locker room talk", framing such behavior as an inherent by-product of masculine nature, to mitigate the political and ethical repercussions of the recording.

To oppose such narrative media outlets and the online community held a united front categorizing it as a typical "boys will be boys" dismissal. For instance, in her article for *Time Magazine* "How Donald Trump Turned 2016 into a Referendum on Gender" Charlotte Alter noted that Trump's defense of (8) "*locker-room banter*" was "*essentially a 'boys will be boys' argument*" (Alter 2016).

A number of texts from the empirical material all featuring the analyzed proverb can be quoted here to demonstrate the vigorous counter-response of the digital community highlighting the danger of the "boys will be boys" mentality. For instance, on October 10, 2016 Sara K. Ahmed tweeted, (9) "*'Locker room talk' is the same 'boys will be boys' rhetoric that perpetuates and condones sexual assault. We are better than this. #debate*" or another netizen named Lex wrote, (10) "*Locker room talk*" = *Boys will be boys* = *men don't need to be held accountable for their sexist actions*" (qtd. in Rees).

More recently, the phrase under consideration was officially deployed by the White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt to rationalize the feud between two top advisers in the Trump administration – Elon Musk and Peter Navarro – which involved a series of personal insults. In April 2025, when asked if the escalating conflict was confusing the public or sending the wrong message, she responded: (11) "*No. Look, these are obviously two individuals who have very different views on trade and on tariffs. **Boys will be boys**, and we will let their public sparring continue. And you guys should all be very grateful that we have the most transparent administration in history*" (Korte 2025).

Given that Donald Trump's conduct has notoriously been described by this idiom, his persona serves as a textbook case for the proverb in online essays and reports, with the anti-proverb *Trump will be Trump* (occasionally *Trump gonna Trump* (cf. *Haters gonna hate*)) being its corollary. Two opposing tendencies in

the use of the anti-proverb can be distinguished in the collected material, with the negative assessment prevailing:

- negative assessment

For instance, in a critique of the Republican party's culture, a 2024 publication for *The American Prospect* linked the original and the recycled versions of the phrase: (12) "**Boys will be boys and Trump will be Trump** – a malevolent deranged geezer for all to see" (Meyerson 2024). A 2020 article for *Los Angeles Review of Books* quotes the American author and filmmaker Chris Whipple as saying that Trump "*clearly has no idea how to govern*," and regardless of his chiefs of staff, (13) "*Trump will be Trump*" (Rohde 2020).

- Positive assessment to describe Trump's "unique voice", immunity to traditional "vetting", following "his gut".

For instance, an article for *New York Amsterdam News* features the anti-proverb in its title (14) "*Bannon or no Bannon, **Trump will be Trump***" and conveys the idea that President's instinct-driven leadership is what his supporters value as a sign of strength (Collinson, 2017).

4.4.4. *Boys will be boys* as a marker of shifts in social norms and a catalyst for change

This actional dimension of the proverb can be observed in social media posts and publications decoupling masculinity from inherent harm and instead linking this phrase with men's prosocial behaviors and empathetic bonding as in the following examples:

(15)



Figure 8. *Boys will be boys* proverb variation, excerpted from Ally Perry, "The Best Heartwarming Wholesome Memes and Posts of the Week (June 12, 2025)," *Memebase, Cheezburger*, 12 June 2025, cheezburger.com/40999685/the-best-heartwarmingly-wholesome-memes-and-posts-of-the-week-june-12-2025. Meme 4, screenshot captured by author on 30 March 2025.

(16)



Figure 9. *Boys will be boys* reinterpretation thread. *Reddit, r/lotrmemes*, 22 Dec. 2020, www.reddit.com/r/lotrmemes/comments/khrngc/boys_will_be_boys/, screenshot captured by author on 30 March 2025.

Within the ongoing *nature vs nurture* debate, some texts reveal a persistent tendency to link the "boys will be boys" mentality to specific parenting methods and stress the idea of changing the stereotype through upbringing, classroom education, and the arts.

Another shift in the social norms *marked* by the proverb is connected with the polemic surrounding the concept of gender fluidity. This is the only set of multi-modal examples relying

mainly on the visual element to neutralize the controversy and leave the intended audience to deduce the meaning on their own, as in the following cartoon (Figure 10):

(17)



Figure 10. Mark Knight, *Boys Will Be Boys* sports cartoon. Knight Cartoons, knightcartoons.com.au/products/boys-will-be-boys-sports-cartoon, screenshot captured by author, 30 March 2025.

The 2020 single “Boys Will Be Boys” by the British pop artist Dua Lipa has been hailed as a feminist anthem for its incisive critique of gendered expectations. The track’s central anti-proverbial hook – (18) “*Boys will be boys, but girls will be women*” – highlights the double standard identified earlier: while boys are granted extended cultural forbearance for their behavior, girls are compelled to mature rapidly to navigate the world around them.

Pop mogul Taylor Swift has lent her voice to sociopolitical issues on several occasions as well. Her hit song “Miss Americana & the Heartbreak Prince” (2019) can be considered a sociopolitical commentary since it employs familiar high school imagery as a deliberate metaphor to express the singer’s disillusionment with the contemporary American political landscape. This feeling of helplessness is fuelled by the lack of wise leadership critiqued in the following lyric: (19) “*My team is losing, battered and bruising: / I see the high fives between the bad guys / ... / American stories burning before me / I’m feeling helpless, the damsels are depressed / **Boys will be boys then, where are the wise men?***”

The anti-proverb featured in the song can also be seen as an actional text and interpreted as a call to the political opposition (“wise men”) to find their voice and bring about change. In 2018, the Australian sleepwear brand Peter Alexander responded to public pressure by withdrawing a children’s sweatshirt from its shops following a backlash. The item, which featured the (20) “*Boys will be boys*” slogan, was pulled after a concerned mother’s protest against the “sexist statement” sparked a larger conversation about the controversial idioms incorporated in children’s fashion (Buttigieg 2018).

(21) Gillette’s 2019 “We Believe: The Best Men Can Be” commercial openly challenged the dismissive cliché *Boys will be boys* (uttered in the opening scene of the video). This much-publicized socially oriented campaign critiqued the culture of “toxic masculinity” and attacked the proverbial “rhetorical shield” that has long provided men with an excuse for grave transgressions (“We Believe”).

Perhaps the most culturally significant use of an anti-proverb derived from *Boys will be boys* is linked to the 2017 Harvey Weinstein sexual abuse scandal:

(22)



Figure 11. Shannon Downey, *Boys Will Be Boys* embroidery, 2016. Photograph courtesy of Shannon Downey / @badasscrossstitch, featured in Elise Taylor, “How That ‘Boys Will Be Boys’ Embroidery Became the Internet’s Response to Harvey Weinstein,” *Vogue*, 16 Oct. 2017, www.vogue.com/article/boys-will-be-boys-badass-crossstitch-harvey-weinstein, retrieved on 15 Oct. 2024.

Originally stitched by craftivist Shannon Downey in 2016 as a direct emotional response to the public outrage following the release of the above-mentioned *Access Hollywood* tape, the “*Boys will be boys*” embroidery achieved viral dissemination due to its extensive reposting by famous actresses and millions of social media users, which cemented its status of the emblem of collective protest. The anti-proverb *Boys will be held accountable for their actions* prescribes a new model of masculine conduct. Sh. Downey’s substitution of the lexeme “boys” was inspired by a phrase once spoken by her mother, who was determined to hold her sons accountable for their transgressions (Taylor 2017). The original insertion of the expletive (though often omitted from the slogan) was intended to channel her anger and frustration.

4.4.5. Anti-proverbial recycling of the proverb *Boys will be boys*

A special group of retooled versions of the proverb under study consists of 25 anti-proverbs, i.e. deliberate, innovative transformations of traditional paremias aimed at creating a humorous or satirical effect. Furthermore, these semantic and pragmatic twists achieved through the use of various linguistic modification devices and techniques challenge traditional worldviews and adapt them to modern contexts. Anti-proverbs have been extensively studied on the material of a slew of world languages (see, e.g., Mieder 1983; Mieder 2003; Raji-Oyelade 2024; T. Litovkina 2015; T. Litovkina et al. 2021).

The constant emergence and ubiquitous presence of proverbs across diverse discourses underscore their role in reflecting our “gravest concerns... and our most precious values” (Lau et al. 2004:1; Konstantinova 2021: 366). However, in the realm of sociopolitical activism, the *anti-proverbial genre* has proven to be an equally vigorous, and perhaps more impactful, linguistic instrument. It can be argued that by poignantly questioning traditional beliefs anti-proverbs subvert deeply-rooted stereotypes and reshape attitudes, thus becoming a catalyst for change.

Listed below are the anti-proverbs from the collected material which represent all of the semantic vectors discussed earlier¹:

¹ This list can serve as an addendum to the one presented in Mieder and T. Litovkina 1999.

- a social/mental construct, stigma, and exculpatory speech formula:

(23) *Boys will be boys, and so will a lot of middle-aged men*²

(24) *Boys will be boys because they can't be men. Amen*

(12 – 14) *Trump will be Trump*

(25) *Boys will be boys and girls will be blamed*

(18) *Boys will be boys but girls will be women;*

- a marker of shifts in social norms and a catalyst for change. The texts here explore the concept of gender fluidity:

(17) *Boys will be boys except when they choose to identify as girls*

(26) *Girls will be boys and boys will be girls. It's a mixed up, muddled up, shook world*

(27) *Boys will be boys even when they are destroying girls' records*

(28) *Boys will be boys? Correct. Gender is not a variable;*

underscore the importance of upbringing and education:

(29) *Boys will be boys until someone teaches them to be more*

(30) *Boys will be boys but parents will be turds*

(31) *Boys will be what they are taught*

(32) *Boys will be boys basically means bad parenting creates assholes;*

underpin men's inherent good traits:

(33) *Boys will be respectful*

(34) *Boys will be good humans*

(35) *Boys will be men*

(36) *Boys will be boys then where are the wise men?*

(37) *Boys will be best bros*

(38) *Boys will be boys?;*

frame men as women's supporters and allies:

(39) *Boys will be feminists*

(40) *Boys will be feminists, activists, and allies;*

² This anti-proverb is the only one also registered in the 1999 collection (Mieder and T. Litovkina 1999: 55).

introduce new mandates for accountability (pointing out the existing double standard):

(41) *Boys will be held accountable for their actions*

(42) *Boys will be held accountable for their actions just like girls/like everyone*

(43) *If boys will be boys, then girls are allowed to be angry*

(44) *Boys will be boys but you're getting too old to use this excuse.*

As the analysis of the anti-proverbs reveals, most of them are genuine “anti-texts”. For instance, *Boys will be boys because they can't be men. Amen*, with its sarcastic tag, the rhetorical *Boys will be boys then where are the wise men?* or the incisive *Boys will be boys even when they are destroying girls' records* are mere parodies of the traditional stereotype giving it a new twist or introducing substantive changes by imitating the original phrasing. *Boys will be held accountable for their actions*, *Boys will be held accountable for their actions just like girls/like everyone*, *Boys will be boys but girls will be women*, and *Trump will be Trump*, on the other hand, can be classified as “proverbs in the making” since they are endowed with greater semantic vigor and pragmatic prowess to become bona fide proverbs in the current propitious sociopolitical environment.

5. Discussion of the results

The comprehensive cognitive-discursive analysis of the proverb *Boys will be boys* and its anti-proverbial derivations has demonstrated their profound impact on the social fabric. The linguistic profile has traced the possible etymological connections of the proverb and examined its semantic companion *Girls will be girls* noting a conspicuous linguistic and (also discursive) asymmetry between the two counterparts. It has validated that *Boys will be boys* is a gendered phrase encapsulating a deeply entrenched social stereotype; it is characterized by discursive ambiguity.

The cognitive profiling of the dictum has unveiled its cognitive-discursive valence and delineated the following four semantic vectors: *Boys will be boys* as 1) a social and cognitive construct; 2) a stigma; 3) a speech formula; 4) a marker of shifts in social norms and a catalyst for change.

The analysis of its discursive profile following the distinguished sematic vectors has demonstrated that the cases of structural-semantic modification of the proverb are relatively infrequent (present only in the form of anti-proverbs). *Boys will be boys* is predominantly applied as a solid stereotype (“social/mental construct” vector) or as an exculpatory speech formula, providing a speaker with the illusory authority to rationalize socially unacceptable behavior, thus being involved in what has been described as “proverbsplaining”.

The “speech formula” vector reveals an extensive pragmatic scope, including uses ranging from the excuse for benign male mischief to normalization of sexual violence and, quite recently, as a characterization of the conduct of Donald Trump and the members of his inner circle.

The “marker of shifts in social norms and a catalyst for change” vector best manifests the actional potential of the proverb and includes “proverb in-action” instances of effectuating change through parenting and education, pop culture, popular brands’ strong social commentary or socially oriented advertising campaigns, and sociopolitical activism.

All the instances of non-canonical discursive use of the proverb *Boys will be boys* include anti-proverbial alterations. 25 anti-proverbs were identified in the empirical material with four sayings (*Boys will be held accountable for their actions*, *Boys will be held accountable for their actions just like girls/like everyone*, *Boys will be boys but girls will be women*, *Trump will be Trump*) possessing the linguistic and cognitive pre-requisites for becoming bona fide proverbs in the future. The conspicuous absence of light humor or playful jokes in the collected texts can be accounted for by the collective (and personal) significance of the problem.

These incisive anti-proverbs fulfill the metalinguistic function by explicating the concept of gender fluidity, underpinning the significance of the upbringing and education of boys, and introducing new mandates for accountability (pointing out the existing double standard applied to women). A newer dimension of the metalinguistic function is connected with the robust counter-critique response of the online community seeking to reclaim

the positive connotations of the adage by highlighting men's inherent good traits and establishing their status as women's allies.

Thus, the three profiles of the proverb *Boys will be boys* corroborate the proposition that, although the gender asymmetry is deeply rooted in the mentality, language consistently captures and marks all the fluctuations, shifts, and revolutionary acts, and serves as the catalyst for change.

6. Conclusion

Given that discourse is largely interpreted in terms of cognitive frames or mental representations, this research serves as a further substantiation of the tenet that phraseology in general, and proverbs in particular, provide fertile ground for this line of inquiry; they are instrumental to the discourses surrounding pressing sociopolitical problems including the issue of gender inequality.

The findings prove that being stereotypical in nature gender biased language limits one's understanding of the human experience. Furthermore, they suggest that the behaviors of social actors are product of discourse. As has been shown, recent discursive and, consequently, social shifts have led to a systematic deconstruction of the "boys will be boys" stereotype, aiming to marginalize its use in the collective consciousness and common parlance. Conversely, while the consensus holds that *Boys will be boys* is a dangerous phrase, there has also been a strong cultural impulse to reconsider the stereotype in a positive light. One must conclude, that the actualization of social change requires a comprehension of the existing social scripts that dictate patterns of human behavior (frequently contained in paremiological lore) and an appreciation of the complexity of these patterns and the shifts within them. Therefore, it is my belief, that the "discourse-gender-proverb" triad will remain a compelling site for future inquiry.

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<https://doi.org/10.29162/pv.43.1.1197>

UDC 811.134.3'36:811.163.42'36'373.7=111

Original scientific paper

Received on 15 February 2026

Accepted for publication on 16 April 2026

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CONDITIONAL CONSTRUCTIONS IN PROVERBS

Abstract: This study starts from two fundamental research questions: in what ways conditionality is expressed in proverbs, and how a generic interpretation is actualized in conditional constructions within proverbs. The study has been conducted on a limited corpus of Portuguese and Croatian proverbs excerpted from several collections of proverbs and sayings, with primary interest in their semantic-syntactic structure rather than their lexical or possibly figurative meaning. We focus on the relationships among propositions in proverbs with a binary structure, guided by the criterion that they are connected by some type of conditional relation. Since both genericity and conditionality are not only linguistic, but also logical and conceptual universals, we expect that a comparative analysis, in this context, will reveal a certain degree of correspondence between Portuguese and Croatian proverbial texts. Our analysis of the corpus will focus on the following research questions: a) what types of conditional constructions are the proverbs based on; b) which verb forms are used in the proverbs to express different degrees of hypotheticality, c) what syntactic features characterize non-canonical conditional constructions in the proverbs. We believe that such type of analysis can contribute, as well, to a better understanding of the actualization of generic information at the linguistic level.

Keywords: proverb, conditionality, genericity, Portuguese, Croatian

1. Introduction

From both a paremiological and a phraseological perspective, proverbs are most often studied as a specific type of micro-texts that represent a lexicalized, “fixed” structure, mostly with figurative meaning, whereby this meaning and its interpretation are primarily explained through the prism of idiomaticity, whether of individual lexical components or of the overall phraseological meaning.¹ Such an approach is probably crucial for the interpretation of the proverbial text, but we are also interested in considering the proverb as a linguistic construction, a type (or several types) of syntactic structure, assuming that these grammatical constructions themselves have their own semantic and pragmatic interpretation, that is, their meaning.

We consider genericity to be the key distinctive feature of the proverb and the proverb to be a prototypical form of a generic statement. This paper is therefore conceived as a contribution to the study of the ways and mechanisms, or syntactic-semantic “strategies,” by which generic value is expressed in a proverbial context. We focus specifically on proverbs with a conditional construction, that is, on how conditionality is expressed in them as a concept and as a semantic relation between propositions. Conditional constructions in both Portuguese and Croatian have their own regularities, primarily regarding temporal, aspectual, and modal values.² However, we will also test our initial hypothesis that generic statements, and especially proverbial ones, in a certain way neutralizes the semantic-syntactic properties of some grammatical categories, both word classes and syntactic structures, as well as tense-aspect values.

In the first part of the article, we will examine the concepts of genericity and conditionality relevant to this research followed by a concise description of conditional subordinate clauses in Portuguese and Croatian. We will then attempt to classify the material from the corpus according to two criteria: the type of conditional construction (according to Peres et al. 1999) and the status of factuality. Finally, we will offer an interpretation of the proverbs from the corpus in which we identified some form of

¹ About the complexity surrounding proverb definition(s) see e.g. Villers (2024).

² Cf. Chapter 4.

implicit, non-canonical conditional relation between the propositions.

2. *On genericity*

In some recent works, including this one, we have examined the means that indicate a generic reading in proverbs. It is therefore necessary to provide a definition of the concept of genericity, at least in those aspects relevant to our research. In addition to general definitions of genericity, we also take into account interpretations of generic value in the context of the study of proverbial texts, which highlight specific features of the “genre” itself, as well as characteristics inherent to generic statements in general (Lanović 2022: 271–273).

Most authors who address the concept of genericity emphasize that it is a philosophical, logical, and conceptual universal that is also expressed at the level of language. In this sense, it is possible to find a link with conditionality, which can also be considered not only a linguistic construction but also a cognitive domain.

In the broadest sense, genericity can be defined as the expression of some regularity or generalized property, a “general” or “timeless” truth (Stanojević and Đurić 2016: 35). In language, it is expressed in two ways: as nominal genericity (“kind-referring NP” or “generic NP”) or as sentential genericity (“kind predication”). In the first type, the noun or noun phrase does not refer to an individual or a single entity but to a *kind* – an entity of the “genus” type. In the second type, generic sentences (“characterizing sentences”) do not express specific episodes or concrete facts, but rather a kind of generalized property or regularity that encompasses a set of episodes or individual facts (e.g., Krifka et al. 1995; Dobrovie-Sorin and Beyssade 2012: 191). Generic reference thus relates to an entire *class* of entities understood as a whole (Lyons 1977; Cruse 2006; Hurford et al. 2007). In such syntactic constructions, the generic interpretation arises from the nature of the relationship between the concept denoted by the noun phrase (the subject) and the property attributed to it by the predicate, as well as from the tense-aspect values of the predicate (Lopes 1992: 133).³

³ For our research, we consider particularly relevant the studies dealing with the interdependence, that is, the interaction, of the two aforementioned „carriers“ of genericity (Carlson 1982; Chierchia 1995; Krifka et al. 1995; Oliveira and Silva 2007 etc.).

Since generic sentences do not refer either to specific individuals or to particular spatio-temporally determined events, their truth value cannot be assessed with respect to specific spatio-temporal criteria (Lopes and Santos 1993: 1). Proverbs make statements about generic situations; in the absence of counter-information, generic information is verified by episodic examples of the described *type situations* (Kleiber 1989). Therefore, the most adequate paraphrase of generic statements in general might be *mostly, generally, usually, in principle*, although this is never lexically explicit in proverbs. For genericity as a feature of the proverb (in our view a fundamental one), the features of atemporality, ageographicality, and impersonality are relevant.

The generic differs from the specific, but it also differs from the universal – this distinction is relevant for proverbs at both the linguistic and conceptual levels. As in other types of generic sentences, proverbs express general truths *by default* (and not universal truths). A certain regularity is taken as true, despite awareness of the existence of exceptions, counterexamples, and contradictions (Schubert and Pelletier 1988, Krifka et al. 1995, Corpas Pastor 1996, Lanović 2022). It should also be noted that contradiction is a well-established feature of folk theories and stereotypes, which are often the source of the semantic motivation of proverbs.

In this and similar studies, we start from the hypothesis that genericity is the key feature of the proverb, and the proverb is the prototypical form of a generic statement.

3. *On conditionals*

Conditional reasoning, similarly to genericity, is understood as a cognitive domain studied by several scientific disciplines – logic, psychology, and philosophy, in addition to linguistics. “Conditional (*if-then*) constructions directly reflect the characteristically human ability to reason about alternative situations, to make inferences based on incomplete information, to imagine possible correlations between situations, and to understand how the world would change if certain correlations were different” (Ferguson 1986). The very concept, that is, the cognitive domain of conditionality, has been examined quite thoroughly within

cognitive linguistics. Dancygier and Sweetser (2005, 2014) view conditional sentences (especially “standard predictive” ones) as examples of constructions that create alternative mental spaces, that is, pairs of mental spaces that cannot coexist within the same segment of space and time. The cognitive framework is appropriate here because it does not treat grammar as independent of meaning; rather, every grammatical construction has a semantic and/or pragmatic interpretation, that is, every syntactic construction can in itself carry meaning.⁴ Kostić (2011: 30–31) cites Dancygier (1998), who argues that the meaning of conditional sentences is determined by a series of *form-meaning* correlations specific to this construction. For example, the verb forms in these sentences signal some important aspects of interpretation (such as the type of reasoning or the knowledge of the speaker and interlocutor that serves as the starting point for reasoning), but in ways specific only to conditional sentences, affecting the interpretation of the entire construction rather than of each one of the clauses. We will also address verb forms in conditional constructions, but in light of the hypothesis that in a proverbial context, due to generic interpretation, their values are in a certain way neutralized. In our analysis, we understand conditionality at both the linguistic and conceptual levels, since most proverbs in our corpus imply some kind of implicit (rather than canonical) conditional relation between propositions, that is, the presence of other meanings or subordinate relations: temporal, causal, concessive, and others. What we consider a conditional construction does not necessarily structurally correspond to a subordinate conditional clause.

The structure of a prototypical conditional construction is “if *p*, (then) *q*” (*q*, if *p*). In a conditional subordinate clause (the protasis or antecedent) the condition for the realization of the content of the main clause (the apodosis or consequent) is expressed. The conjunction *if* was traditionally considered in logical-philosophical tradition and in formal semantics as an oper-

⁴ „Construction Grammar (Fillmore et al. 1988, Fillmore and Kay 1991, Goldberg 1995, 2006, Croft 2001) and Cognitive Grammar (Langacker 1987, 1990, 1991) in particular specifically hold that linguistic structure consist of constructions, which are *form-meaning mappings* at every level of the grammar.“ (Dancygier and Sweetser 2014: 129).

ator of material implication ($\rightarrow$), and this relation was regarded as key for interpreting conditional sentences.⁵ This implied that the truth value of the complex proposition was determined by the truth values of the main and subordinate propositions, that is, the proposition is false only if the antecedent is true and the consequent false. However, it became clear that such an interpretation does not reflect how speakers intuitively perceive and understand conditional constructions, and research developed further. The idea of material implication has been overcome, and today it is generally accepted that the truth value of a conditional construction does not depend on the truth values of the antecedent and consequent.

A significant contribution to the evolution of conditional analysis was made by Ramsey (1929), who introduced an epistemic perspective and suggested that truth value necessarily depends on the speaker's system of knowledge and beliefs, that is, on the context of available information, and that there is a modal relation between antecedent and consequent. Complementary to this approach, in terms of conditional constructions, was the semantics of possible worlds and its relation to modality (e.g. Declerck and Reed 2001). Based on such a perspective, and on the speaker's stance towards the expressed situation, is the classification of conditional sentences according to the status of factuality – into factual, hypothetical, and counterfactual – which is in principle accepted by contemporary descriptive grammars, both Portuguese and Croatian.

Within the corpus of proverbs collected for the purposes of this research, we will attempt to carry out two types of classification: according to the typology of conditional constructions by Peres et al. (1999), which in our view significantly contributed to the interpretation of conditional constructions in general, especially in Portuguese, and according to the status of factuality (e.g. Mateus et al. 2003, Raposo et al. 2013). These classifications will serve both for the analysis of the syntactic-semantic structure of proverbs in our corpus and for illustrating two possible types of typology of conditional constructions in general.

⁵ Material implication: p is a sufficient condition for q , and q is a necessary condition for p .

4. Conditional clauses in Portuguese and Croatian

In this chapter, we will provide a concise description of the structure of conditional subordinate clauses in Portuguese and Croatian.⁶ A more detailed discussion will be provided in the next chapters, focusing on the analysis of proverbs from our corpus.

As noted in the previous chapter, a conditional complex sentence, according to its syntactic structure, consists of two semantically interdependent clauses, the so-called protasis or antecedent and the so-called apodosis or consequent. The protasis, i.e. the subordinate clause, contains the condition, while the apodosis, i.e. the main clause, expresses an action or content that is realized “conditionally,” that is, if the action or content of the protasis, i.e. the subordinate clause, is realized. The clauses are therefore connected by one of the formulas “[if *p*, (then) *q*]” or “[*q*, if *p*],” and the resulting complex sentence expresses that whenever proposition *p* is true, proposition *q* is also true (Lobo 2013: 2020, Peres et al. 1999, Lanović and Sarić 2024).

The status of factuality (or, according to some authors, “degree of hypotheticality”)⁷ is the fundamental criterion for the typology of conditional sentences. Although conditional sentences always involve a hypothetical situation, the probability of realization of the condition, and thus of what is conditioned, is not always the same. Therefore, conditional constructions are traditionally divided into real (factual), hypothetical (possible, potential), and unreal (counterfactual). This distinction is relevant because it is expressed through variation in verb forms (tense and mood), which are constructionally linked to a particular type of conditional interpretation.

In Portuguese, the prototypical conditional subordinate clause is introduced by the conjunction *se* ‘if’, the most frequent conditional conjunction, while the main clause begins with *então* ‘then’, which may be implicit or omitted. Other common conditional conjunctions include *caso* ‘if, in case’, *desde que*, *conquanto/contanto que*, *uma vez que* ‘provided that, as long as,

⁶ The examples of conditional sentences cited for illustration in this chapter are taken from Lanović and Sarić (2024), Silić and Pranjković (2005) and Belaj and Tanacković Faletar (2020).

⁷ E.g. Belaj and Tanacković Faletar (2020: 259–274).

given that, since’, *se porventura* ‘if by chance’, *salvo se, sem que, a não ser que* ‘unless, except if’ (in so-called exceptive-conditional clauses),⁸ all of which require the use of the subjunctive in the subordinate clause, while imposing certain formal restrictions regarding the choice of subjunctive tenses. The conjunction *no caso de* ‘in case of’ is also frequent, but occurs exclusively with the infinitive.

In Portuguese, the alternation between the indicative and subjunctive mood tends to be associated with the epistemic opposition “real”/“unreal” (*realis/irrealis*).⁹ On the other hand, the subjunctive in Portuguese is, in any case, (relatively) syntactically determined; it is the mood of the subordinate clause, determined by the nature and meaning of the verb or other predicate in the main clause, and in adverbial subordinate clauses also by the conjunction (Lanović and Sarić 2024). Although the indicative also appears in conditional sentences, it may be said that among adverbial subordinate clauses, the use of the subjunctive in them is the most systematic. However, when this type of semantic-syntactic construction appears in the context of a specific type of generic statement, such as proverbial discourse, it requires a particular approach.

In Croatian, the most common conditional conjunctions are *ako*, *ukoliko*, and *li* ‘if, provided that, insofar as’, which introduce real (factual) or hypothetical (potential) conditional sentences.¹⁰ The conjunction *kad(a)* ‘if’, which indicates a higher

⁸ Cf. Belaj and Tanacković Faletar (2020: 271–274).

⁹ „In fact, this is not a matter of opposition between the “real” in the sense of the “true” and the “unreal” in the sense of the “false,” but rather of a distinction between actualized and non-actualized predication, or possibly between real and non-real predication. [...] Specifically, real predications (*realis*) are situated either in the past or in the present—something that can be claimed to be happening or to have already happened—whereas non-real predications (*irrealis*) are situated in the future: everything future is in fact hypothetical, and what is relevant, with regard to the use of verbal mood, is the speaker’s perception or assessment of the situation in terms of the degree of certainty that something will indeed happen or will not happen.” (Lanović and Sarić 2024 /in press; translation ours/).

¹⁰ Belaj and Tanacković Faletar (2020: 260–261) also list the particle *neka*, functioning as a conjunction, which is the rarest and most marked option; in that case, the predicate can only be in the present tense of the third person (e.g. *Neka ovi ponovno pobijede ne izborima, jao nama!* ‘If they win the elections again, woe to us!’).

degree of uncertainty, appears in hypothetical or unreal (counterfactual) conditional sentences. The hypothetical conjunction *da* 'if' introduces exclusively unreal conditional sentences. Compound conjunctions *osim ako*, *osim kad(a)*, *osim ukoliko*, *izuzev kad* 'unless, except if, except when' occur only in exceptive-conditional clauses, which express the exclusion of the realization of the content of the main clause provided that the content of the conditional clause is realized.

Real (factual) conditional sentences express a realizable condition whose realization actually leads to the realization of the action contained in the main clause. Most of these sentences are equivalent to temporal subordinate constructions with *quando*, *kad(a)* 'when', especially those with generic interpretation. In Portuguese, the indicative typically appears in real conditionals. In Croatian, in protases introduced by the conjunctions *ako* and *ukoliko* there are no morphosyntactic restrictions regarding the use of verb tenses, whereas the conjunction *li* occurs only with the present tense and future II.

- (1) *Se o Rui estava doente, a mãe telefonava-lhe todos os dias.* 'If Rui was ill, his mother called him every day.'
- (2) *Se a água atinge a temperatura de 100 graus, começa a ferver.* 'If water reaches a temperature of 100 degrees, it starts to boil.'
- (3) *Ako su gosti došli, putovali su i oni s njima.* 'If the guests came, they also travelled with them.'
- (4) *Dođu li gosti, vidjet ćete i sami.* 'If the guests come, you will see for yourself.'

Among real conditionals are also "pseudo-conditionals" – in fact causal structures marked by factivity. Real, factual situations from the protasis do not condition the realization of the content of the apodosis:

- (5) *Se a Maria está em casa, então vamos visitá-la.* 'If Maria is at home, then let's visit her.'
- (6) *Ako su svi parni brojevi djeljivi s dva, onda je djeljiv i broj osam.*

- (7) *'If all even numbers are divisible by two, then the number eight is divisible by two as well.'*

Among “false conditionals”, one may also include so-called “speech-act” conditionals:¹¹

- (8) *Se bem me lembro, o João não gosta de ervilhas. 'If I remember correctly, João doesn't like peas.'*
 (9) *Ako se ne varam, ti si im to obećao. 'If I am not mistaken, you promised it to them.'*

Hypothetical (possible, potential) conditional sentences express in the antecedent an action that is possibly or eventually realizable (with varying degrees of probability), and if it is realized, the propositional content of the consequent will also be realized:

- (10) *Se o Rui estiver doente, a mãe vai telefonar-lhe todos os dias. 'If Rui is ill, his mother will call him every day.'*
 (11) *Se o Rui estivesse doente, a mãe telefonar-lhe-ia todos os dias. 'If Rui were ill, his mother would call him every day.'*

In the latter example, the degree of hypotheticality is higher, that is, the probability of realization of the action is lower, but remains possible – it will depend on context, the combination of verb tenses, complements, and sometimes pragmatic factors. In Portuguese, in hypothetical conditionals, the subordinate clause contains the subjunctive (future or imperfect), while the main clause contains a verb in the indicative (present, future and periphrastic future forms, conditional, or imperative).

In Croatian, there are also more restrictions regarding the use of verb tenses. In the protasis, the conditional mood is obligatory. In the apodosis, with the conjunctions *ako* and *ukoliko*, one may use the conditional, the relative present (most often

¹¹ Although the typical mode for the “false conditionals” is indicative, the subjunctive may also occur; e.g. *Se quiseres lanchar, há leite e bolachas* ‘If you want a snack, there is milk and biscuits’. According to Santos (2003: 189) the only distinction is stylistical.

imperfective) with future meaning, and future I. If the protasis is introduced by the more hypothetical conjunction *kad(a)*, the conditional is obligatory in the apodosis as well.

- (12) *Ako bismo imali vremena, došli bismo.* 'If we had time, we would come.'
- (13) *Ukoliko bih ranije završio s poslom, putovat ću i ja s vama.* 'If I finish work earlier, I will travel with you as well.'
- (14) *Kad bih ranije završio s poslom, putovao bih i ja s vama.* 'If I finished work earlier, I would travel with you as well.'

Unreal (counterfactual) conditional sentences are those in which the condition contained in the subordinate clause is unrealized or unrealizable, and consequently the action or state contained in the main clause is also unrealized or unrealizable. In Portuguese, the verb of the unreal conditional clause is typically in the imperfect or pluperfect subjunctive, and the main clause in the imperfect indicative or conditional:

- (15) *Se o Rui tivesse estado doente, a mãe ter-lhe-ia telefonado todos os dias.* 'If Rui had been ill, his mother would have called him every day.'
- (16) *Se o Sol girasse à volta da Terra, não haveria sistema solar.* 'If the Sun revolved around the Earth, there would be no solar system.'

In Croatian, in unreal conditional protases the relative present is used when referring to an unrealizable condition, whereas with an unrealized condition one of the verb forms expressing past time is used (most commonly the perfect). In the apodosis, the conditional is obligatory.

- (17) *Da postoje vukodlaci, svijet bi izgledao drukčije.* 'If werewolves existed, the world would look different.'
- (18) *Da si radio, imao bi sada od čega živjeti.* 'If you had worked, you would now have something to live on.'

As already noted, our understanding of conditional construction in this paper will not necessarily structurally coincide with the prototypical structure of the conditional complex subordinate sentence, since we understand conditionality not only as a syntactic-semantic relation, but above all as a conceptual one.

5. *Corpus*

The corpus for this paper consists of a total of 300 proverbs with binary structure – 136 Portuguese and 164 Croatian – excerpted from several collections of proverbs and sayings, based on the criterion of some type of conditional relation between propositions. The assumption is that this type of relation between antecedent and consequent is the most frequent in proverbs, although it is not always a prototypical conditional structure.

The existence of some form of conditional relation and binary structure were the relevant features for including a proverb in the corpus, regardless of its literal or figurative meaning. In addition to proverbs with canonical, prototypical conditional structure, the corpus also includes those in which propositions are connected by some type of implicit conditional relation, and other meanings are often present in them, most frequently causal, concessive, and temporal.

Using the material from the corpus, we will carry out a classification by subjecting canonical conditional constructions to two possible typologies – with regard to the type of conditional constructions according to Peres et al. (1999) and with regard to the status of factuality. After that, we will attempt to offer a typology of non-canonical conditional constructions identified in the corpus.

The analysis and presentation of results will primarily be qualitative, since, given the relative limitation of the corpus, it would be inappropriate to present specific quantitative estimates. For the purposes of this paper, several randomly selected examples will be used to illustrate each of the categories.

6. *Classification according to the general typology of conditional constructions in Portuguese (Peres et al. 1999)*

The hypothesis of the general typology of conditional constructions in Portuguese by Peres et al. (1999) will first be presented in tabular form and then explained and illustrated (with examples provided by the authors themselves) for each type of construction.¹²

Table 1. The hypothesis of the general typology of conditional constructions in Portuguese (Peres et al. 1999: 631)

<i>Construções condicionais</i> 'Conditional constructions'				
monocondicionais 'monoconditionals'			bicondicionais 'biconditionals'	
com marcação de condição suficiente (ou de condição suficiente) 'sufficient condition'		com marcação da condição necessária (ou de condição necessária) 'necessary condition'	diretas 'direct'	indiretas 'indirect'
condição suficiente fechada 'closed sufficient condition'	condição suficiente aberta (incondicionais) 'open sufficient condition (unconditionals)'			

Monoconditional constructions ($p \rightarrow q$) indicate a straightforward relation of implication; the antecedent is a sufficient condition for the consequent. The authors classify them into constructions with a sufficient and a necessary condition, whereby the sufficient condition may be "closed" or "open" (the "unconditional" constructions).

A "closed" condition implies that the antecedent contains a single situation presented as a sufficient condition for the veri-

¹² The typology of Peres et al. (1999: 627–653) is mostly adopted by Lobo (2013: 1981–2060). Some other authors who dealt in more detail with conditional structures in Portuguese: Ferreira (1996); Marques (2001, 2010, 2013); Oliveira (1990, 1991, 2008 etc.); Santos (1992, 1993, 2004).

fication of the consequent. In Portuguese, these are typically introduced by the operator *se* ‘if’, or *caso, no caso de, a: O Paulo vem se chover*. ‘Paulo will come if it rains.’

An “open” sufficient condition (inconditionals) implies “conditional-concessive” constructions. The situation contained in the consequent will occur in any case, regardless of the verification of the set of relevant options contained in the antecedent (at least one of these situations could prevent the realization of the consequent):¹³

- (19) *Paulo vem mesmo que chova*. ‘O Paulo will come even if it rains.’
- (20) *O Paulo vem, quer chova quer não*. ‘Paulo will come whether it rains or not.’
- (21) *O Paulo vem, aconteça o que acontecer*. ‘Paulo will come no matter what happens.’
- (22) *O Paulo vem, por muito que lhe custe*. ‘Paulo will come no matter how difficult it is for him.’

In monoconditional constructions with a necessary condition, the subordinate conditional clause in the above formula would be the proposition *q*, while the main clause expresses the sufficient condition *p*. These constructions are introduced in Portuguese by exclusive operators *só se, apenas se, somente se* ‘only if’ and others:

- (23) *Paulo só vem se estiver bom tempo*. ‘Paulo will come only if the weather is good.’
- (24) *Só te curas se deixares de fumar*. ‘You will recover only if you stop smoking.’

In biconditional constructions ($p \leftrightarrow q$), the antecedent is both a sufficient and a necessary condition for the consequent, which includes a relation of mutual implication between the antecedent and the consequent. Operators introducing “direct” bicondition-

¹³ The authors also distinguish subtypes of these „unconditional“ constructions: alternative, universal and selective inconditionals (Peres et al. 1999: 633–635).

als are *se e só se, mas só/apenas se, desde/contanto que* ‘if and only if’, ‘provided that’:

- (25) *Saio, mas só se estiver bom tempo. ‘I’m going out, but only if the weather is good.’*
 (26) *Venho, desde que esteja bom tempo. ‘I’ll come, provided that the weather is good.’*

Operators of “indirect” biconditional subordination are *excepto se, salvo se, a menos que, a não ser que* ‘except if, unless’ and others:

- (27) *Venho, salvo se não estiver bom tempo. ‘I’ll come unless the weather is bad.’*
 (28) *Saio, a não ser que esteja a chover. ‘I’m going out unless it is raining.’*

We attempted to apply this classification on the proverbs from our corpus, taking into account “canonical” conditional constructions.¹⁴ The most represented type in the corpus, in both languages, are monoconditionals with a “closed” sufficient condition:¹⁵

- (29) *Se o cego guia o cego, correm ambos o risco de cair. (If the blind leads the blind, both run the risk of falling.)*
 (30) *Se queres aprender a rezar, entra no mar. (If you want to learn to pray, go into the sea.)*
 (31) *Se as andorinhas partirem em Outubro, seca tudo. (If the swallows leave in October, there will be drought.)*

¹⁴ Peres et al. (1999: 627–653) also include in this category the “conditional-concessive” sentences, as well as some other structures, such as *quer... quer*, which they consider an “alternative” type of conditional-concessive sentence (cf. Lobo 2013: 2018); some authors treat these structures as coordinate.

¹⁵ Peres et al. (1999) include in this class constructions that, according to the other criterion we used, can be classified as factual (*Se um indivíduo é juiz, tem uma licenciatura em Direito* ‘If an individual is a judge, he has a law degree.’), hypothetical (*Se a estrada for arranjada, haverá menos acidentes. ‘If the road is repaired, there will be fewer accidents.’*) and counterfactual (*Tivesse ele dito a verdade, tudo teria ficado resolvido* ‘If he had told the truth, everything would have been resolved’). Cf. Lopes (2009: 149–169).

- (32) *Se a inveja fosse coxa muita gente andava de muletas.*
(If envy were lame, many people would walk on crutches.)
- (33) *Ako dažd ne daždi, zemlja ne plodi.* (If it doesn't rain,
the land will not yield.)
- (34) *Ako gora ne će k tebi, a ti k njoj.* (If the mountain won't
come to you, you go to the mountain.)
- (35) *Ako hoćeš da te zlo posluže, plati naprijeda.* (If you
want to be poorly served, pay in advance.)
- (36) *Da je steći ko što je reći, svi bi bogati bili.* (If gaining
were as easy as speaking, everyone would be rich.)

The remaining proverbs in the corpus are identified as monoconditional constructions with an “open” sufficient condition, that is, unconditional constructions.¹⁶

- (37) *Ainda que o galo não cante, a manhã sempre rompe.*
(Even if the rooster does not crow, morning always breaks.)
- (38) *Por velho que seja o barco, sempre passa o vau.* (No
matter how old the boat is, it will always pass the ford.)
- (39) *Quer faça frio ou calor não largues o cobertor.* (Whether
it's cold or hot, do not let go of the blanket.)
- (40) *Magarac ostaje magarac, makar imao i zlatan pokrovac.*
(A donkey remains a donkey, even if it has a golden cover.)
- (41) *I ko bježi, od smrti nije utekao.* (Even he who flees has
not escaped death.)
- (42) *Ili malahna, ili velika nevjesta, hoće joj se svatovi.*
(Whether the bride is small or big, she will want to marry.)

Examples (37), (40), and (41) represent “selective” unconditional constructions, in which the proposition from the protasis is presented as contrary to the realization of the situation in the apodosis (*even-if* conditionals in English); examples (39) and

¹⁶ Belaj and Tanacković Faletar call them unconditional-concessive clauses (*bezuovjetnodopusne klauze*) (2020: 286).

(42) are “alternative” unconditional constructions, where the protasis expresses a set of options through coordinated propositions, while example (38) is a “universal” unconditional construction, implying universal quantification over situations.

Other types, such as monoconditionals with a necessary condition and biconditionals, were not registered in the sources used.

7. *Classification according to the status of factuality*

We classified the proverbs in the corpus according to the criterion of factuality status,¹⁷ taking into account only prototypical, “canonical” conditional constructions. We identified all three types; the most common, in both Portuguese and Croatian, are directive hypothetical conditionals.¹⁸ It should be noted that, in terms of structural grammatical pattern, they may also be real (factual), but authors generally classify them as hypothetical and they mostly fit that type.

Here are some examples of proverbs from the corpus, classified as real (factual) conditional constructions:

- (43) *Se em terra entra a gaivota é porque o mar a enxota.*
(If the seagull lands on the shore, it is because the sea drives it out.)
- (44) *Se as armas falam, as leis se calam.* (If weapons speak, the laws are silent.)
- (45) *Se mais temos, mais apeteçemos.* (The more we have, the more we desire.)
- (46) *Se Deus o marcou, alguma coisa nele notou.* (If God marked him, he noticed something in him.)
- (47) *Ako što oko ne vidi, srce ne žudi.* (What the eye does not see, the heart does not crave.)
- (48) *Riječi su dobre, ako djela slijede.* (Words are good if deeds follow.)
- (49) *I crv se svija ako ga zgaziš.* (Even the worm writhes if you crush it.)

¹⁷ Cf. Chapter 4.

¹⁸ „Directive“ in the sense of instructions or warnings in the proverbial context – how should or should not one behave to achieve some goal or to avoid some negative circumstances.

- (50) *Ako gaće ne skvasi, ribe ne uhiti. (If you don't wet your pants, you won't catch any fish.)*

The prototypical verb tense of real conditionals, in both Portuguese and Croatian, is the present (with certain aspectual differences), in both the protasis and apodosis. Many authors refer to the so-called “timeless” present, an unmarked verb tense expressing relative present (Mikić and Škara 1992; Lopes 1992; Barić et al. 1995; Katičić 2002; Belaj and Tanacković Faletar 2020 and others). They note that this tense expresses a meaning that, in addition to “timeless”, is also called “gnomic,” “habitual-generic,” or explicitly “proverbial.” According to Mikić and Škara, “proverbs show a tendency to express timelessness, thus attempting to abstract from the specifications of tense” (1992: XI; *translation ours*). We will refer again to the relativity of the category of tense in the proverbial context, but through the “timeless” present atemporality is certainly expressed, as one of the fundamental features of the generic statement.

It is worth highlighting example (46), in which the past tense appears in both the protasis and apodosis, namely the aorist indicative (*pretérito perfeito simples*). Past tenses are atypical for proverbs, but they do occur (we have recorded additional examples in our corpus among non-canonical conditional constructions). Their occurrence in generic statements is thought to result from “inductive generalization,” derived from knowledge of the regular repetition, in the past, of certain episodic situations, which thereby become typical (whenever a situation of type A is verified, a situation of type B is also verified) (Lopes 1992). In this way, the past tense confers a higher degree of factuality, credibility, and persuasiveness to such statements.

Among the hypothetical (potential) constructions in our corpus, as can be seen from the following examples, the majority are directive conditional constructions:

- (51) *Se não há vento, rema. (If there is no wind, row.)*
 (52) *Se podes olhar, vê; se podes ver, aprecia. (If you can look, see; if you can see, appreciate.)*
 (53) *Se queres ter boa fama, não te encontre o sol na cama. (If you want a good reputation, don't let the sun find you in bed.)*

- (54) *Se ouvires roncar o mar, deixa os outros embarcar.* (If you hear the sea snore, let others board.)
- (55) *Se bebes demais, tropeças e caís.* (If you drink too much, you stumble and fall.)
- (56) *Ako hoć' bit' dobro služen, sam se služi.* (If you want to be well served, serve yourself.)
- (57) *Ako je tko lud, ne budi mu drug.* (If someone is foolish, do not be his friend.)
- (58) *Ako misliš kćerku dobit, klanjaj se majki.* (If you want to win a daughter, bow to her mother.)
- (59) *Ako budeš svudar, ne ć' bit' nigdje.* (If you are a wanderer, you will be nowhere.)

Directive or normative proverbs probably constitute the bulk of the proverbial corpus in general, regardless of language. There is certainly a close connection between proverbs and normative statements, as every “advice,” “warning,” or “caution” is in fact based on conditional reasoning, whether this is explicitly stated or not (as seen in the various structural patterns of directive proverbs, which are often elliptical). Their pragmatic purpose is didactic or instructive, and their interpretation is close to the deontic. They serve as “instructions” for certain behavior, which could be paraphrased as statements with the modal verb *dever* ‘have to, must’, with a deontic interpretation, in the apodosis. The modal verbs *dever* and *haver-de*, as well as *querer*, *poder* ‘to want, can’ (in Croatian *htjeti*, *misлити*), are often explicit, or the imperative is used. Simply by appearing in the proverbial context, it is understood (*by default*) that the warning comes from the “voice of collective authority.” This type of proverb is also characterized by atemporality, as the conditional statement does not refer to a specific situation, but to a “class” of situations, making the “warning” permanently valid – if the conditions or assumptions for its applicability are met.¹⁹

Verb forms – both tenses and moods – vary in both Portuguese and Croatian. In examples (51-55), in Portuguese we record the present or subjunctive future in the protasis (hypotheticality, “futurity”) and the present indicative, imperative,

¹⁹ Cf. Lopes (1992: 246–249).

or present subjunctive in the apodosis. In Croatian (56-59), the protasis appears in the present or future (I or II), and the apodosis in the imperative, future, or present. In the proverbial context, however, tenses are not absolute, but become relative; syntactic-semantic rules seem to be neutralized, and all structures may receive a generic interpretation.

There are also unreal (counterfactual) conditional constructions in our corpus; the following are some illustrative examples:

- (60) *Se Deus quisesse que o homem voasse, tinha-lhe feito asas. (If God wanted man to fly, he would have made him wings.)*
- (61) *Se não houvesse ocasião, não haveria ladrão. (If there were no opportunity, there would be no thief.)*
- (62) *Se o velho pudesse e o moço soubesse, não havia nada que se não fizesse. (If the old man could and the young man knew, there would be nothing left undone.)*
- (63) *Se Deus ouvisse os cães, choviam ossos. (If God listened to the dogs, it would rain bones.)*
- (64) *Kad bi mladi znali, stari mogli, lijeni htjeli, sve bi dobro bilo. (If the young knew, the old could, and the lazy wanted, everything would be fine.)*
- (65) *Da budala zna da je budala, dvije bi pameti imao. (If a fool knew he was a fool, he would have twice the wisdom.)*
- (66) *Da je tkati kao zjati, svaki bi tkao, a ne bi zjao. (If weaving were like yawning, everyone would weave, and none would yawn.)*
- (67) *Kad bi čoeK znao, đe će vrat slomiti, nigda ne bi onamo išao. (If a man knew where he would break his neck, he would never go there.)*

Among proverbs with unreal conditional constructions in our corpus, those in which the protasis contains an unrealizable condition (examples 60-67), i.e., a proposition corresponding to essentially impossible situations, predominate. In such cases, the relation between propositions, though logically valid, does not align with reality, or the “impossible” condition results in an absurd consequent. In Portuguese, the verb of the subordinate

clause typically appears in the imperfect or pluperfect subjunctive (a mood for *irrealis* predication), while the verb of the main clause appears in the conditional (or in the imperfect indicative, which replaces it). In Croatian, the protasis contains the conditional, (relative) present, or infinitive with the conjunction *da* (“da-clause”), while in the apodosis there is exclusively the conditional.

A specific feature of the proverbial context is that the status of factuality, or the degree of hypotheticality, is, at least in some respects, not actually relevant for interpretation, which is always generic.

8. *Non-canonical conditional constructions*

A large proportion of our corpus consists of structurally diverse constructions that imply some form of *implicit* conditional relation between propositions. Structurally, these include other types of subordinate clauses (relative, temporal, locative) which, however, are conditional in sense and meaning. In classification, we relied primarily on Lopes (1992), but our main criterion was to interpret and illustrate with representative examples all the types of constructions recorded in our corpus.

8.1. *Constructions with an indefinite-relative pronoun in the role of subject*²⁰

Such constructions, with pronouns *quem*, *tko* ‘who(ever)’ (along with some additional forms in Croatian), are the most common among the non-canonical constructions in our corpus. The pronoun denotes an indefinite “individual,” in fact a *kind* (“kind-referring NP”), and may be interpreted as a universal quantifier over entities (human beings). Belaj and Tanacković Faletar point to the high degree of hypotheticality and schematicity of the relativizer *tko*, which precisely because it does not denote strictly directed reference appears in phraseologized and proverbial

²⁰ In the grammatical tradition, they have been classified and named differently; Portuguese authors have traditionally most often grouped them among nominal subordinate clauses, whereas today they are treated as relative clauses without an antecedent, or “free” relative clauses (*relativas sem antecedente*, *relativas livres*). For Belaj and Tanacković Faletar (2020), they are correlative clauses of the substitution type.

constructions of general meaning (2020: 366–367). These can be paraphrased with *se / quando / sempre que; ako / kada / kad god / svaki put kada* ‘if, whenever, every time that’. The high degree of factuality of such constructions derives from empirical generalization. The following are several illustrative examples from our corpus:

- (68) *Quem à boa árvore se chega, boa sombra o cobre.*
(Whoever approaches a good tree is covered by good shade.)
- (69) *Quem anda à chuva, molha-se.* (Whoever walks in the rain gets wet.)
- (70) *Quem quiser viver em paz, tem de ser mudo, cego e surdo.* (Whoever wants to live in peace must be mute, blind, and deaf.)
- (71) *Quem a dois amos servir a alguém há de mentir.* (Who serves two masters must lie to someone.)
- (72) *Quem com cães se deita com pulgas se levanta.* (Who lies down with dogs gets up with fleas.)
- (73) *Quem no mar não entrar não se pode afogar.* (Who does not enter the sea cannot drown.)
- (74) *Tko želi rat bio mu u kući.* (Whoever wants war, let it be in his house.)
- (75) *Tko u boj ne ide, u boju ne umire.* (Who does not go to battle does not die in the battle.)
- (76) *Tko hoće časno, ne može lasno.* (Whoever wants to do something honourably cannot do it easily.)
- (77) *Tko leži sa psom, pun je buha.* (Who lies with the dog gets full of fleas.)
- (78) *Tko ljeti planduje, zimi gladuje.* (Who idles in summer starves in winter.)
- (79) *Tko vjetar sije, buru će žeti.* (Who sows the wind will reap the storm.)

In Croatian, conditional constructions with *tko* ‘who(ever)’ use the present indicative in both the protasis and apodosis (with both perfective and imperfective aspect, as relative and time-less), and in a small number of examples we record future I or the imperative in the apodosis. In Portuguese, present, aorist, and

future subjunctive forms appear in the protasis, depending on structurally different levels of factuality; the same verb tenses are found in the apodosis. In the Portuguese subcorpus, past verb tenses (indicative aorist, *pretérito perfeito do indicativo*) are thus recorded, especially in the protasis, as in examples (80-82). In Croatian, we recorded only one example of such a construction with a past tense (83):

- (80) *Quem não se aventurou, não perdeu nem ganhou.* (Who did not venture, neither lost nor gained.)
- (81) *Nunca milho semeou quem passarinho receou.* (No one ever sowed corn who feared the little bird.)
- (82) *Quem nasceu para burro, nunca chega a cavalo.* (Who was born a donkey will never arrive as a horse.)
- (83) *Kome nije bilo patiti, onaj ne može ni zapaziti.* (Who has not suffered cannot perceive.)

In Croatian, these constructions also include the relativizer *koji* 'that, which', sometimes with an explicit antecedent and sometimes without it (84-87):

- (84) *Koja jabuka docne sazrije, dugo stoji.* (The apple that ripens late lasts long.)
- (85) *Koja kokoš mnogo kakoće, malo jaja nosi.* (The hen that cackles much lays few eggs.)
- (86) *U kojega je miša samo jedna rupa, brzo glavu izgubi.* (The mouse with only one hole quickly loses his head.)
- (87) *Koju ruku ne možeš posjeći, valja je poljubiti.* (The hand you cannot cut off, you should kiss.)

8.2. Constructions *quando p, q* / *kad(a)* 'when(ever)' *p, q*

Although these constructions have the structure of temporal clauses, the conjunction *quando* / *kada* 'when(ever)' is atemporal and in fact has conditional value – it can be paraphrased with *se* / *ako* 'if', or with *sempre que* / *kad god*, *svaki put kad* 'when-ever, every time that'. In generic conditionals, it reflects a set of cases in which the consequent is true and therefore functions as a universal quantifier over situations. Generic interpretation is

further supported by its iterative value, establishing a kind of fixed correlation between type situations:

- (88) *Quando em casa não está o gato, folga o rato.* (When the cat is away, the mouse plays.)
- (89) *Quando a esmola é grande, o santo desconfia.* (When the alms are great, the saint becomes suspicious.)
- (90) *Quando o mar está calmo, qualquer um pode ir ao leme.* (When the sea is calm, anyone can go to the helm.)
- (91) *Quando há vento é que se iça a vela.* (It is when there is wind that the sail is hoisted.)
- (92) *Kad je zdravlja, onda je svega.* (Where there is health, there is everything.)
- (93) *Budala kad šuti, drže da je pametan.* (When a fool is silent, they think he is wise.)
- (94) *Kad lisica prodikuje, pazi na kokoši.* (When the fox preaches, beware of the chickens.)
- (95) *Kad susjedu kuća gori, ti na svoju vodu nosi.* (When the neighbor's house is on fire, carry water to your own.)

In accordance with the iterative value of the temporal conjunction, in examples (90-93) the verb tense is present indicative – “timeless,” that is, relative. In examples of directive proverbs (94, 95), the apodosis contains the imperative.

8.3. Constructions *onde p, q* / *gdje* ‘where(ever) *p, q*

Like *quando* / *kada*, *onde* / *gdje* in generic conditional constructions, most often in proverbs, loses its original grammatical meaning as a relative adverb of place, that is, a spatial localization, becoming a universal quantifier over states or events. It behaves in fact identically to *quando* / *kada*, also establishing a fixed correlation between type situations, with a high degree of factuality. This is evident in examples from the corpus (96-101), all of which have the (relative, proverbial) present tense:

- (96) *Onde há fumo, há fogo.* (Where there is smoke, there is fire.)
- (97) *Onde muitos mandam ninguém obedece.* (Where many give orders, no one obeys.)

- (98) *Onde olhos não vêem, coração não sente.* (Where the eyes do not see, the heart does not feel.)
- (99) *Gdje je mnogo babica, kilava su djeca.* (Where there are many midwives, the children are weak.)
- (100) *Gdje je dim, tu je i vatra.* (Where there is smoke, there is fire.)
- (101) *Gdje je mnogo riječi, malo je koristi.* (Where there are many words, there is little use.)

8.4. Conditional-concessive constructions

In interpreting this type of construction, neither Portuguese nor Croatian authors are unanimous, but most distinguish them from so-called causal-concessive constructions (e.g. Silić and Pranjković 2005: 349–351; Belaj and Tanacković Faletar 2020: 274–286). Portuguese authors (e.g., Lobo 2013: 2015–2020) generally divide them first into factual and non-factual, and then among non-factual distinguish conditional-concessive hypothetical (*condicional-concessiva hipotética*) from conditional-concessive counterfactual sentences (*condicional-concessiva contrafactual*).²¹ The consequent is linked to a set of potential, alternative conditions, and the content of the consequent is always true, whichever of those conditions is fulfilled. Even if the subordinate clause describes a situation functioning as a potential obstacle to the realization of the situation described in the main clause, contrary to expectations this does not prevent realization of the main clause proposition.²² Peres et al. (1999) classify them among constructions “with open sufficient condition” or “unconditional” (see Chapter 6).²³ The following are several examples from the database illustrating this type of conditional:

²¹ Cf. Lanović and Sarić (2024; *in press*).

²² They are often noted for their similarity to independent adversative clauses; in most cases, it is also possible to reframe them as adversative clauses, but they are certainly in a different syntactic relationship, and their informational content is somewhat different.

²³ In accordance with the generic interpretation, Belaj and Tanacković Faletar (2020) point to a metonymic relationship of UNCONDITIONALITY for HABITUALITY/CONCESSIVENESS. “It is, however, not a matter of allowing the realization of the main clause’s content on the basis that it is in opposition to the content of the subordinate concessive clause, i.e., it is not a matter of allowing despite something un-

- (102) *Ainda que o galo não cante, a manhã sempre rompe.* (Even if the rooster does not crow, morning always breaks.)
- (103) *Quer faça frio ou calor não largues o cobertor.* (Whether it's cold or hot, do not let go of the blanket.)
- (104) *Por mais que o amor se encubra mal se dissimula.* (No matter how much love is concealed, it is poorly hidden.)
- (105) *Por muito que se tenha, nunca é de mais.* (No matter how much one has, it is never too much.)
- (106) *Magarac ostaje magarac, makar imao i zlatan pokrovac.* (A donkey remains a donkey, wven with a golden cover.)
- (107) *I u malom čovjeku, nađe se veliko srce.* (Even in a small man, a big heart can be found.)
- (108) *Ili loncem o kamen, ili kamenom o lonac, teško loncu svakojako.* (Whether the pot strikes the stone, or the stone strikes the pot, it is the pot that suffers.)

In Portuguese examples (102–105), as in conditional-concessive constructions in general, the protasis must contain the subjunctive. In concessive clauses, this is the case even when the proposition of the subordinate clause is true; traditionally there was a distinction between “factual” and “non-factual” content in concessive clauses, marked by alternation between the indicative and subjunctive, but the tendency is towards the subjunctive regardless of whether the concession is imaginary or real (Lanović and Sarić 2024).²⁴ In Croatian examples (106–108), verb tenses vary, and elliptical constructions are not uncommon, which becomes irrelevant for generic interpretation.

expected or contrary, but despite everything, or rather anything, which is precisely what makes unconditional clauses a marginal type of concessive meaning.” (Belaj and Tanacković Faletar 2020: 285; *translation ours*).

²⁴ Marques (1995: 159, 164) offers a possible explanation for propositions that are presented as true, yet the conjunctions as operators of concessive subordination still select the subjunctive: he states that awareness of the truth of the subordinate clause’s proposition in concessive structures exists, but that it is “not relevant” for the sentence’s semantics, since it does not mark any contrast and is not necessarily taken as “new information.”

8.5. Imperative clause in the protasis – declarative clause with future indicative in the apodosis

This type of conditional construction is not characterized by a high degree of factuality (like, for example, conditionals with *quem / tko* ‘who(ever)’, *quando / kada* ‘when(ever)’, or *onde / gdje* ‘where(ever)’); its truth value is undetermined. It should be noted that future indicative, which generally appears in such examples in the apodosis, is not a factual tense in Portuguese; it rarely expresses posteriority relative to the time of utterance and, is its semantic characteristics, is closer to mood than to tense (e.g., Mateus et al. 2003: 158). In Croatian, the first part most often contains some form of imperative (or otherwise syntactically expressed imperativity), while the second contains some form of the future (Pranjković 2002: 154–156):

- (109) *Diz-me com quem andas, dir-te-ei quem és//as manhas que tens.* (Tell me who you spend your time with, and I will tell you who you are.)
- (110) *Fala pouco e bem, ter-te-ão por alguém.* (Speak little and well, and they will consider you someone.)
- (111) *Falai no mau que ele sempre aparece.* (Speak of the bad, and he will always appear.)
- (112) *Čini dobro i meći u more, ne će tonut.* (Do good and cast it into the sea; it will not sink.)
- (113) *Pomozi drugomu, i tebi će Bog pomoći.* (Help another, and God will help you.)
- (114) *Pusti pijetla na prag, popeće se i na stolicu.* (Let the rooster on the doorstep, and it will climb the chair.)

8.6. Elliptical expressions – nominal binary phrases

Although we list this type of implicitly conditional construction last in our classification, it is generally very frequent in proverbial texts, as it eliminates the parameter of time, and it represents a privileged proverbial form for expressing general, timeless, and impersonal “truths.” As Pranjković (2002: 174–176) notes, these are implicit coordinated structures with a conditional relation, in which conditionality is expressed primarily through aspectual-temporal relations, that is, parallelism of verb forms. They are

stylistically marked and characteristic of proverbs or *sententiae*, mostly archaic. They may also consist exclusively of nominal (nominative) parts; this is mostly the case in the examples registered in our corpus. These structures are predominantly binary, juxtaposed, asyndetically connected, and semantically there is a relation of implication between the members. They are also ideal for proverbial expression because of their specific rhythmic structure, which serves as a mnemonic element. Their factual value, as in most other structural types, derives from generalization formed by abstraction from the regular co-occurrence of episodic situations. The following are illustrative examples of elliptical proverbs from our corpus:

- (115) *Patrão fora, dia santo na loja.* (*The boss away, the holy day in the shop.*)
- (116) *Estrelas a brilhar, marinheiros ao mar.* (*Stars shining, sailors to the sea.*)
- (117) *Longe de vista, longe do coração.* (*Far from sight, far from the heart.*)
- (118) *Grande mar, grande tormenta.* (*Big sea, big storm.*)
- (119) *Dobar početak, dobar svršetak.* (*Good beginning, good ending.*)
- (120) *Golemo blago, golema i briga.* (*Great treasure, great worry.*)
- (121) *Čist račun, duga ljubav.* (*Clear accounts, lasting friendship.*)
- (122) *Strpljen – spašen.* (*Patient – saved.*)
- (123) *Veselo srce – pola zdravlja.* (*A cheerful heart, half of health.*)

9. Results and discussion

According to the results of the analysis of the corpus of proverbs with conditional constructions used for the purposes of this paper, the most represented, both in the Portuguese and Croatian subcorpus, are proverbs with implicit conditional constructions, that is, those that structurally do not correspond to the prototypical conditional sentence “if *p*, (then) *q*,” but instead express some kind of implicit conditional relation between propositions.

Among these, constructions with an indefinite-relative pronoun in the role of subject (*quem* / *tko* (*koji* ‘who(ever)’) predominate. These are followed, in quantitative terms, by constructions with *quando* / *kada* ‘when(ever)’ and *onde* / *gdje* ‘where(ever)’, as well as elliptical binary nominal structures.

It has been confirmed that in general (across various types) directive conditional constructions prevail, often not introduced by a conjunction. In these, the content of the protasis explicitly states the preconditions for the realization of the content of the advice/warning or the reasons justifying that advice (e.g., goals).

Concise forms of expressing conditional relations (e.g., binary nominal structures, but also a large number of directive constructions) are preferred due to conciseness and rhythmicity, given the importance of mnemonic elements in proverbial texts.²⁵

The analysis revealed a very high level of correspondence between Portuguese and Croatian proverbs with conditional structure. In temporal-aspectual terms, the fundamental difference is the Portuguese subjunctive (*conjuntivo*), which, if not syntactically determined (e.g., by the predicate of the main clause or by conjunction), generally has a hypothetical, “futural,” *irrealis* value. In the Croatian subcorpus, it was not confirmed that equivalents to the Portuguese subjunctive in corresponding constructions would necessarily be verb forms expressing hypotheticality, which supports the hypothesis that in generic, and especially proverbial contexts, the values of certain grammatical categories are neutralized. The preferred tense in both Portuguese and Croatian is the present indicative, thereby confirming its assumed status as a relative tense, in fact atemporal and “timeless”, when it appears in a proverbial statement.

Given the results, we assess that the answer to one of the hypotheses stated at the beginning of the article is affirmative – the proverbial context indeed neutralizes the syntactic-semantic properties of certain grammatical categories and structures, particularly tense, aspectual, and modal values. For illustration,

²⁵ We can, for instance, assume that this is the reason why *então* / *onda* ‘then’ which use to be presented as part of the extended formula of the conditional structure, almost never appears explicitly in the apodosis of proverbs.

let us consider two examples of proverbs from our database in which we observe the “status of factuality,” as this is a criterion relevant specifically for conditional constructions:

- (124) *Ako gora ne će k tebi, a ti k njoj. (If the mountain won't come to you, you go to the mountain.)*
 (125) *Da se riječi kupuju, manje bi ih bilo. (If words could be bought, there would be fewer of them.)*

According to the criterion of conditional structure itself, example (124) represents a hypothetical construction, where the content of the subordinate clause is potentially realizable, that is, realization is probable. Example (125), however, represents an unreal conditional sentence in which the propositions, according to our “knowledge of the world,” are unrealizable. However, knowing that these are proverbs, this structural distinction is completely irrelevant at the conceptual level. The “truth” of the content of a proverb is understood *by default* in the communicative context in which it is used, without any need to question the stated claims; it is entirely irrelevant whether we believe them or not, or whether we identify with the voice of the implicit “collective authority”. When confronted with proverbial text, a generic reading is automatically activated (see Chapter 2), which, in our interpretation, may be attributed to the automatic activation of several types of mechanisms operating at linguistic, pragmatic-discursive, and conceptual levels (Lanović 2022). According to Lanović (2022: 271-273), at the linguistic level, decisive for generic interpretation is the referential value of the entities thematized in the proverb, especially noun phrases, that is, their interaction with tense-aspect values of predications and the relation among propositions representing “type situations.” In this paper, we have dealt exclusively with the expression of genericity at the linguistic level.

However, there are other types of means in discourse signaling that we are dealing with a proverb that may be assigned as “pragmatic-discursive mechanisms”. These are metalinguistic expressions that very often (though not necessarily) introduce a proverb into discourse, simultaneously presenting it as a voice of authority (in Portuguese, e.g., *como diz o povo, como se costuma*

dizer, como se diz, como diz o provérbio, como dizem os velhos ‘as the saying goes, as they say, as it is said, as the proverb says, as the old people say’ etc.). In this type of mechanisms, we also include mnemonic elements, that is, specific rhythmic and syntactic patterns characteristic of proverbs. In some cases, specific vocabulary, very often archaic, will also serve as a trigger for the activation of a generic-proverbial reading.

In addition to these two types of mechanisms, cognitive or conceptual mechanisms will certainly also operate. In this respect, various interpretations may be offered, but as this is not the focus of the present paper, we will, for illustration, suggest the proposal by Lakoff and Turner (1989), who identified the conceptual metaphor *GENERIC IS SPECIFIC* as the basis for understanding and interpreting proverbial texts. “There exists a single generic-level metaphor, *GENERIC IS SPECIFIC*, which maps a single specific-level schema onto an indefinitely large number of parallel specific-level schemas that all have the same generic-level structure as the source-domain schema” (Lakoff and Turner 1989: 162). The mentioned conceptual metaphor combines with the cultural model the authors call “The Great Chain of Being,” the folk unconscious theory of the connection between properties and behavior they call “the Nature of Things,” and the pragmatic principle of communication called the “Maxim of Quantity” (provide as much information as necessary and no more); they consider this combination essential for the interpretation and understanding of proverbs (Lanović 2022: 273-275). We may agree that, for the interpretation and understanding of proverbs, the interaction of different parameters is essential, in addition to linguistic ones, reasoning mechanisms based on the speaker’s encyclopedic knowledge are activated, along with cognitive operations such as abstraction and generalization, as well as reasoning based on analogy.²⁶

10. Concluding remarks

According to our initial research questions, the results of the analysis conducted on a limited corpus confirmed that all types

²⁶ Cf. also Corpas Pastor (1996).

of prototypical conditional constructions appear in proverbs, except for monoconditionals with a necessary condition and biconditionals (according to the general typology of Peres et al. 1999). Among non-canonical conditional constructions, with an implicit conditional relation between propositions, the following have been confirmed: constructions with an indefinite-relative pronoun as subject; constructions of the type *when(ever) p, q*; constructions of the type *where(ever) p, q*; conditional-concessive constructions; imperative clause in the protasis – declarative clause with future indicative in the apodosis, and elliptical expressions – nominal binary phrases. As for the types of constructions, the Portuguese and Croatian subcorpora showed a high degree of correspondence. Regarding the verb forms used to express different degrees of hypotheticality, the main difference is the Portuguese subjunctive. However, our hypothesis was confirmed that, given that proverbial discourse expresses generic information, the values of certain grammatical categories are “neutralized”; thus, in proverbial contexts, in both languages, and especially in Croatian, verb forms that do not themselves express hypotheticality are frequent (most commonly, the relative present indicative). We consider that in this study the corpus was too limited for quantitative assessments to be meaningful, but this remains a task for future research based on more comprehensive (extensive) corpora.

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<https://doi.org/10.29162/pv.43.1.1175>

UDC 821.124.09:81'373.7:82-7=111

Original scientific paper

Received on 13 January 2026

Accepted for publication on 30 April 2026

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PERVERBS AND *DETORSIO*: COMIC PROVERB MODIFICATION BETWEEN YESTERDAY AND TODAY

Abstract: Since antiquity, paremias and phraseologisms have always been modified for comic purpose. Latin rhetoricians and scholars used to call this type of manipulation of proverbs *detorsio*. Closer inspection reveals that the stylistic devices employed by ancient authors are the same as those found in modern perversbs, a term used to collectively describe *anti-*, *pseudo-*, *quasi-* and twisted proverbs. The aim of this article is to show how the modern concept of perversbs and the ancient one of *detorsio* correspond. To prove this thesis, I will first define the concept of perverb and that of comic *detorsio* using a few examples. Next, I will show how certain mechanisms present in modern perversbs are also present in ancient examples of comic *detorsio*. To this end, I will use the comparative method, juxtaposing ancient and modern examples. Special focus will be placed on Petronius' *Satyricon*: this 1st-century Latin novel abounds in proverbs and idiomatic expressions that are used for linguistic mimesis and characterization of the characters.

Keywords: Perversbs, *detorsio*, parody, Greek proverbs, Latin proverbs, ancient literature

1. Introduction¹

To create a comical effect, one resorts to something unexpected that may surprise the listener or reader. For this purpose, one can employ proverbs and idioms, or to be more precise, paremias or phraseologisms. This kind of manipulation is attested nowadays in the so-called perversbs, but this use of paremias and phraseologisms was also known in ancient times. In his *Rhetoric* (3.10–11, 1412a29 ff.), Aristotle states that one of the most effective means of achieving ‘the witty’ (τὸ ἄστεϊον) is the surprise, which occurs when the listener “does not hear what he expects” (οὐ γὰρ ὥσπερ ὁ ἀκούων ὑπέλαβεν). The philosopher goes on to say that ‘the witty’ can be achieved, for example, through the unexpected and unforeseen use of riddles (ἡνιγμένα), new terms (τὰ καινὰ), puns (τὰ παρὰ γράμμα σκκώματα), homonyms (ὁμωνυμῖαι) and also through the use of proverbs (παροιμῖαι). The concept is reiterated by Cicero in his treatise *De oratore* (2.258):

Saepe etiam uersus facete interponitur, uel ut est uel paululum immutatus, aut aliqua pars uersus... In hoc genus coniciuntur etiam proverbia.

[Often, to provoke laughter, a verse is also inserted, either in its complete or slightly modified form, or a part of a verse... To this genre also belong proverbs.]

The Latin pedagogue and rhetorician Quintilian (6.3.96–98) also deals with this issue:

adiuuant urbanitatem et uersus commode positi, seu toti ut sunt [...], quod fit gratius, si qua etiam ambiguitate conditur [...], seu uerbis ex parte mutatis [...], seu ficti notis uersibus similes, quae παρωδία dicitur; et proueria oportune aptata.

¹ For Latin authors and their works, I will use the abbreviations listed in the Index of the *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* (abbreviated: *ThLL*); for Greek authors and their works, I will use the abbreviations used in the *Greek-English Lexicon* by Liddell-Scott-Jones (or *L.-S.-J.*). The English translation of passages is always yours. Linguistic examples with interlinear glosses will follow the Leipzig glossing rules (see: <https://www.eva.mpg.de/lingua/resources/glossing-rules.php>). All translations from languages other than English are my own.

[Humour is also enhanced by appropriately placed verses, either referred to in their entirety [...], and this will be more pleasing, if it is seasoned with some double entendre [...], or with some changed words [...], either imaginary verses similar to the authentic ones – and this is *παρωδία* [parody] – or appropriately adapted proverbs].

But how did the ancients modify paremias and phraseologisms? And how do the moderns do it? Furthermore, in which cases are there similarities? These are the questions I will be exploring in this article. I will start by defining the terms ‘paremia’ and ‘phraseologism’, after which I will introduce the concept of the para-proverb. Methodologically, the article adopts a qualitative and comparative approach. The corpus is deliberately limited to cases in which the underlying proverbial model remains recognizable, and the alteration can be classified according to a specific mechanism, such as addition, omission or substitution. This allows the comparison of ancient *detorsio* and modern perversbs not as historically connected phenomena, but as functionally comparable strategies of comic proverb manipulation.

2. The concept of paremia and phraseologism

From its earliest attestations in the mid-fifth century BC until at least the beginning of the Imperial period, the term *παροιμία* appears to denote concise sayings marked by an ethical orientation and by a traditional (*παλαιά*) form, which are not attributed to any specific author (Lelli 2023:144). While this definition is broadly applicable, it is not without exceptions: *παροιμιαί* may vary in length and do not necessarily possess a moral dimension. Regarding the etymology of the term, García Romero (1999: 222) states:

Si οἶμος/οἶμη es la narración [...], del mismo modo que προίμιον es “lo que precede a la narración”, el “proemio”, παροιμία significaría entonces “lo que se encuentra junto a la narración”, es decir, lo que no pertenece a la narración propiamente dicha (el preverbio *παρα-* es muy frecuente en el sentido de “fuera de”) pero se deduce de ella como corolario, como enseñanza de sabiduría universal que se desprende de un hecho concreto.

[If οἶμος/οἶμη is the narration [...], just as προίμιον is “that which precedes the narration”, the “proem”, παροιμία would then mean

“that which is next to the narration”, in other words, that which does not belong to the narration itself (the prefix *παρα-* is very frequent in the sense of “outside”) but is deduced from it as a corollary, as a teaching of universal wisdom which follows from a specific fact.]

Previously, *παροιμία* was only used for the construction of nouns and adjectives, such as ‘paremiography’ and ‘paremiographic’, ‘paremiology’ and ‘paremiological’. Due to the terminological confusion in the world of paremiology today, the term has been taken over by Franceschi (2005: IX) to mean

un elemento della struttura di quel codice linguistico naturale che consente all'uomo di esprimere le intuizioni mentali mediante strutture logiche, e che noi diciamo idioma: del quale va dichiarato strumento importantissimo.

[An element of the structure of that natural linguistic code that enables man to express mental intuitions by means of logical structures, and which we call idiom: of which it must be declared a very important instrument.]

According to the Scuola Geoparemiologica Italiana (Franceschi 2005: XII), the term ‘paremia’ possesses a broad semantic scope:

Espressione brachilogica convenzionale in forma di sentenza in sé conclusa, concettosa, allologica e polisemica, costruita secondo un'opposizione logicoritmica binaria e ricca dei tratti strutturali e formali propri della produzione orale – che mentre l'evidenziano nella sequenza del discorso, la rendono meglio memorizzabile – e che sotto l'apparenza di un particolare asserto è intesa a palesare per analogia, in modo succinto e icastico e con forte effetto retorico, un consiglio o un parere (di preteso valore universale) relativo ai più vari aspetti del vivere dell'agire umano.

[A conventional brachylogical expression in the form of a self-contained, conceptual, allological and polysemic sentence, constructed according to a binary logical-rhythmic opposition and rich in structural and formal features typical of oral production – which, while highlighting it in the sequence of discourse, making it easier to memorise – and which, under the appearance of a particular assertion, is intended to reveal by analogy, in a succinct and vivid manner and with a strong rhetorical effect, a piece of advice or

opinion (of supposed universal value) relating to the most varied aspects of human life and action.]

While the definition stated above is suitable, I argue that logical-binary opposition is not always necessary, as shown by *paremia* (0):

(0) Piedmontese from the Biella area (Soletti 2011)

I ciap asmějo aj ulle.

‘The shards resemble pots’.

The term ‘*paremia*’ is used in English in a narrower sense, specifically to indicate proverbs, sayings, or sapiential utterances (Villers 2022: 2). Here, I will use it in its broader sense as outlined above.

The Escuela Paremiológica Española makes a further distinction: it commonly uses the term ‘*paremia*’ to refer to fixed expressions that are equal to or longer than a phrase, and considers their use to fall within the scope of paremiology. Phraseology would be responsible for the study of phraseologisms or fixed expressions that are shorter than a phrase. The classification proposed by Sevilla Muñoz and Crida Álvarez (2013) is indeed coherent and useful, but it poses problems when applied to Greek and Latin paremiology. This is due to the broader meaning of the term *παροιμία* in ancient Greek. The cited authors propose its use to designate fixed expressions of equal or greater length than a sentence. However, in Ancient Greek the term includes fixed expressions shorter than a sentence, which the authors refer to as ‘phraseologisms’.² This makes its use problematic in studies of ancient Greek and Latin paremiology, because in those languages it has a broader meaning than in modern paremiology and, as a result, its use can lead to misunderstandings and ambiguities.

Furthermore, the concept of phraseologism is much broader than that of idiomatic expressions, including all expressions shorter than a phrase, such as collocations. I would currently like to focus exclusively on phraseologisms that have a proverbial

² In the classical word, it can be considered a *paremia* even a single word such as *κρητίζειν* ‘to behave like a Cretan’, namely, ‘to be a cheat’, see López Graña 2020: 45-108.

meaning and not those that have only an idiomatic one. This type of phraseological unit can also undergo the same processes of alteration as *paremia* (1):

- (1) Ancient Greek (Stratt. fr. 57 K.-A.)
 Σαννυρίωνος σκυτίνης ἐπικουρίαν.
 ‘Sannyrion’s leather help’.

This is a parody built on the proverbial phrase shown below (2) by adding a word (Σαννυρίων ‘Sannyrion’, an Athenian comic poet of the 5th century BC) and replacing a word (σκυτίνη ‘leather’ < σκυίνη ‘fig wood’):

- (2) Ancient Greek (García Romero 2015a: 150, and 2015b: 291)
 σκυίνη ἐπικουρία.
 ‘Fig wood help’.

Fig wood is particularly fragile; therefore, the idiomatic phrase (2) metaphorically indicates weak and futile help. In contrast, due to the absence of context, it is complicated to grasp what the former phrase (1) means, but it is plausible that this is an obscene joke: we know about the existence of leather phalluses [ὄλισβοι] the most famous of which seem to be the ones produced in Miletus (see Ar. *Lys.* 107–110 and Th. 8.17.3). It is important to note that the aforementioned modified phraseologism (1) also demonstrates how multiple alteration mechanisms can coexist.

In relation to what I have written, I find an observation by Lambertini (2022: 49) very useful and insightful:

Proverbi ed espressioni idiomatiche possono essere gli uni le varianti delle altre e viceversa: sono accomunati, infatti, da un lessico simile e da allusioni reciproche. Per verificare questa ipotesi, è sufficiente confrontare le espressioni *Piangere sul latte versato* e *Fare d’ogni erba un fascio* con i proverbi *È inutile piangere sul latte versato* e *Non si può fare d’ogni erba un fascio*”.

[Proverbs and idiomatic expressions can be variants of each other and vice versa: indeed, they have in common a similar lexicon and mutual allusions. In order to test this hypothesis, it is sufficient to compare the expressions *Piangere sul latte versato* and *Fare*

d'ogni erba un fascio with the proverbs *È inutile piangere sul latte versato* and *Non si può fare di tuttata l'erba un fascio*].³

In sum, the distinction between different types of proverbial expressions is inherently fluid. For more details about the structural aspects which confer proverbiality to an expression, see Mac Coinnigh (2015). These structural aspects, called proverbial markers, are collectively referred to by Villers (2022: 10) as *ornatus*, a loanword from classical rhetoric.⁴

3. Comic deformation of proverb yesterday and today

3.1 The concept of anti-proverb, perverb and para-proverb

As Litovkina (2015: 326) states, “proverbs have never been sacrosanct”; rather, they have always been modified “as satirical, ironic or humorous comments on a given situation”. Consequently, “the so-called fixity of proverb is a myth” (Mieder 2008: 89). An extraordinary example of intentional proverbial modification is the so-called anti-proverb. An anti-proverb can be defined as “an allusive distortion, parody, misapplication, or unexpected contextualization of a recognized proverb, usually for comic or satiric effect” (Doyle et al. 2012: XI). The term comes from the German *Anti-Sprichwort*, coined by Mieder and Röhrich in analogy of words such as *Antiheld* ‘anti-hero’, *Antimärchen* ‘anti-fairy tale’ and *Antilegende* ‘anti-legend’ (Mieder 2008: 88).⁵ An anti-proverb calls into question the presumed veracity of a proverb by employing antonyms (3), by transforming

³ Regarding the expressions *fare d'ogni erba un fascio* [tar everyone with the same brush], see Pittàno 2020: 141.

⁴ Following Theophrastus, Cicero lists three main qualities of expression [*uirutes elocutionis*]:

1. *puritas*, i.e. grammatical correctness (also called Ἐλληνισμός by the Greeks and *Latinitas* by the Romans);

2. *perspicuitas*, i.e. expressive clarity;

3. *ornatus*, i.e. beauty resulting from the skilful use of ornaments and stylistic devices (Mortara Garavelli, 2018: 164). Given the complex articulation of the constituent elements of *ornatus*, see Mortara Garavelli, 2018: 197-199.

⁵ For an overview of the generally positive reception of the term by the scientific community, see Hrisztova-Gotthardt et al. 2023: 176-182.

the proverb into its opposite (4), or finally by posing a naïve question (5):

(3) English (Litovkina 2015: 327).

An exception disapproves the rule < An exception approves the rule.

(4) English (Litovkina 2015: 327; see also Mieder and Litovkina 1999: 13–14).

A friend that isn't in need is a friend indeed. < A friend in need is a friend indeed.

(5) English (Litovkina 2015: 327; see also Mieder and Litovkina 1999: 130–131)

If love is blind, how can there be love at first sight? < Love is blind.

Sometime even anti-proverbs may convey revealing social messages (6):

(6) English (Litovkina 2015: 327; see also Mieder and Litovkina 1999: 37–41)

A condom a day keeps AIDS away. < An apple a day keeps the doctor away.

No ancient examples of modified proverbs conveying explicit social messages were identified.

Having said that, the anti-proverbs may also be based upon simple wordplays or puns (7):

(7) English (Litovkina 2015: 327; see also Mieder and Litovkina 1999: 10–13)

A fool and his monkey are soon parted. < A fool and his money are soon parted.

It will be clear that, to provoke humor, the traditional proverb upon which the anti-proverb is based must be well-known, because it is only in this way that one can play with the listener's or reader's expectations (Litovkina 2015: 329). In short, regardless of the variety of modified proverbs that exist, the original

proverb must always remain recognizable (Hrisztova-Gotthardt et al. 2023: 177).

A plethora of synonyms of anti-proverbs has been introduced over the years: e.g., *quasi-* or *twisted proverbs*, as well as *modified* or *fractured proverbs* and *perversbs*.⁶ One problem in paremiological and phraseological research is the absence of refined terminology. To complicate matters further, there is the complexity of phraseological units, where it is not easy to determine to which class they belong. Similar problems arise in relation to paremias and phraseologisms that have been modified for comic effect. Modified paremias and phraseologisms differ greatly from one another, and I believe it is appropriate to assign each type a unique name. For this reason, I have decided to limit the use of the term ‘anti-proverb’ and to apply the taxonomy as well as the hierarchical approach proposed by Madziuk (2016: 21–23; Hrisztova-Gotthardt et al. 2023: 186–188) to traditional Greek and Latin material. The author invites us to distinguish between these terms, as shown in Figure (1):

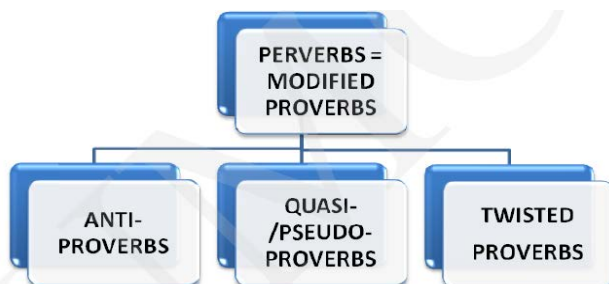


Figure 1: Classification of modified proverbs.

⁶ While ‘anti-proverb’ remains the most internationally recognized term, the academic debate regarding its prefix is still ongoing. As noted, the *anti-* prefix suggests a direct opposition that is not always present in humorous wordplay. Alternative terminologies have been proposed to better capture this nuance: for instance, *perverbe* or *proverbe détourné* in the French tradition; *paraproverbio* in Italian and Spanish scholarship (Cocco 2015; García Romero 2015), which utilizes the prefix *para-* ‘beside’; and *post-proverbials* in the Nigerian context (Raji-Oyelade 2012). For a list of terms to indicate deliberate proverb transformations, see Litovkina et al. 2021: 18-19, Hrisztova-Gotthardt et al. 2023: 175-176 and Cocco 2015: 43.

Specifically, she proposes using the neologism *perverb* for all intentionally modified proverbial expressions. The term *perverb* is a morphological blend of ‘proverb’ (from Latin *proverbium* ‘saying, adage, maxim’) and ‘perverted’ (from Latin *peruertere* ‘turn from the right way’).⁷ The term ‘perverb’ precisely and effectively defines the set of modified proverbs and their semantic twists, and deserves wider circulation within the contemporary critical lexicon.

In turn, these perversbs can be divided into three subgroups. The first is the subgroup of the properly said *anti-proverbs*. As indicated by the prefix *anti-*, they express meanings that stand in opposition to those of the original versions as in example (8):

(8) English (Madziuk 2016: 23; see also Mieder and Litovkina 1999: 147–148)

Money talks, but it doesn't always talk sense. < Money talks.

From this perspective, Madziuk’s view is consistent with that of Cocco (2015: 48–49). The second subgroup is that of *quasi-* or *pseudo-proverbs*. Their main characteristic is that they take the structure of genuine sayings, without fulfilling elementary proverbial requirements such as the features of PCW (pithy, catchy, wise):

(9) English (Mandziuk 2016: 23; see also Mieder and Litovkina 1999: 73–77)

Early to bed and early to rise and it probably means your TV set is being repairing. < Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise

As opposed to traditional sayings, the aforementioned one is neither concise nor memorable due to the lack of stylistic device such as rhyme, which is present in the original. Finally, there are *twisted proverbs*, namely, the most productive set of modified proverbs:

⁷ For some examples of traditional Latin proverbs with modified or updated references, see Bérchez Castaño 2019: 67–68.

(10) English (Mandziuk 2016: 23; see also Mieder and Litovkina 1999: 63–64)

Curiosity thrilled the cat. < Curiosity killed the cat.

Unlike *quasi-* or *pseudo-proverbs*, they undergo various phonological, lexical and/or conceptual modifications.

For some perversbs, several variants have been recorded. In order to get an idea of the phenomenon, let us compare *To err is human*, *to forgive is divine* with its modified versions below (11–14):

(11) English (Litovkina 2015: 328; see also Mieder and Litovkina 1999: 213–216)

To err is human – to totally muck things up needs a computer.

(12) English (Litovkina 2015: 328; see also Mieder and Litovkina 1999: 213–216)

To err is human, but to really foul things up requires a computer.

(13) English (Litovkina 2015: 328; see also Mieder and Litovkina 1999: 213–216)

To err is human, but it takes a computer to completely fuck things up.

(14) English (Litovkina 2015: 328; see also Mieder and Litovkina 1999: 213–216)

To error is human, but to really screw things up you need a computer.

The focus in the aforementioned *quasi-* or *pseudo-proverbs* is on information technology. After all, the anti-proverbs reflect the sociocultural context in which they arise. As Mieder (2008: 90) states, “it is the mass media more than any other vehicle that helps to spread anti-proverbs and that makes people aware of the fact that perhaps they are needed for effective communication”. Although perversbs are extremely common in the present era of mass media and the Internet, they are not a new genre at all. In this regard, Litovkina (2015: 328) cites various philosophers, writers, and poets who created anti-proverbs: Lichtenberg, Kant, Goethe, and Voltaire. However, it is possible to go further back

in time up to the proverbial *detorsio* frequently attested in ancient literature.

3.2 *The concept of detorsio*

After having defined what a proverb is, it is time to turn to the comic deformation (*detorsio*) of paremias and phraseologisms definition with some examples. Comic *detorsio* represents a deliberate shift of a proverb's original significance towards a novel purpose. This technique has ancient roots; for instance, Alcaeus redirected such expressions to serve aggressive, ironic, or sarcastic roles (Lelli 2023: 10). This practice, which impacts a wide array of well-known short forms, also plays a significant role in Greek comedy. By exploiting different levels of reception through the *detorsio* of the proverb, Aristophanes provides hundreds of witty examples (Lelli 2023: 28–29). Furthermore, based on the extant evidence, in his work *On the Ridiculous*, Theophrastus focused on this phenomenon within literary genres, such as iamb, comedy, parody, or satirical drama, that are more inclined to incorporate proverbial expressions and alter them for satirical ends (Ath. 8.348a; Lelli 2023: 40).

There is a passage in Aristophanes' 411 BC comedy, *Women at the Thesmophoria*, where the poet takes up an ancient proverb and modifies it. The original proverb is attested by the Greek sophist Zenobius (*Vulg.* 6.20): 'Υπὸ παντὶ λίθῳ σκορπίος· παροιμία· 'Υπὸ παντὶ λίθῳ σκορπίος καθεύδει [Under every stone there is a scorpion: proverb: Under every stone a scorpion sleeps]. The meaning is clear: you must always be alert. As a way of astonishing the audience's expectations, Aristophanes (*Th.* 528–531) distorts the proverb by replacing σκορπίος 'scorpion' with the word ῥήτωρ, in the sense of 'politician':

τὴν παροιμίαν δ' ἐπαινῶ
τὴν παλαιάν: ὑπὸ λίθῳ γὰρ
παντί που χρὴ
μὴ δάκη ῥήτωρ ἀθρεῖν.

[And I praise the old proverb: under every rock there is to look at, lest you be bitten... by a politician!]

Additionally, there is a pun that is lost in the English translation. By λίθος Aristophanes alludes to the βῆμα τῆς πυκνός, the tribune from which orators delivered their speeches: see *Eq.* 956 (πέτρας); *Pax* 680 (τοῦ λίθου ἐν τῇ πυκνῇ); *Ec.* 87 (λίθω), etc. (Prato 2001: 253).⁸

The relationship between comedy and proverbial imagery was also a subject of study in Alexandrian philology: one thinks of *On the Ancient Comedy* by Eratosthenes (c. 276 B.C. – c. 194 B.C.). It is possible that such reflections appear in the works of Aristophanes of Byzantium, both in his commentaries on comic authors and in his paremiological studies (Tosi 1993). In addition to those erudite men, several ancient scholars must be mentioned about whom modern scholars unfortunately know little more than their names (Lelli 2006: 24–25). Having said that, the comic distortion of proverbs to elicit ἀστεῖον ‘hilarity’, as seen in Aristophanes, is not only the preserve of comedians; it is also documented in the lyric poet Archilochus of Paros (fr. 248 West²):

Καρπάθιος τὸν λαγών· ραποιμία Καρπάθιος τὸν λαγών. διὰ γὰρ τὸ μὴ εἶναι λαγών ἐν τῇ χώρᾳ, ἐπηγάγοντο αὐτοί· καὶ τοσοῦτοι ἐγένοντο, ὥστε τὸν σῖτον καὶ τὰς ἀμπέλους αὐτῶν βλαβῆναι. τάττεται δὲ ἐπὶ τῶν ἑαυτοῖς ἐπισπωμένων κακά. ὁ γοῦν Ἀρχίλοχος ταύτην τὴν παροιμίαν ἔφη. Ἐπίχαμμος μέμνηται ταύτης ἐν Νήσοις (Zenobius *Athous* 1.80)

[The man of Karpathos and the hare. And the proverb ‘the man of Karpathos and the hare’. Since there were no hares in their land, those of Karpathos brought them from outside; and they became so numerous that their grain and their vineyards were damaged because of them. It applies to those who bring evils upon themselves. Archilochus, for example, said this proverb; Epicharmus quotes it in *The Islands* [fr. 93 Kassel-Austin].

In the corresponding gloss of Hesychius’ lexicon (κ 59) we read:

Καρπάθιος τὸν μάρτυρα· παροιμία δὲ ‘Καρπαῖθιος τὸν λαγών’ κατ’ ἔλλειψιν τοῦ ‘ἐπηγάγετο’. διὰ γὰρ τὸ μὴ εἶναι [...] ὑπ’ αὐτῶν

⁸ García Romero (2015b: 287 n. 8) is not entirely convinced by this interpretation, since the orators spoke not below [ὑπὸ] but above the tribune [λίθος].

βλάπτεσθαι. ὁ γοῦν Ἀρχίλοχος παρὰ ταύτην τὴν παροιμίαν ἔφη
 ‘Καρπαίθιος τὸν μάρτυρα’.

[The witness from Karpathos. And proverb “that man from Karpathos, the hare” by ellipsis of “brought”. For as there were no hares [...] they were damaged because of him. Archilochus, for example, next to this proverb said ‘that of Karpathos the witness’.]

Without context, we can only speculate on what the humor of the *detorsio* of the paremia consists of. Archilochus may have mockingly modified the proverb to refer to a witness who would have harmed himself or, with his testimony, the party he should theoretically have favored (García Romero 2015a: 153).

Furthermore, the comic distortion of a proverb is evidenced in Platonic dialogues (*Symp.* 174b3):

ἔπου τοίνυν, [...] ἵνα καὶ τὴν παροιμίαν διαφθείρωμεν
 μεταβάλόντες, ὥς ἄρα καὶ ἀγαθῶν [codices: Ἀγάθων’ Lachmann]
 ἐπὶ δαίτας ἴασιν αὐτόματοι ἀγαθοί.

[Well, follow me [...] so that, after changing it, we can destroy the proverb that says it is the good guys who come to the good guys’ parties of their own accord.]

There is a pun between the adjective ἀγαθός ‘good’ and the proper noun Agathon (Ἀγάθων), the organizer of the feast to whom Socrates addresses himself. Following Lachmann’s suggestion, we should correct the text transmitted by the manuscripts and read the proper noun in the dative Ἀγάθων(ι) instead of the plural genitive ἀγαθῶν: ‘to the feast with Agathon the good men flock on their own accord’. Moreover, this is not the only case in which this proverb is twisted for comic purposes: αὐτόματοι δ’ ἀγαθοὶ δειλῶν ἐπὶ δαίτας ἴασιν [to the feast of the coward the good men flock on their own accord] (see Eup. fr. 315 Kassel-Austin).

4. Mechanisms of proverb alteration

Until now, we have seen almost exclusively cases of single word replacement, but there are several other types of proverb alteration to be examined. These alterations vary according to the mechanisms employed to transform the original phraseological unit. Many techniques can be employed in the transformation of a proverb, and sometimes more than one technique is used

simultaneously. This section of the article will illustrate the most common mechanisms of proverb transformation found in both modern perverses and ancient cases of *detorsio*.

4.1 Addition in proverbs

Many proverb transformations preserve the actual text without change, simply adding one or more new words (Litovkina et al. 2021: 57–61), see (15):

(15) Italian (Marchesi 1965: 9)

Chi rompe paga. Chi corrompe paga di meno. < *Chi rompe paga.*

Whoever breaks something pays for it. Whoever bribes pays less. < *Whoever breaks something pays for it.*

The abovementioned modified proverb is characterized by a bitter taste and has a clear social message. It should be noted that corruption was a widespread phenomenon in Italy in the 1960s.

As known, metaphor is one of the most effective proverbial markers. In some perverses (16), the metaphorical meaning of a proverb is ironically twisted by putting it in a context where it is literally interpreted:

(16) English (Litovkina 2015: 335)

When one door shuts, another opens... which means that you live in a drafty house. < *When one door shuts, another opens.*

This type of proverb variation can even produce wellerisms (Litovkina et al. 2021: 61–64). This proverb form generally consists of three parts:

- 1) a statement (often consisting of a saying or proverbial phrase);
- 2) a speaker who makes this comment; and often
- 3) a phrase that places the statement in an unexpected and artificial situation.⁹

⁹ The triadic structure is undoubtedly the most prevalent, although wellerisms featuring a bipartite structure are also common. This structural diversity renders an incontrovertible definition of the linguistic entity under consideration elusive, cf. Mieder

Wellerisms are very common in modern languages; just think of meaningful introductory phrases such as the English *as the bishop said to the actress* (Smith 1975: 114). They are based either on a paradoxical opposition (e.g. *“I see,” said the blind man*), or on the summary of an amusing tale, real or fantastic, not always easy to trace. See the following example (17):

- (17) English (Litovkina 2015: 334; see also Mieder and Kingsbury 1994: 120 and Mieder and Litovkina 1999: 168)
“Out of sight, out of mind,” said the warden as the escaped lunatic disappeared over the hill. < Out of sight, out of mind.

Nevertheless, the wellerism is an ancient proverb form that can be traced back to ancient Sumer (18):

- (18) Sumerian (Unseth et al. 2017: 2)
The fox urinated into the Tigris: ‘I am causing the high tide to rise!’ [he said]

In this context (18), the fox symbolizes vain arrogance. We find examples of them even in ancient Greek (19–20):

- (19) Ancient Greek (Theocr. 15.77)
 ἔνδοι πάσαι, ὁ τὰν νυὸν εἴπ’ ἀποκλάξας
 “‘Inside all things”, as the one who locked the bride in the house said.’

- (20) Ancient Greek (Crat. fr. 251 K.)
 ταῦτ’ αὐτὰ πράττω, φάσκ’ ἀνὴρ οὐδὲν ποιῶν
 “‘That’s exactly what I’m doing,” said the man who was doing nothing.’

Similar cases are present in Latin (21–23):

- (21) Latin (Paul. Fest. p. 356 Lindsay)
Rideo, inquit Galba canterio.
 “‘I laugh,” said Galba to the nag’.

(22) Latin (Lucil. fr. 531 Marx)

Hoc aliud longe est, inquit qui cepe serebat

“‘This is something else entirely,” says the one who plant onions’.

(23) Latin (Laber. mim. 63–64 Ribbeck)

Duas uxores? Hercle hoc plus negoti est, inquit, cocio: / sex aediles uiderat.

“‘Two women? By Hercules, that’s more trouble!”, said the pedlar: he had seen six aediles’.

The popularity in the classic world of these formulas can probably be attributed to their reuse in genres such as mime and atellana.

In Petronius’ *Cena Trimalchionis*, there is another interesting example of wellerism. Ganymedes, a freedman at Trimalchio’s table, has created a mood of gloomy pessimism with his bitter outbursts. Thus, another freedman, Echion, replies to him that one must take things as they come (24):

(24) Latin (Petron. 45.1)

‘Modo sic modo sic’ inquit rusticus; uarium porcum perdid- erat.

‘A bit like this and a bit like that,” said the farmer, he had lost his spotted pork’.

The persuasiveness of the wellerism lies in inserting the described opposition into alienating contexts with often desecrating results: according to Vannini (2011: 72), Echion ridicules Ganymede by comparing his dissertation on the economic crisis to the vague way in which a farmer describes a lost pig.¹⁰

4.2 Omission in proverbs

As well as additions, there are the omissions. According to Litovkina et al. (2021: 77–80), the omittable part of the original proverb may vary from one or more phonemes (25) to one (26) or more words (27):

¹⁰ The image of the colourfulness, notes Marmorale (1948: 60–61), recurs in Plautus’ comedy: see Plaut. *Epid.* 17–18, *Mil.* 216, *Pseud.* 145–148, and *Poen.* 26.

(25) English (Oleneva 2023: 60; see also Mieder and Litovkina 1999: 216)

Too many cooks oil the broth. < Too many cooks spoil the broth.

(26) English (Oleneva 2023: 60; see also Mieder and Litovkina 1999: 83–84)

Familiarity breeds. < Familiarity breeds contempt.

(27) English (Oleneva 2023: 60; see also Mieder and Litovkina 1999: 95–96)

He who fights and runs away, lives. < He who fights and runs away, lives to fight another day.

In ancient Greek, an example very similar to the proverb (25) would be the aforementioned substitution of σκυτίνη for σκυίνη in the text by Strattis (1). This type of proverb alteration can extend to a complete reordering of the original structure; for instance, in example (28), where only *an apple a day* is retained:

(28) English (Oleneva 2023: 60)

“I’m worried. My girl is running around with that new doctor in town.” “Feed her an apple a day.” < An apple a day keeps the doctor away.

Litovkina et al. (2021: 82–83) refer to cases of mere allusion to the original proverb (or, in this instance, the original phraseologism).

Having said that, it is time to comment a proverb-based joke (29) pronounced by the rich freedman Trimalchio during his famous feast:

(29) Latin (Petron. 34.5)

Aequum Mars amat.

‘Mars does love equality’

The passage has generally been interpreted as a wordplay related to *aequo Marte* (Friedländer 1906: 232; Schmeling 2011: 121). The allusion to Mars’ equity does not sound misplaced, even if it seems to be a blunder, since in this context an invocation to Dionysus, god of wine, would have been more appropriate. How-

ever, on closer inspection, it is evident that Trimalchio has organized the dining room as a battlefield, where all the guests are metaphorically ‘well-armed’.¹¹ He is intent on astonishing his guests, not only offering excessively elaborate dishes, but also by showing off his bogus *philologia* [culture] (39.4). In a sense, he sets himself up as a champion of his social class – the rich but illiterate *liberti* [freedmen] – against the class of his guests – the freeloading but well-educated *scholastici*. Despite his efforts, Trimalchio constantly makes gaffes, demonstrating his illiteracy.¹² On one occasion, however, he mentions *Aeneid* (39.3): *sic notus Ulixes?* [Do you know so little about Ulysses?].¹³ It can be inferred that such quotes were widespread. Consequently, it should not be surprising that they are also present amongst the speeches of the illiterate.¹⁴ For these reasons, it cannot be excluded that Trimalchio echoes some Homeric passages. Cucchiarelli (1998: 586–591) connects the motto *aequum Mars amat* to νῦν δ’ ἔρχεσθ’ ἐπὶ δεῖπνον ἵνα ξυνάγωμεν Ἄρηα [now, therefore, get your noonday meal, in order that (ἵνα) we may join the battle] (Hom. *Il.* 2.381). Here, it may transpire a Petronius’ touch of

¹¹ As Marmorale (1948: 22) observes, all the guests have been equipped by the host, Trimalchio, with “armi proprie uguali a quelle degli altri. Per tale motivo ha assegnato a ciascun invitato una mensa personale oltre ad allestirne una comune” [their own weapons equal to those of the others. For this reason, he has assigned (to them) a personal table, in addition to having prepared a common one]. This interpretation can be integrated with Ciaffi’s explanation (1967: 116-17 n. 52): “Oltre alla solita tavola quadrata in mezzo ai tre letti [...], ciascuno dei invitati aveva a disposizione un tavolino a lato, per tenerci sopra le stoviglie”. [In addition to the usual square table in the middle of the three beds [...], each of the guests had a small table to the side to hold their dishes on].

¹² Talking of epic poetry, he is firmly convinced that Ulysses was hurt by the Cyclops Polyphemus (48.7); he confuses Cassandra, the Trojan prophetess, blessed with foresight but cursed never to be believed, with Medea, the sorceress and murderer of her own children (52.1).

¹³ Obviously, it is not enough to look well educated, because “l’emistichio virgiliano (Aen. II, 44), con cui Laocoonte mette in guardia i Troiani, doveva essere diventato proverbiale, come dire di qualcuno ‘non è un semplicione’” [the Virgil’s hemistich (Aeneid II, 44) with which Laocoön warns the Trojans must have become proverbial, as if to say ‘he/she is simpleton’] (Ciaffi 1967: 125 n. 70).

¹⁴ For instance, a servant of Abinnas – another freedman – quotes a Virgil’s verse (Petron. 68.4 = Verg. *Aen.* 5.1) (Friedländer 1906: 243; Marmorale, 1948: 39; Smith, 1975: 88). Schmeling (2011: 150) vaguely mentions an inscription from Pompeii showing various Vergil’s verses turned into paremias over time.

irony, given that during the feast, there will be no lack of fights. Furthermore, this is not an isolated example of συνουσία [being with] which falls apart in ancient literature.¹⁵ My belief is that ξυνὸς Ἐνυάλιος, and consequently *aequo Marte*, is more fitting in this scenario, because it sounds more sententious, and the adjective ξυνὸς better conveys the idea of equality.

4.3 Replacing of one word

One of the most common techniques to coin perverbs is replacing a word (Litovkina et al. 2021: 96–99); see (30):

(30) English (Mac Coinnigh 2015: 121; see also Mieder and Litovkina 1999: 99)

Hair today, gone tomorrow. < *Here* today, gone tomorrow.

In the Greek sphere, the *Suda* reports a paremia (32), which, in classical literature, only appears in Herondas' *Mimes* (31) with a tasty comic *detorsio* (Tosi 2017: 32):

(31) Ancient Greek (Herod. 7.49–50)

ἀλλ' οὐ λόγων γάρ, φασίν, ἡ ἀγορὴ δεῖται
χαλκῶν δέ.

'However, they say, the assembly actually needs **money**, not words.'

(32) Ancient Greek (*Suda* o 906)

οὐ λόγων ἀγορὰ δεῖται Ἑλλάδος, ἀλλ' ἔργων

'The assembly of Greece needs **deeds**, not words.'

According to an old proverbial motif, a woman's oath is not to be trusted and, therefore, her words should be written on water.¹⁶

¹⁵ The most paradigmatic episode is the fight at the wedding feast of King Pirithous between the Centaurs and the Lapiths, a legendary people of Greek mythology. The *casus belli* would have been Ares' revenge for being the only uninvited god. Servius, the well-known commentator of Virgil, describing this episode in a gloss about *Aen.* 7.304. See Putnam, 1990.

¹⁶ See Catull. 70.3–4: *sed mulier cupido quod dicit amanti, | in vento et rapida scribere oportet aqua* [But what a woman says to her eager lover should be written in the wind and running water].

This concept is attested to in a fragment by Sophocles (34) and is parodied by several comedy writers, including Xenarchos (33):

(33) Ancient Greek (Xenarch. fr. 6 K.–A.)

ὄρκους δ' ἐγὼ γυναικὸς εἰς **οἶνον** γράφω.

‘Woman’s oath, I write it on the **wine**.’

(34) Ancient Greek (S. fr. 811 Radt)

ὄρκους ἐγὼ γυναικὸς εἰς **ὕδωρ** γράφω.

‘Woman’s oaths, I write them on the **water**.’

In Xenarchos’ fragment (33), we can even track an allusion to the proverbial motif about women’s passion for wine (García Romero 2015^a: 149–150, Tosi 2024: 31).

In Petronius’ *Satyricon*, there might be almost two cases of replacement of a single word, both uttered by Trimalchio. The former is collocated in the section, where he describes each sign of the zodiac.¹⁷ Trimalchio was born under the sign of Cancer (*in*

¹⁷ The passage does not lack assonances with what has been handed down to us by the ancient astrological tradition: e.g. the reference to the strains of slaves when discussing Virgo, since as Manilius writes (4.190) this sign is tightened by a knot (the autumnal equinox); or, finally, the reference to the squints when discussing those born under the sign of Sagittarius (Firm. Mat. *math.* 8.27.11). Despite such premises, the astrological digression presents inconsistencies with the ancient astrology: the landlord begins by illustrating how, under the sign of Aries, *plurimi [...] scholastici nascuntur et arietilli* [many scholars and little rams are born] (39.5); this statement is not found in any other text, “ma qui l’interesse di Trimalchione è aprire il suo discorso con un accenno agli ospiti di riguardo, che in quanto uomini di cultura non avrebbero certo schifato un segno di testa (cfr. Man., II, 456 seg.; IV, 704), come dimostrano poi subito i loro applausi” [But here Trimalchio’s interest is to open his speech with a mention of the distinguished guests, who as men of culture would certainly not have scorned a headed zodiac sign (cf. Man., II, 456 f.; IV, 704), as their applause then immediately shows] (Ciaffi 1967: 126 n. 72). In addition, at other times his dissertation is prompted by easy puns: speaking of Capricorn (39.12), he does not hesitate to say that under that sign the poor (*aerumnosi*) are born with horns (*cornua*). The pun is transparent for Italian speakers: indeed, the Italian phraseologism *avere le corna* means ‘to be to be cheated on’. Unfortunately, as there are no other parallel places of our saying in the ancient world, it is unclear whether the horns are those of betrayed husbands (Firm. Mat. 8.28.5) or the fleshy excrescences of the so-called Campanian disease (Hor. *sat.* 1.5.58–63), see Ciaffi 1967: 127 n. 76. The discourse, which began with the masters of rhetoric, ends with the *rhetores* (39.12): in this it agrees with Firm. Mat. *math.* 8.30.7, which places lawyers under the nineteenth degree of Pisces; however, the juxtaposition of the latter with cooks (*obsonatores*) is bizarre.

cancro ego natus sum). In antiquity, those born under this constellation were attributed with a propensity for lucrative activity, specifically mercantile professions of all sorts:

*Cancer ad ardentem fulgens in cardine metam, [...]
attribuit uarios quaestus artemque lucrorum:
merce peregrina fortunam ferre per urbes
et gravia annonae speculantem incendia uentis
credere opes orbisque orbi bona uendere posse
totque per ignotas commercia iungere terras.*
Manil. *Astr.* 4.162 sgg.

[The sign of Cancer, shining on the axis near the fiery median point, [...] attributes the different trades and the art of earning money: to bear the lot from city to city with foreign trade and, taking into consideration the grave burdens of rising prices, to risk capital in storms and to be able to sell goods to the whole world and establish trade relations for many unknown lands.]

In the light of what he states, Trimalchio seems to adapt the proverbial locution *omni pede stare* [to stand alert] to the zodiac sign of Cancer, replacing *omni* [each] with *multis* [many/much]:

(35) Latin (Petron. 39.8)

ideo multis pedibus sto.

‘Therefore, I stand upright on many feet.’

The original locution is proverbial and comes from the peasant world (Otto 1890: 275 s.v. *pes* 3), as Quintilian (12.9.18) testifies: *itaque in his actionibus omni, ut agricolae dicunt, pede standum est* [Therefore, in these actions, it is necessary to remain, as the farmers say, always alert]. In our case, the freedman modifies the proverb by indulging the suggestion given to him by the image of the crab and its many legs (Friedländer 1906: 244; Marmorale 1948: 41; Schmeling 2011: 153–54).

Additionally, after talking about the Corinthian bronze, he tells of a blacksmith who is said to have invented unbreakable glass in Caesar’s time.¹⁸ After a silly play on words (50.4), namely

¹⁸ The tale, famous in the imperial period and the Middle Ages, is also reported by Plin. *HN* 36.195 and Cass. Dio 57.21.6–7, who make Tiberius the protagonist. Isidore

that his Corinthian bronze is authentic (*Corinthea uera*) because the bronzer he uses is called Corinth (*Corinthus*), Trimalchio sets out to tell the true story of the said material. When the inventor of infrangible glass shows his product to the emperor, he is so enthusiastic that he thinks to have everything under control:

(36) Latin (Petron. 51.5)

Putabat se coleum Iouis tenere,

‘He thought to have Jupiter by the balls.’

This passage contains an extremely vulgar expression that scholars have long attempted to remedy. The primary concern is that while the *Satyricon* refers to gods frivolously (Petron. 44.17), it rarely does so blasphemously. Furthermore, the use of *coleus* in the singular is problematic (Smith 1975: 137–38), as the term typically appears in the plural (e.g., Petron. 39.7). To resolve these issues, several corrections have been proposed: John of Salisbury suggested correcting *coleum* [testicle] to *caelum* [sky]; similarly, Heinsius proposed *solium* [throne], a correction accepted by Smith (1975) and Müller (1995). This restores the frequently attested nexus *solium Iouis tenere* [to hold the throne of Jupiter], a widespread formula in Latin literature, see: Plaut. *Truc.* 940–941; Verg. *Aen.* 12.849; Hor. *Epist.* 1.17.34; Ov. *Fast.* 6.353; Stat. *Silv.* 3.1.25–26; and Suet. *Calig.* 57.3 (Vannini 2011:69).

Despite various emendations, many critics defend the manuscript reading (*coleum*). Marmorale (1948: 54) rejects these ‘trivializations,’ arguing that the coarse phrasing reflects a vital popular reworking of language. Aragosti (2011: 248) shares this view. From a textual perspective, the principle of *lectio difficilior* supports this defence: it is difficult to imagine that the common term *solium* could have been corrupted into the vulgar *coleum*. It is far more likely that the opposite occurred during attempts to normalise the text. To resolve the grammatical issue of the singular usage, Schmeling (2011: 213) interprets *coleus* as *scrotum*.

of Seville (*Etymologiae* 16.16.6) manipulates the Petronian text but also names Tiberius; finally, John of Salisbury (*Policraticus* 4.5, p. 232) paraphrases and expands the text of the *Satyricon*.

In my view, the expression is best understood as a twisted proverb or para-proverb. Rather than a scribal error, it is a deliberate, comical distortion of the phrase *solium louis attingere*, an idiom which, like the modern expression “being in seventh heaven,” originally denotes reaching a state of supreme bliss. Through this *detorsio*, the replacement of the majestic ‘throne’ (*solium*) with a vulgar anatomical reference achieves a maximum shock-humor effect. Furthermore, it subtly alters the meaning of the pemia: while the original refers to divine happiness, the new para-proverb takes on the sense of “having everything under control”, reflecting the materialist attitude of the speaker.

4.4 Substitution of two or more words

Another way to parody a proverb is by substituting two words. Indeed, proverbs with binary structures have become formulas upon which countless proverb variations are built (Litovkina et al. 2021: 100–103). For instance, plenty of anti-proverbs are modelled on *An apple a day keeps the doctor away*. We have already seen an example (6), to this we can add the following (37):

(37) English (Litovkina 2015: 333; see also Mieder and Litovkina 1999: 37–41)

A joint a day keeps reality away. < *An apple a day keeps the doctor away.*

At present, I have encountered only one case of an ancient proverb with two words replaced. The aforementioned verse by Sophocles (31), according to which women’s oaths should be written on water, was in fact parodied by Philonides as follows:

(38) Ancient Greek (Philonid. fr. 7 Kassel-Austin)

ὄρκους δὲ μοιχῶν εἰς τέφραν ἐγὼ γράφω.

‘Oaths of adulterers, I write them in ashes.’

The reference to ash is not accidental, since burning ash was used to remove the pubic hair of adulterers caught in the act, as a form of mockery.

4.5 Changing the second part of the original proverb

Frequently, there are perversbs where the second part of the original proverb is completely changed (Litovkina et al. 2021: 103–106). One for all (39):

(39) English (Litovkina 2015: 334; see also Mieder and Litovkina 1999: 105–108)

*If at first you don't succeed, **blame it on your wife**.* < If at first you don't succeed, try, try again.

It must be noted that 65 parodies of this Anglo-American proverb have been recorded. The complete changing of the second part of the original paremia does not seem to be attested in ancient literature.

4.6 Changing the first part of the original proverb

On the other hand, it is much rarer for the first part of the proverb to be completely changed (Litovkina et al. 2021: 106–107):

(40) English (Litovkina 2015: 337; see also Mieder and Litovkina 1999: 37–41)

***A patient without health insurance** keeps the doctor away.*
< An apple a day keeps the doctor away.

Not even the entire modification of the first part of the original paremia seems to be attested in ancient literature.

4.7 Blending (or contamination) of proverbs

It sometimes happens that two proverbial expressions are mixed up (Litovkina et al. 2021: 121–134); see (41):

(41) English (Litovkina 2015: 337)

A penny saved gathers no moss.

< A penny saved is a penny earned + A rolling stone gathers no moss.

In Apuleius's *Metamorphoses*, a 2nd century Latin novel, a brand-new proverb is created by the author (42):

- (42) Latin (Apul. met. 9.42)
De prospectus et umbra asini.
 ‘About a donkey’s peek and shadow.’

In this case, we are faced with the fusion of two Greek paremias (43–44), both indicating events of little importance:

- (43) Ancient Greek (Luc. On. 45, see also Menandr. fr. 189 Kassel-Austin)
 ἐξ ὄνου παρακύψεως
 ‘About a donkey’s peek.’
 (44) Ancient Greek (Ar. V. 191 and Plat. Phdr. 260c)
 περὶ ὄνου σκιᾶς
 ‘About the donkey’s shadow.’

The origin of the two proverbs seems to be different: the former (43) would refer to a donkey who, after sticking his snout in a potter’s window and destroying many vases, is sued by the craftsman for stretching his neck to peek (Cf. Zenob. *Vulg.* 5.39); the latter (44), which was also the title of an Archippus’ play (frr. 35–36 Kassel-Austin),¹⁹ would refer to the anecdote about a man who, after renting a donkey, took to sleeping under its shadow to avoid the heat and was therefore brought to court by the owner of the animal who insisted that he had rented the donkey and not its shadow (Cf. Zenob. *Vulg.* 6.28; *Paroemiogr.* 2.566, 566 Leutsch-Schneidewin; Otto 1890: 41 s.v. *asinus*, *asellus* 8). This last anecdote is related by Demosthenes during a capital trial before judges who were bored with the case, but who were so interested in this futile anecdote that they earned the speaker’s reproach (Mattiacci 1996: 178). The episode seems to be inspired by a passage from Lucian of Samosata’s *Lucius or the Ass* (chap. 45). As usual, Apuleius renews the starting model, turning the saying into a para-proverb.

4.8 Repetition of identical words

Word repetition is a common device both in proverbs and perverbs (45):

¹⁹ For commentaries about these fragments, see Miccolis 2016: 204–213.

(45) English (Litovkina 2015: 336; see also Mieder and Litovkina 1999: 134–137)

The man who lives by bread alone, lives alone. < Man doesn't live by bread alone.

Less frequently, we encounter case of triplication or downright quadruplication (46):

(46) English (Litovkina 2015: 336; see also Mieder and Kingsbury 1994: 76 and Mieder and Litovkina 1999: 80–81)

"Every little helps", said Mr. Little and took the six little Littles out to help him saw a pile of wood. < Every little helps.

This technique does not appear in ancient literature either.

4.9 Word-order reversal

Sometimes, the word-order of the standard phraseological unit is inverted, see (47):

(47) English (Litovkina 2015: 337; see also Mieder and Litovkina 1999: 52–53)

Better never than late. < Better late than never.

This is also the title of a Chika Unigwe's collection of short stories about exile and the meaning of being migrants in search of a better future, with a focus on the role of women in a patriarchal culture. I have not found this stylistic device in the ancient sources I have consulted.

4.10 Playing with ambiguity of word

Some perverbs play with the ambiguity of a single polysemous word or two homonymous words (48):

(48) English (Litovkina 2015: 336; see also Mieder and Litovkina 1999: 231–232)

Where there's a will, there's an inheritance tax. < Where there's a will, there's a way.

There is no shortage of instances where the ambiguity of words is played out in classical literature. Again, in the *Satyricon*, Phileros, another freedman, speaking of a fellow, exclaims (49):

(49) Latin (Petron. 43.6)

Numquam autem recte faciet, qui cito credit.

‘He will never get one right, he who immediately lends his trust.’

This proverbial expression (Otto 1890: 97 s.v. *credere* 2) is also found in Ov. *ars* 3.685–686: *nec cito credideris: quantum cito credere laedat / exemplum uobis non levis Procris erit* [Don’t be gullible: Procris’ example of how harmful it is to be gullible will be important to you] (Friedländer 1906²: 255, Marmorale 1948: 53; Pianezzola 1993: 413). According to Smith (1975: 105), through the addition of *utique homo negotians* [especially a businessman], the freedman makes a pun based on the two main meanings of *credere*, ‘to believe’ and ‘to lend’. As proof of this, the English scholar quotes two passages; see Cic. *Att.* 1.16.10: “*mihi uerum*”, *inquam*, “*XXV iudices crediderunt, XXXI quoniam nummos ante acceperunt, tibi nihil crediderunt*” [“To me seriously”, I say, “twenty-five judges gave credit, to you, on the other hand, thirty-one did not, so much so that they wanted to pocket the money first”]; Sen. *Suas.* 7.5: *credamus Antonio, Cicero, si bene illi pecunias crediderunt faenatores* [Let us believe in Antony, or in Cicero, if the money lenders lent him money willingly].

There is no shortage of anti-proverbs which tend to combine a sexual meaning with a non-sexual one (50), constituting clear examples of double entendre:

(50) English (Litovkina 2015: 336)

Buggers can’t be choosers. < Beggars can’t be choosers.

Let us return once again to the *Satyricon*.

(51) Latin (Petron. 24.7)

Post asellum diaria non sumo.

‘After a delicacy, I do not eat common food.’

The term *asellus* can refer to both a delicious fish and a small donkey. Given that this proverbial expression is uttered by Quartailla, the nymphomaniac priestess of Priapus, many commentators have thought that these words allude to the sexual vigour or penis size of the *asinus* [donkey] (Schmeling 2011: 73–74).²⁰

5. Conclusion

I would like to raise the following three considerations regarding the specific terminology to be used, the universality of proverb alteration mechanisms, and the coexistence of alterations. In this paper, I have demonstrated how many cases of proverb manipulation are present in both modern perverbs as well as in ancient paremias and phraseologisms that have undergone comic *detorsio*. Starting from a standard proverbial expression, it is possible to create a plethora of variants of perverbs: concerning modern languages, see the examples based on *An apple a day keeps the doctor away* (4 and 35) or the ones based on *To err is human to forgive is divine* (9, 10, 11 and 12); on the other hand, for ancient Greek and Latin, see the examples based on ὄρκους ἐγὼ γυναικὸς εἰς ὕδωρ γράφω (31 and 36).

Due to the complexity of the linguistic phenomenon described, more precise terminology and classification are required. In this regard, the concept of the “paraproverb” proposed by García Romero (2016) and the taxonomy developed by Mandziuk (2016) have proven to be consistent and useful. Regarding the universality of mechanisms, most of the stylistic devices for the formation of modified proverbs, identified by Litovkina (2015)

²⁰ According to Trimalchio, among those born under the sign of Gemini, there are those *qui utrosque parietes linunt* [who plaster two walls at the same time] (39.7). This is a proverbial image (Otto 1890: 265–266 s.v. *paries* 1) of Greek origin (δύο τείχους ἀλείφειν) that Cicero (*fam.* 7.29.2) renders as *duo parietes de eadem fidelia dealbare* [to whitewash two walls with the same bucket]; see Marmorale 1948: 41 as well as Garbarino and Tabacco 2008: 272 n. 5. It bears interesting similarities to the German saying *wer auf beiden Achseln trägt, schwarz und weiß aus Tiegel malt* [who carries on both shoulders, paints black and white from a pot]; see Friedländer 1906: 244. This expression is used in reference to those who are said to be opportunists and have a foot in both camps. Smith (1975: 90) suggests that the proverb is euphemistically addressed by Trimalchio to those who are equally prone to both homosexual and heterosexual relationships. To prove his assertion, he refers to 43.8: *omnis Mineruae homo* [a man skilled in every art of Minerva].

and Oleneva (2023), are also present in classical languages. The most commonly used stylistic devices in classics appear to be:

1. addition of words, especially in wellerism formation (17–22),
2. omission with a complete reordering of the original structure (27),
3. replacement of one word (29, 31, 33 and 34),
4. substitution of two or more words (36),
5. blending of two proverbs (39),
6. playing with word ambiguity (46), even with sexual allusion (48).

Unlike modern perversbs, ancient modified proverbs, based on our current knowledge, appear to lack explicit social commentary.

These devices are rather frequent in Greek comedies, but they are not exclusive to this literary genre, as the Latin novels shows: especially in Petronius' *Cena Trimalchionis*, where the presence of paremias and phraseologisms is abundant, we have found some examples of modified proverbs. We have also found one, though significant, case of blending two Greek proverbs in Apuleius' novel *Golden Ass*. However, no cases were found involving substitution of the first and/or second part of the proverbs, word repetition, or reversal of word order. The analysis confirms that, both in modern and classical languages, these mechanisms are not mutually exclusive and can coexist, as in the passage from Aristophanes (*Th.* 528–531) cited at the very beginning of my article (where word substitution and semantic ambiguity are combined).

The comparison between modern perversbs and ancient *detorsio* has shown that comic proverb modification is governed by recurrent and remarkably stable mechanisms. Although the terminology and literary contexts differ, both traditions rely on the recognizability of the underlying proverb and on its deliberate semantic or structural distortion for humorous effect. The present study does not claim exhaustive coverage of the phenomenon but rather proposes a preliminary comparative framework that may help connect contemporary paremiological categories with ancient evidence. Further research on larger corpora will be

necessary to refine this model and to test its applicability to other genres and languages.

Acknowledgments

I am indebted to Professor Ferdinando García Romero and Professor Esteban Bérchez Castaño for their mentorship. A special thank goes to Kim Henrik Haegermann, for having commented on the first draft of my article, and to Polina Oleneva for her valuable feedback. Finally, I appreciate the support from my friends: Daniela Capra, Marco Ciocca and Michelle Pauline Klopfer.

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<https://doi.org/10.29162/pv.43.1.1186>

UDC 398.9(=411.21)(620):331=111

Original scientific paper

Received on 28 January 2026

Accepted for publication on 20 March 2026

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CULTURAL HERITAGE PRESERVED IN PROVERBS: PROFESSIONS IN EGYPT

Abstract: The main aim of the study is to show that proverbs serve as a means of preserving cultural heritage. Since professions, as an example, are part of cultural heritage, the study focuses on those mentioned in the Egyptian proverbs from the 19th century. The source of these proverbs is the iconic collection of Ahmad Taymour. The corpus of the study focuses solely on professions of the simple working class, which resulted in the identification of 53 professions mentioned in 103 proverbs. Five of the professions referenced in 22 proverbs are now extinct, yet most of these proverbs remain very popular and are still used by Egyptians till this very day. These extinct professions include female and male slaves, the water carrier, donkey driver and mesaharaty (Ramadan drummer). Furthermore, the study has shown that proverbs often convey the nature of the job. They have given insight into the lives of the people practicing these professions, naming different aspects of the job such as the requirements, obstacles, materials, products and tools. The proverbs also express the perception of these professions and their value in society.

Keywords: Egyptian proverbs, professions, cultural heritage, extinct professions, society's perception of the professions, aspects of the professions

1. Introduction

While defining the proverb, many scholars have pointed out some of its main functions such as transferring wisdom from one

generation to another and playing a role in both communication and language learning.

One important function of proverbs is their cultural significance, especially their role in preserving cultural heritage. They serve as documentation of culture, customs and traditions, and a record of the history of a nation in general. Proverbs convey the social and economic context in which they were created. Yu Dz-yadyk and Ildikou Csajbok-Twerefou (2023: 53) state that proverbs “are directly related to folk traditions and help to preserve history, culture, and the mentality of society.” Furthermore, Buriyev Dilmurod Arzimurodovich (2023: 92) states that “Proverbs and sayings cover the socio-historical experience of the people.”

Further concepts relevant to the present study are endurance, cultural memory and intentional preservation. The study is based on the fact that proverbs serve as a means of preservation only if they remain in circulation. Most of the proverbs in this study are still in use today, demonstrating their endurance. People continue to use them because they play a role in communication. These proverbs are also part of cultural memory, reflecting and constituting the identity and values of the people. According to Dinter, cultural memory is a “collective memory shared by societies and communities and recalled by symbolic stimuli”. (Dinter: 2). Yet the wording and thus the “cultural realia” and “traditional matters” (Mieder 2004: 137) embedded in the proverbs are of lesser importance, as speakers focus on the meaning and function of the proverbs. The proverbs are associated with specific wording to which people are accustomed and which they unconsciously use. Furthermore, people do not use proverbs with the aim of an intentional preservation of the elements they contain. This is the role of collectors and scholars, who among others collect proverbs to ensure that this oral tradition does not die out.

What counts for this study are the elements within the proverbs that serve as means of preserving customs and traditions. Wolfgang Mieder specifies some of these elements:

More than other scholars, folklorists and other cultural historians are also interested in the content of proverbs, to wit what cultural realia are contained in individual proverbs and how they differ from culture to culture in proverbs that might mean the same. Many proverbs refer to old measurements, obscure professions,

outdated weapons, unknown tools, plants, animals, names and various other traditional matters. (Mieder 2004: 137)

Mieder identifies professions as one of the traditional themes embedded in proverbs. The interest in examining professions as a source for explaining proverbs has been shared by several scholars. Lutz Röhrich and Gertraud Meinel state that crafts in German proverbs and idioms have influenced the language. Proverbs convey insights into the cultural life of previous centuries and serve as a source for the history of German crafts. They have examined the origin and meaning of many proverbs and idioms, that refer to crafts and how they influence the language (Röhrich and Meinel 1971/72: 163–164). Röhrich and Mieder (1977: 65) regard proverbs and idioms as a mirror of the cultural and historical backgrounds of work, customs and folk belief.

The present study does not approach proverbs from a linguistic or semantic point of view, but rather sees them as a means of documenting history and preserving cultural heritage, as they help us learn about the professions of a past era by mentioning them and thus preserving them for the future generations even if some of these professions are now extinct. Scholars learn about these professions and gain further information about them from the proverbs.

The collections and studies of Egyptian proverbs have paid attention to the role of proverbs in conveying the nature and history of the Egyptians. These studies have recognized not only the general role of proverbs but also the specific role of professions mentioned in proverbs in preserving cultural heritage. The following collections and studies of Egyptian proverbs are based on the conviction that proverbs are a source of documentation and a means of understanding the Egyptians in general and their professions in particular. The collection of Egyptian proverbs by John Lewis Burckhardt dating to the early 19th century recognized the role of proverbs in providing insight into the lives of the Egyptians. His book (first published in 1834) reflects this conviction starting from its title, “Arabic Proverbs or, The Manners and Customs of the modern Egyptians”, which emphasizes that proverbs reflect manners and customs and are key to understanding the Egyptians. Burckhardt wrote: “I also hope that it [the collection] will contribute to knowing the Arabic

People and its current language” (Burckhardt 2012: 25). Mieder writes in his introduction to the reprint of the German version of Burckhardt’s book, that Burckhardt’s proverbs count as valuable “Kulturdokumente” (cultural documents) (Burckhardt 2012: 7). He also states that this collection will contribute to understanding the way of living and thinking of the Arabs. (Burckhardt 2012: 8) Burckhardt’s collection includes 782 proverbs written in Arabic and arranged alphabetically according to the first letter of the proverb, followed by the translation and explanation of the proverb. In his explanations customs and traditions are revealed. Later in 1953, Ahmad Ameen published “The Dictionary of Customs, Traditions and Egyptian Expressions” in which his comments and explanations of the different traditions are partially based on proverbs that he cites to prove his statements. Nabila Ibraheem, a well-known folklorist, writes that the special thing that Ameen did is to register the Egyptian proverbs according to subjects, unlike others who arranged the proverbs alphabetically. What motivated him to do that was his recognition of the great importance of the proverbs of each nation as a significant source for the moral and social historian. She further quotes Ameen as saying that collecting Egyptian proverbs about women enables us to understand how women were perceived (Ibraheem 1974: 174).

Ibraheem Sha’lan’s book titled “The Egyptian Folk in Their Colloquial Proverbs” (1972) follows the same concept, stating that the study of proverbs is a study of the lives of different sectors of the people with the variety of their work, ways of communicating, manners and traditions (Sha’lan 1972: 3–4). For him the proverb is a “social document” (Sha’lan 1972: 5), a means of monitoring and recording (Sha’lan 1972: 39) and has a social function (Sha’lan 1972: 43). Sha’lan’s book is not a collection of proverbs like Burckhardt’s but is divided into chapters. Two of its chapters deal with peasants and professions. In these, he discusses different professions and quotes proverbs to support his points. According to Sha’lan proverbs refer to different professions that were common in the past, some of which are now extinct while others are resisting progress, but are also diminishing (Sha’lan 1972: 233). Within the frame of the paremiology of Egyptian proverbs further studies have focused on professions

mentioned in proverbs. Sha'lan (2012), in his article "The Crafts in the Egyptian Popular Proverbs", writes that "The proverbs are the cornerstone for knowing the peoples" (Sha'lan 2012: 135).

Ahmad Ibraheem Al-Şaify published in 2020 the "Encyclopedia of Crafts, Industries, and Works in Egyptian Popular Proverbs". The encyclopedia is organised according to different professions and lists 126 professions. In the introduction, he explains that he starts with a certain profession by providing a brief study of the related proverbs, followed by a comprehensive explanation of each proverb, the meaning of its words, and the context in which it is used (Al-Şaify 2020: 12). In addition, he refers to the article by Hossam Abd El-Zaher published in 2013 titled "The Popular Proverbs as a Source of Studying Egyptian Professions and Crafts in the 19th Century" (Al-Şaify 2020: 12). These collections and studies of Egyptian proverbs not only demonstrate the strong belief that proverbs serve as a means to understand the nature of the Egyptian people in general, but also convey the conviction that they are an important source for learning about different professions, especially those of past centuries, as reflected in Egyptian proverbs. Setting aside the collections that did not aim at focusing on the professions mentioned in the proverbs, it appears that the studies using professions as means to illustrate the nature of the Egyptian people and their cultural history and heritage have mainly examined each profession individually, explaining its nature and providing further information drawn not only from the proverbs but also from other sources. An overall evaluation of all proverbs containing professions has not been provided by the authors. Often, the quoted proverbs do not explicitly mention the names of the professions. Furthermore, the authors often did not adhere to the strict definition of a proverb, so that similes, idiomatic phrases and even vendors' cries (Al-Şaify) are included in their studies, which does not comply with the titles of their books.

The fact that some of these collections and studies date from the 20th. and 21st. centuries will not serve the present study in concentrating on the proverbs of the 19th. century as the main aim of the study is to show that proverbs are a means of preserving cultural heritage, which means that they must originate from earlier times, and that among other things, encapsulate the professions

of the past. Specifically, the main aim of the study is to identify the professions mentioned in the proverbs, provide further information about them as included in the proverbs, and ultimately show that proverbs are a means of conserving cultural heritage through the role they played for the professions.

The questions that the study aims to answer are as follows: Which professions are mentioned in the Egyptian proverbs? Have the professions only been mentioned or do the proverbs contain further information about them? How did society perceive and evaluate the different jobs? Did some of the professions mentioned become extinct, and if so, how many are there? Has the fact that these professions no longer exist influenced their use in the present time?

The corpus of the present study is Ahmad Taymour's collection "The Colloquial Proverbs". The assurance that this collection will serve the aim of the study lies in the fact that it was compiled before 1930, as Taymour died that year and the collection was published posthumously in 1949. Thus, the proverbs in this collection date back to the 19th and early 20th centuries. Another important reason for choosing Taymour's collection is that it is, from the point of view of Egyptian and Arab paremiologists, the best collection of Egyptian colloquial proverbs. "According to many scholars, his [Taymour's] phenomenal work ["The Colloquial Proverbs"] is regarded as a remarkable thesaurus that provides a substantial and comprehensive collection of Egyptian proverbs which is fundamentally an indispensable basis for profound research. This collection is also of immense value to scholars of various other fields" (Matta 2025: 1 – 2). The proverbs in Taymour's collection are arranged alphabetically according to the first letter of the proverb and not by subject, so that part of my work has been to extract the proverbs mentioning a specific profession. There are other proverbs that discuss work or trade in general, or even allude to a particular profession, but the proverbs analyzed here are only those that explicitly mention a specific profession by name. Another restriction of the underlying corpus is that I have focused on professions of the simple working class, in other words, the lower-class jobs. Excluded are "glamorous" and highly regarded professions such as judges, doctors, employees and clergymen.

2. *Corpus*

The corpus features the professions arranged alphabetically. Only proverbs that mention the professions are included. After listing the proverbs and their explanations, I will provide an overall summary of how the professions are portrayed. If there is only one or two proverbs related to a particular profession, or if the explanation is clear, I will give no further comments to avoid redundancy. Proverbs that mention two professions will be counted only once in the total, even if they are repeated under both professions. For easy reference, the numbering of the proverbs follows the Arabic collection of Taymour (2011), to facilitate locating the original wording in Arabic, as transcribing the proverbs would take up space. The numbers also correspond to the English translation (Matta 2025). The number of each proverb will be given in brackets each time it is mentioned in the text. The cited proverbs will appear in quotation marks. If a proverb contains direct speech, it will be placed in single quotation marks. The proverbs will only be written in the English translation. The explanation is translated from Taymour and placed in simple brackets following the proverb. Further information from my side will be placed in brackets followed by my initials “H.M.” If an exact translation for a particular word is not possible, it will be transcribed and placed in single quotation marks. Some proverbs do not require explanation, especially as I have omitted the figurative meaning. I have translated all passages in the references that are written in Arabic or German.

- *The astrologer*

166: “He is blind and makes himself an astrologer.” (He is incapable of being an astrologer.)

The astrologer must have good eyesight to be able to practice his job.

- *The baker*

92: “Give the bread to its bakers even if they eat half of it.” (Even if the bakers eat half the bread, the remaining half is still good because of its high quality. If you give your bread to an ignorant baker, he will spoil it all.)

1121: "The baker is the partner of the bookkeeper." (Because the baker bribes him, the bookkeeper overlooks the baker's cheating.)

1122: "A baker and a bookkeeper." (Said about the corrupt salesman who determines both the weight and the price, and controls them without anyone to check on him.)

Baking requires special skills. Furthermore, bakers could be corrupt and cheat the customers.

- *The barber*

592: "If you see the barber shaving the beard of your neighbor, wet your own beard with soap." (Be prepared because you might encounter the same destiny as your neighbor.)

2734: "A barber opened (his shop): he started with the head of a bald man." (The barber is unlucky because his first customer is bald.)

2782: "'Molokheya' and fresh bread, oh what devastation it is for you, O barber." (The barber is a poor man with many children.) 'Molokheya' is a thick green vegetable soup (H.M.) and requires a lot of fresh bread, so that this meal is a financial burden for the poor man.

The barber is considered poor.

- *The beggar*

478: "The one whose door is known to the beggar; oh, how long is his suffering." (The beggar is very persistent.)

998: "They made the female beggar get married, so she would not be needy; she put a piece of bread in the bag and said: 'Charity, O my mistress!'" (Although she was no longer needy, she continued begging.)

1646: "The beggar's eye came out, and the owner of the house is taking his time." (The beggar became very tired and suffered, while the landlord is taking his time in giving him what he had asked for.)

1647: "Half the world belongs to the beggar." (The beggar goes everywhere and collects things, so that he acquires a lot.)

1648 and 1993: “A beggar hates a beggar, and the owner of the house hates the two.” (Beggars hate each other and are competing because they are forced to share what is given.)

Beggars are persistent and people do not recognize their suffering and need. Beggars may earn a lot, and begging can become a habit or even an obsession, and they also feel threatened by other beggars.

- *The blacksmith*

2797: “The one who is the neighbor of the blacksmith will be burnt by his fire.”

The blacksmith deals with fire.

- *The bookkeeper*

1121: “The baker is the partner of the bookkeeper.” (Compare 3.2)

1122: “A baker and a bookkeeper.” (Compare 3.2)

Bookkeepers are regarded as corrupt.

- *The builder*

1681: “Make the skillful builder work with you even if he eats your lunch.” (What you spend on a skillful builder will pay back and is not considered a loss.)

Building requires skill.

- *The butcher*

958: “The butcher does not fear the large number of sheep.” (The butcher knows that the enormous number of sheep does not help them defend themselves.)

1270: “The man is like a butcher; he does not like but the fat one.” (The man chooses the fat and strong woman for marriage like the butcher, who chooses the mutton, because of the good quality of its meat.)

2648: “‘Why is your meat of bad quality?’ He said: ‘(It is) from a butcher I know.’” (The butcher only keeps his own benefit in mind, so that he cheats even his own friends.)

The butcher is not afraid of many sheep. He is not honest.

- *The camel-driver*

1683: "Did you see the camel? He said: 'And neither the camel-driver.'"

2493: "I saw neither the camel nor the camel-driver."

- *The captain:*

28: "The son of the captain became too heavy for the boat and perished the food." (The captain's son does not help because of the position of his father. Therefore, he is a burden.)

487: "He who makes himself a captain should get the wind by its horns." (He who says he is worthy of being a captain should find ways to make the ship sail. That proves that he is worthy of being the boss.)

1288: "He is riding for free and flirts with the captain's wife." (The passenger has no sense of honor as he pays back the captain's favor by flirting with his wife.)

1335: "The captain has an opinion, and the sailor has an opinion." (Each one of them does not know what the other wants.)

2727: "The boat that has two captains sinks."

2733: "The south wind throws the captain to a place that he hates." (The south wind is hated by the seamen, and the captain is helpless in the face of this wind.)

The captain should have skill in dealing with the wind. He sometimes disagrees with his subordinates, but disagreeing with another captain leads to drowning.

- *The carpenter*

733: "The door of the carpenter is dislocated." (The carpenter neglects his own property.)

1633: "The skillful woman weaves with the leg of a donkey and the stinky woman beats the carpenter." (The skillful ones do not need the perfect tool. But the clumsy one drains out the carpenter.)

1914: "The knot beats the carpenter." (A knot in the wood stops the carpenter's work. It is a problem that cannot be solved.)

1980: "When the carpenter encounters a knot, he is perplexed." (Compare explanation for 1914)

Sometimes a carpenter neglects his own property. Knots and bad helpers drain him out.

- *The confectioner*

2638: "Not everyone who arranges the pots (kitchenware) says: 'I am a confectioner.'" (It is not enough to seem to be doing the right thing.)

The confectioner must have skill.

- *The cook*

637: "If your cook is great, you are not safe from disgust."

1784: "The cook of the poison must taste it."

Even a great cook makes mistakes, and he must bear the consequences of his actions.

- *The corpse-washer*

1870: "My female enemy and she became my corpse-washer." (The corpse-washer might gloat.)

2057: "The female corpse-washer is blind and the gravedigger is crippled."

2058: "'Wash his corpse and make him a turban!' He said: 'Am I a corpse-washer and a guarantor of paradise?'" (The people asked the corpse washer to make a turban for the deceased so that he might go to paradise. He replied that this is not within the scope of his job.)

The female corpse-washer must be fit for the job. The corpse-washer cannot go beyond the scope of his work.

- *The dancer*

910: “The woman dancer (ghazeya) dies, and her finger is dancing.” (‘Ghazeya’ is a dancer who dances and plays on the rope in the countryside. She cannot quit the habit of dancing.)

1244: “The world is like a ‘ghazeya’: she dances a bit for everyone.” (‘Ghazeya’ see 910.)

The “ghazeya” cannot give up dancing and performs for everybody and not just for a single person.

- *The diver:*

2912: “The water proves the diver a liar.” (Deep water is the real test for the diver.)

- *The donkey driver:*

540: “If the donkey drivers oppose each other in stubbornness, it is the luck of the passengers.” (If the donkey drivers fight, they lower the fees.)

713 “What made him carry and what made him load and what made him a donkey driver, the charge he gets is not equal to the errand.” (What made the donkey driver do all that useless effort, although the fee is less than the effort.)

1181: “The fighting of the donkey drivers, the luck of the passengers.” (Compare explanation of 540)

Competition among donkey drivers lowers the fee. In general, they are poorly paid.

- *The dressmaker*

86: “I would rather sew with a horn of a palm tree than have the mistress (dressmaker) say: ‘Give me the fees.’”

The dressmaker’s fees are high.

- *The druggist*

1725: “The morning of the seller of beans and not the morning of the druggist.” (Beans are eaten for breakfast. People prefer beans as the need for food in the morning is greater than that for perfumes.)

1910: “The druggist who is like pitch loses the mastic and preserves the paper.” (The ignorant druggist underrates the important substance and preserves the unimportant display.)

The ignorant druggist does not know his priorities. People prefer the seller of beans over him.

- *The drummer*

1812: “As long as I am a piper and you are a drummer, oh how many long nights we will see.” (The nature of their jobs requires staying up very late.)

- *The ferry driver*

2755: “The old ferry driver has been spared.” (The ferry driver transports people in his boat.)

- *The foreman*

173: “He is one eyed and makes himself a foreman.” (A foreman supervises farmers and others.)

The foreman must be fit for his job.

- *The garbage collector*

1338: “A garbage collector and a flower in his hand.”

1337: “A garbage collector whose needs are covered is a hidden sultan.”

The garbage collector is disdained by the people, and they mock him. But being self-sufficient makes him as good as a ruler.

- *The gardener*

3128: “He sells flowers to the gardeners.” (This is useless, as gardeners have flowers in abundance.)

- *The goldsmith*

29: “The son of the goldsmith longs for a ring from his father.”

831: “The daughter of the goldsmith longs for a necklace from her father.”

2779: “(She is) crippled and tells the goldsmith: ‘Make the anklet heavier!’”

The goldsmith’s son, daughter and a crippled woman ask for his products.

- *The gravedigger*

2057: “The female corpse-washer is blind and the gravedigger is crippled.”

The gravedigger must be fit for his job.

- *The guard*

1149: “Take a man for yourself and he will be a guard for you at night and a hireling at daytime.” (Get married and your husband will benefit you.)

1835: “Be hostile to a prince and not be hostile to a guard.” (Hostility against a great man does not harm, as he will do nothing to shame himself, unlike the disdained guard whose enmity can bring you great distress.)

The guard protects his wife at night, but he is very hostile and mean when people disagree with him.

- *The harvester*

1273: “Where can the sun go from the neck of the harvester?” (The harvester endures a lot of sunshine.)

The harvester is exposed to the sun as he works in the open field all day.

- *The hireling*

1149: “Take a man for yourself and he will be a guard for you at night and a hireling at daytime.” (See *The guard*)

The hireling serves his wife.

- *The hunter*

405: "He who made it easy for the hunter will make it easy for the frying." (If God facilitates the beginning, He will facilitate the end.)

1906: "The bird is cleaning its feathers, and the hunter is being fried." (The bird is at ease while the hunter cannot catch the bird and is waiting for a chance to catch it.)

2182: "They said to the hunter: 'What have you caught?' He said: 'What is in the net is gone.'"

Hunting requires patience, but there is the risk of not catching anything.

- *The magician*

1014: "The magician does not die except by the snake."

1015: "The magician does not forget the death of his son and the snake does not forget the cutting off of her tail."

3100: "Oh, how many things do you have in the bag, you magician." (The magician hides snakes and other things in his bag to impress the audience during his show.)

The magician's job forces him to work with snakes, which he fears and which might kill him or his son.

- *The maid*

980: "Maids serve maids, how treacherous are you, O fate." (Used for two who used to be equal, but one was raised by luck to a higher status.)

Maids are disdained.

- *The makeup artist*

1962: "She is bleary-eyed and pretends to be a makeup artist."

The makeup artist should be fit for her job.

- *The master*

1234: "The strike of the master equals one thousand, even if it fails." (The proverb praises the skillful master.)

1682: "The work of the master for his son." (Something is so skillfully done as if it is the work of a master for his son.)

3181: "The master dies, and he goes on learning."

Being a master means being skillful. He produces good products and continues learning until death.

- *The merchant*

866: "When the merchant goes broke, he goes through his old copybooks." (The merchant hopes to find an old, unsettled debt.)

1685: "Paying on credit will make the merchant owning a thousand go broke."

2080: "The insolent eats the money of the merchant."

Part of the merchant's job is keeping records of his expenses. Merchants possess money.

- *The "mesaharaty"*

1966: "They made you a 'mesaharaty'. He said: 'Ramadan is over.'" (The 'mesaharaty' (Ramadan drummer) walks at night through the streets in the (Islamic fasting) month of Ramadan, to wake people up before dawn prayer, so that they can eat before starting to fast.)

The 'mesaharaty's job is seasonal.

- *The milkman*

1212: "The flies know the face of the milkman."

The money changer:

160: "He is bleary-eyed and makes himself a money changer." (He is not fit for the job.)

The money changer must be fit for his job.

- *The mourner*

2756: "The female mourner laments and every sad woman weeps over her own deceased." (Female mourners are hired

at funerals to mention the good traits of the dead and magnify the loss.)

- *The peasant*

601: "If pincers come out of wood, a pasha comes out of the peasant." (Such a tool cannot be made of wood. That means a peasant can never become a pasha (a high-ranking person in society H.M.).)

674: "If it rains on the iron in the season of plowing, oh how lucky is the peasant." (It is good luck when it rains early.)

1958: "The peasant will never be successful."

2118: "A peasant whose needs are covered is a hidden sultan."

2119: "No matter how much the peasant is promoted, the tattoo does not go away." (The tattoo indicates his origin and actual environment. Tattoos are very common among villagers.)

3012: "Feed the peasant apples for two years, you give him a spanking, he gets it down as 'galoween'." ('Galoween' is a kind of plant peasants eat with cheese.)

According to Taymour, city people unjustifiably mock the peasants, saying nothing good can come from them and that they will never change nor get promoted. If a peasant is self-sufficient, he is as good as a ruler.

- *The piper*

1356: "The neighborhood's piper does not enchant."

1357: "The piper does not cover his beard."

1812: "As long as I am a piper and you are a drummer, oh how many long nights we will see." (Compare explanation 3.20)

3178: "The piper dies, and his finger is playing."

The piper's job makes him stay up late. His music is not appreciated in his own neighborhood. He should not cover his beard in shame, as his job is a reason enough to be ashamed. He goes on playing even after his death as he cannot give up his habit.

- *The sailor*

1335: "The captain has an opinion, and the sailor has an opinion." (The sailor has a different opinion than the captain.)

- *The seller of beans*

1725: "The morning of the seller of beans and not the morning of the druggist." (Compare explanation 3.19)

People prefer the seller of beans to the druggist, as they need food in the morning more than perfume.

- *The seller of old shoes*

2742: "The destiny of the bald is the seller of old shoes." (The seller of shoes can make hats for the bald to protect their heads, as the normal hats will wear out.)

- *The shepherd*

1322: "Get a shepherd and watch him." (Watch over someone you hire even if he is trustworthy.)

- *The singer*

2764: "The singer sings, and everyone applies the meaning to himself."

- *The shoe man*

2525: "His tongue is like the scissors of a shoe man: it opens only on impurity." (The shoe man repairs old shoes so that the scissors only open on old used and impure leather.)
The shoe man's job is regarded as impure.

- *The (female) slave*

150: "'Cook, O female slave!' 'Pay the cost, O master!'"

828: "The daughter of high origin is precious even if she is a slave."

933: "A female slave serving a female slave. He said: 'This is a huge disaster.'" (The two used to be equal, but one was raised by luck to a higher status.)

1008: "What belongs to the mistress is in the box and what belongs to the female slave is in the market." (The secret of the female slave is revealed as she is not valued.)

1582: "A mistress and two female slaves to fry two eggs." (Describes many workers doing something small that does not require all these workers.)

1583: "The mistress and a female slave for a plate of 'basaria'." ('Basaria' are small fish. The proverb describes many workers doing something trivial.)

The female slave cannot do anything unless her master pays the cost. Slaves are disdained. Their secrets are revealed without considering their feelings. It is a disaster if a woman of high class who became a slave is forced to serve another slave.

- *The (male) slave*

761: "Instead of telling the male slave: 'O my master!' I will make my errands with my hand."

870 and 1985: "She is one-eyed and the daughter of a slave and her wedding night is a Sunday." (The daughter of a male slave is ugly. Usually, the wedding nights are on Friday or Monday night. The proverb refers to someone who has two hated traits.)

1023: "Your darling whom you love even if he is a slave."

1659: "Buying the slave is better than raising him."

1806: "The 'tanboura' of the slave is a recreation over his condition." ('Tanboura' is a musical instrument.)

1858: "A slave who is not yours is as free as you are." (If you do not own a slave, you have no power over him.)

2183: "They told the slave: 'Your master is going to sell you.' He said: 'He knows what is good for him.' They said: 'Then why don't you run away?' He said: 'I know what is good for me.'"

2652: "They did not find bread to snatch so they got a slave to slap."

3125: "Either the male slave dies, or his master sets him free." (The slave should be patient and endure what he is going through.)

The slave is not a free man. His captivity would end either by dying or by being set free. A slave is on the one hand expensive to maintain, and on the other hand could be badly treated by his master. His life is difficult, so that a musical instrument is his means of recreation. The slave is only owned by one master, who may sell him, but for others he is a free man. Running away might be a choice. Slaves are difficult to raise and train, so buying them is better than raising them. Slaves are disdained, so it is degrading to have to call them, "My master". Slaves are also regarded as ugly.

- *The spinner*

2056: "The female spinner spins with the leg of a donkey."

The female spinner manages to spin with the least of tools.

- *The tailor*

66: "The fee of the tailor is under his hand." (The cloth is a guarantee for getting paid.)

- *The water carrier*

21: "How can I be a water carrier and you splash water on me?" (The water carrier is used to water and does not fear it.)

3127: "He sells water in the quarter of the water carriers."

The water carrier has water in abundance.

- *The witch:*

1333: "Go away you witch, you will neither win this world nor the hereafter." (People did not want to deal with witches. They used to fear their harm.)

The witch is disdained and people think that she has lost both life and the afterlife.

3. *The analysis*

3.1 *Combination of two jobs*

In six proverbs *two jobs* are combined. The evaluation of a job can be unexpected and may favor a job that is usually not favored, only because of the contrast to the other job. In proverb (1725), the seller of beans is preferred to the seller of perfume – the druggist –, as the former provides people – especially the poor – with essential food, not like perfume which is considered a luxury.

Sometimes, the workers of two jobs are not opposed to each other but are connected, such as the baker (1121) and the bookkeeper, who, according to the proverb, is bribed by the baker, so he can overlook his dishonesty. In proverb (1122), the baker and the bookkeeper are the same person which is unethical as the baker is without any supervision.

Sometimes both jobs are *similar*, like the captain and the sailor (1335), who are not of the same opinion and neither of them knows what the other is thinking. Also, similar jobs are the drummer and the piper (1812) as they have, by the nature of their jobs, to stay up late at night to entertain people. Sometimes, the jobs are in the same field, such as the corpse-washer and the gravedigger (2057). Two jobs might also be mentioned together without a real link between them, like the guard and the hireling (1149).

Some proverbs discuss the *relationship between the members of the same job* or trade. While in others, there is a sense of intense competition or hostility between them, like beggars (1648, 1993) who hate each other. Donkey drivers (1181, 540) are also depicted as fighting, which is the luck of the passengers, as the conflict leads to the reduction of the fare. -

3.2 *Specific aspects of the professions*

Studying all the proverbs in the corpus reveals that there are certain aspects related to the jobs. People should be *fit to practice* a certain job according to its nature and requirements. Therefore, people wonder how those who are *unfit* for a job could practice it. A blind man can neither become an astrologer (166), nor a corpse-washer (2057), nor a money changer (160). A one-eyed

person cannot become a foreman (173) and a weak-sighted person cannot become a makeup artist (1962). A crippled person cannot become a gravedigger (2057). Sometimes *skill* is required, so that workers would stand out: people are advised to choose the skillful workers, as the strike of a master (1234) is worth a thousand strikes. Even if assigning skilled workers will cost a lot, one should choose them. Thus, people should choose skilled bakers (92) even if they eat half of their bread, and hire the skilled builder (1681) even if he eats their lunch. If the captain (487) is capable and worthy of being a captain, he can get the wind by its horns. Skill must be developed; thus, the skilled master (3181) continues learning until death. Sometimes, it is not skill that is needed, but *the minimum requirement* is not being ignorant or stupid, or depending on the position of the father, like the following proverbs: If the druggist (1910) is ignorant, he preserves the wrapping paper and neglects the mastic. A stupid sailor (1548) is a burden on the ship. The captain's (28) son can be a burden on the ship, as he does not work but, on the other hand, eats from the supply, which is counted as a loss. Sometimes, what is needed is just patience, like the hunter (1906). At other times, the nature of a job leads to certain *habits* which grow and over time become obsessions. This applies to the female beggar (998) who, after being forced to marry so that she is no longer needy, goes back to begging. This also applies to the female dancer (910), whose finger dances even after she dies, and the piper (3178), whose fingers play even after death. The old tattoo of the peasant (2119) still shows, although he has been promoted.

There are *dangers* associated with the nature of certain professions, such as the magician (1040) who ultimately dies from a snake bite. The captain (2733) encounters strong winds which lead him to places he does not want to go to. The diver (2912) is tested by the deep water. A *difficulty* that a carpenter (1980 and 914) encounters is a knot in the wood or just a clumsy helper (1633). The harvester suffers from the sun (1273). Sometimes, workers are incapable of fulfilling the wishes of the clients because they are not within the *scope* of their work, as with the corpse-washer (2058), who cannot guarantee paradise for the deceased since his job is strictly washing the corpse. Even if people are careful, they might encounter *bad luck* in their jobs:

The job of the Ramadan drummer (1966) is tied to the Islamic fasting month of Ramadan, so when this month is over, he is jobless. Also, the barber (2734) is unlucky if his first client is bald. Moreover, *bad or poor judgement* can be a reason for failure. You do not give people something they have an abundance of; for example, gardeners (3128) have plenty of flowers and water carriers (3127) plenty of water, so you neither sell flowers to gardeners nor water in the quarter of the water carriers. In other instances, poor judgement involves using too many workers for a job that requires only one, like the proverbs where one (1583) or even two slaves (1582) and the mistress cook a small meal which only requires one person. More than one captain (2727) leads to the sinking of the ship. Furthermore, poor judgement is evident when somebody puts too much effort into something which is not worth the trouble and will not pay back, like the donkey driver (713). The druggist is ignorant and negligent, so he does not know the priorities and thus loses the mastic, while preserving the wrapping paper (1910). Given these obstacles, the proverbs send out *warnings* to people to avoid anything that can stand in the way of fulfilling a task. However good the workers might be, they should not be left unsupervised; even if the shepherd (1322) you assigned to watch your sheep is trustworthy, you must still supervise him yourself. And even if the cook (637) you hire is great and very clean, you may find things in your food that disgust you. The proverbs also warn the merchants (1685) not to sell on credit, as even a very rich merchant can go broke this way. People are also warned not to believe that somebody is clever because he seems to be doing the right things; for example, if someone is able to arrange baking tins in the right way, this will not make him a confectioner (2638).

Every job is tied to specific *materials, products and tools* that are important constituents of the profession. *The material* of the shoe man (2525) is old leather. The magician (3100) has all kinds of things hidden in his sack, with which he surprises and fascinates people. The material must be available, so that the female slave (150) can cook; it is the responsibility of her master to provide the necessary food for cooking. The tailor (66) has a guarantee of getting his fee, as the material (cloth) is in his possession.

The goldsmith manufactures jewelry, so rings (29), necklaces (831) and anklets (2799) are the products he sells. If the product of the cook is poison (1784), he must taste it. The seller of old shoes (2742) will sell hats to the bald. The gardeners (3128) sell flowers and the water carriers (3127) sell water. The milkman (1212) sells milk, and the butcher (248) sells meat. The druggist sells mastic (1910) and perfume (725), and the baker bakes and sells bread (92). The seller is even named after the products he sells, such as the name of the 'seller of beans' (1725).

Every job requires certain *tools*, which are an important part of the job, such as the plow for the peasant (674), the net for the hunter (2182), the scissors for the shoe man (2525), the copy-books for the merchant (866), the bag or sack for the magician (3100), and soap for the barber (592). Sometimes, if someone is very clever, they may use makeshift equipment, like the resourceful female spinner (2056), who weaves with the leg of a donkey, or a woman who does not want to pay high fees to the dressmaker (86) and would rather sew with the horn of a palm tree.

3.3 Society's perception of the professions

Another important aspect of professions is how society evaluates them. In other words, how the ones who practice a certain job are judged on the grounds of their job. As the corpus of the study is already restricted to the simple, less glamorous jobs, the evaluations found in the corpus are mostly negative. Out of the six proverbs about *peasants*, four are negative. According to Taymour, city people unjustifiably mock peasants, saying nothing good can come from them (601 and 1958), and that they will never change as they stick to their old habits, cannot be promoted, and their origins will always show (3012 and 2119).

The *guard* is regarded (1835) as unrefined. The enmity of a guard can cause great distress for his enemy. The *beggars* (1648, 1993) are hated by the owner of the house, and it is regarded as torture if a beggar finds their way to someone's house (1478). The beggar's (1646) feelings are disregarded and overlooked. Also, the *garbage collector* (1338) is regarded as inferior, so it is surprising to see a flower in his hand. *Maids* are looked down upon, and it is considered a treacherous fate if a mistress becomes a maid and serves others. (980) The secrets of the *female*

slave (1008) are out in public, as hurting her feelings does not count. She is disdained, looked down on and is regarded as low class (828). It is even considered a disaster or betrayal of time and fate if a former slave becomes a mistress with another slave serving her, as in proverbs (933, 980). *The male slave* (870) is also regarded as low class, considered ugly (1023) and looked down on and having to deal with him or abiding to the male slave (761) should be avoided. A *witch* (1333) is feared for her potential harm, so people avoid her and do not even see a chance for her to go to paradise after she dies. The *butcher* (2648) is dishonest and cheats his clients. The *baker* and the *bookkeeper* are also dishonest (1121 and 1122). Society regards the job of the *shoe man* as disdained (2525). The negative perception of the job of the *piper* made him feel ashamed of his job (1357).

3.4 Proverbs as a means of preserving cultural heritage

The question of whether proverbs can be regarded as a means of preserving cultural heritage can be partially answered by examining the professions mentioned in the proverbs. Selecting Taymour's collection is appropriate for answering this question, as his collection mainly contains proverbs from the 19th century. The analysis has shown that some of the professions mentioned in Taymour's collection are now extinct. These include slaves in general, both the female and male slave, the water carrier, the donkey driver and the Ramadan drummer. Identifying extinct professions is not straightforward and I have tried to support my opinion with quotations from reputable studies. Ameen, in his dictionary published in 1953, writes about some of these professions: he notes that slavery has been abolished and slaves set free (Ameen 1953: 216). According to Ameen, the profession of water carriers has declined as water faucets are now found in homes. (Ameen 1953: 235)

Sha'lan mentions other extinct jobs. He states that the job of donkey drivers has become extinct. They do not exist in the present time, except in places where there are tourists, unlike in the past when they played a major role in the sector of transport as there were no other means available. (Sha'lan 1972: 235) Sha'lan also writes about the profession of the Ramadan drummer, which is nearing extinction because it is seasonal and peo-

ple use other means to wake up at dawn and eat before fasting (Sha'lan 1972: 236).

It is very difficult to determine whether other jobs such as magicians, witches, camel drivers, corpse washers, dancers, astrologers, makeup artists, money changers and spinners are extinct or still exist. It is possible that their nature, their scope of work or their tools have changed. A makeup artist from the 19th century might look quite different and use tools which are quite different, so these professions could – based on their nature – be regarded as extinct. However, trying to make such comparisons would go beyond the scope of the present study.

Examining the jobs that are proven to be extinct, we find that their number, compared to the underlying corpus, is substantial. There are six proverbs mentioning the female slaves, 10 mentioning the male slaves, two mentioning the water carrier, three mentioning the donkey driver and one mentioning the Ramadan drummer. The total number is 22, which is about 21.4 % of the corpus. The question remains whether the extinction of certain professions has affected the use of the proverbs containing these professions in today's society. To my knowledge, the proverbs containing extinct professions have not been affected by this; they have shown endurance, as some of them are very popular and are constantly used among the Egyptians. I will provide some examples based on my knowledge as a native speaker of Egyptian-Arabic. Proverbs which are still very popular include: “‘Cook, O female slave!’ ‘Pay the cost, O master!’” (150), “Buying the slave is better than raising him.” (1659), “He sells water in the quarter of the water carriers.” (3127), “The fighting of the donkey drivers, the luck of the passengers.” (1181), “They made you a ‘mesaharaty’ (Ramadan drummer). He said: ‘Ramadan is over.’” (1966).

4. Conclusion

The main aim of the present study is to demonstrate that proverbs serve as a means of preserving cultural heritage. As professions form part of cultural heritage, the study focuses on the professions mentioned in proverbs. The study has taken Egyptian proverbs as an example. The source for the present study is the collection of Taymour, which is considered the best collection of

Egyptian proverbs, and was compiled before 1930. Therefore, these proverbs provide evidence that the professions, along with the information about them included in this collection, belong to the past and have been preserved through proverbs to the present day. The corpus of the study is restricted to professions of the simple working class, excluding the so-called “glamorous” and highly valued professions, so that the numbers mentioned refer only to a subset of the professions found in Taymour’s collection.

The total number of simple jobs mentioned in Taymour is 53, which appear in 103 proverbs. Twenty-nine professions are mentioned in only one proverb (astrologer, blacksmith, book-keeper, builder, confectioner, diver, dressmaker, drummer, ferry driver, foreman, gardener, gravedigger, harvester, hireling, maid, makeup artist, ‘mesaharaty’ (Ramadan drummer), milkman, money changer, mourner, sailor, seller of beans, seller of old shoes, shepherd, singer, shoe man, spinner, tailor, witch); seven professions are mentioned in two proverbs (camel-driver, cook, dancer, druggist, garbage collector, guard, water carrier); 11 professions are mentioned in three proverbs (baker, barber, butcher, corpse-washer, donkey driver, goldsmith, hunter, magician, master, merchant, piper); one profession is mentioned in four proverbs (carpenter); one profession is mentioned in five proverbs (beggar); three professions are mentioned in six proverbs (captain, peasant, female slave.); and one profession is mentioned in 10 proverbs (male slave).

It is also noteworthy that the job appearing in the largest number of proverbs is that of the male slave, who appears in 10 proverbs, while the female slave appears in 6 proverbs. Together, they account for nearly 15.5 % of the proverbs in the corpus of the study. Both jobs, as previously noted, are extinct. Six proverbs contain a combination of two jobs, which are either in harmony with each other, or in competition, in the same field or simply mentioned together without a valid reason.

As mentioned above the numbers should not be regarded as absolute, as the source is only one collection and the study does not include all professions. The figures should be taken as indicative only. Furthermore, the study has shown that most of the professions in the corpus are not merely mentioned by name; proverbs often convey the nature of the job along a variety of as-

pects related to them. The proverbs provide insight into the lives of the people practicing these jobs, highlighting different aspects of the job such as the requirements of a job and the obstacles facing the job. The proverbs also name the materials, products and tools which constitute an important part of the job.

I have also attempted to answer the question of how society views these simple jobs and the people who practice them. The evaluation of some of these jobs and their worth in society is reflected in the proverbs. As the corpus of the study is already restricted to the simple, less glamorous jobs, the evaluations found in the corpus are mostly negative. Peasants, guards, beggars, garbage collectors, maids, shoe men, witches, pipers, female and male slaves are looked down upon. Members of other professions, such as barbers, bookkeepers and butchers, are regarded as dishonest.

The important question of this study is whether proverbs can be regarded as means of preserving cultural heritage. This question can be partially answered by noting the extinct professions that are mentioned in the proverbs, which make up nearly 21.4 % of the corpus of the study. As mentioned above, selecting Taymour's collection is appropriate for addressing this question, as this collection mainly contains proverbs of the 19th century. Identifying extinct professions that belong to the past and no longer exist in the present is not easy, and I have tried to support my opinion with quotations from reputable studies. These extinct jobs that have been found in the proverbs of the corpus are slaves in general, both the female and male slave, the water carrier, donkey driver and Ramadan drummer. Considering their number, which is 22 proverbs (21.4 % of the corpus), this is substantial in relation to the total of 103 proverbs mentioning jobs in this study.

Another question the study has attempted to answer is whether the extinction of certain professions has affected the use of the proverbs containing these professions in today's society. It has been noted that many proverbs containing extinct professions have not been affected, as some of them remain very popular and are still widely used among Egyptians today. Studying other traditional elements, as mentioned by Mieder, could significantly contribute to answering the question whether proverbs serve as a

means of preserving cultural heritage. This could be the subject of further research in this field.

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<https://doi.org/10.29162/pv.43.1.1176>

UDC 811.131.1'373.7:81'322=134.2

Original scientific paper

Received on 19 January 2026

Accepted for publication on 12 April 2026

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ESTUDIO SOBRE LA FRECUENCIA DE USO DE LAS PAREMIAS: REFLEXIONES DESDE LA LINGÜÍSTICA DE CORPUS

Resumen: El presente trabajo analiza la aplicabilidad de los corpus como herramienta computacional capaz de medir la frecuencia de uso de las paremias. La noción de frecuencia de uso, de aparente simplicidad intuitiva, representa una variable compleja de sistematizar debido a las dificultades que su proceso de catalogación supone. Para ello, en este estudio se opta por combinar metodologías de corte tradicional con otras basadas en corpus. Ambas aproximaciones presentan aspectos metodológicos heterogéneos; no obstante, pese a su distinta naturaleza, los resultados muestran una notable convergencia en los valores frecuenciales proporcionados. Salvo un número limitado de excepciones, la triangulación de los datos revela una coherencia proporcional en la frecuencia de uso de las paremias en las dos formas de cribado. El acercamiento digital se convierte, así, en un método complementario para la extracción de información no solo cuantitativa, sino también cualitativa y contextual, lo que se traduce en una comprensión más amplia y no convencional del fenómeno proverbial.

Palabras clave: encuesta paremiográfica, frecuencia de uso, Lingüística de Corpus, paremias italianas, paremiografía digital

1. Introducción

El auge de los estudios paremiológicos en las últimas décadas ha estimulado una abundante y multidisciplinaria producción

científica internacional. Aun disponiendo de esa prolificidad, al colocar bajo un escrutinio crítico la vasta producción a disposición se advierte una serie de interrogantes que, de forma recurrente, comprometen la plena realización de las investigaciones en determinadas áreas de la paremiología contemporánea. Un eje de reflexión sistemáticamente palpable atañe a la noción de *frecuencia de uso* con la que se verbalizan las paremias. Este tema de fricción puede condensarse en tres preguntas nodales: i) ¿cuál es la frecuencia de uso actual de las paremias?, ii) ¿cómo precisar patrones fiables relativos a su índice de uso? y, iii) ¿qué herramientas resultan pertinentes para evaluar la significatividad y el grado de recurrencia de las formas parémicas en sincronías contemporáneas?

En el marco de las evidencias disponibles, solo para un número finito de paremias y en un conjunto reducido de lenguas ha sido posible formalizar respuestas a las cuestiones planteadas. Así, a título ilustrativo, tras la aplicación de técnicas paremiográficas se ha logrado establecer un índice de aparición para las paremias anexadas en los mínimos paremiológicos¹ actuales disponibles (Sevilla y Zurdo 2016; Sevilla y Barbadillo 2021; Crida 2021; Díaz y Sabio 2024). A pesar de la meticulosidad científica que caracteriza estas obras, persiste cierta resistencia hacia métodos que garanticen el acceso a bancos de datos exhaustivos y capaces de facilitar resultados representativos y estadísticamente relevantes.

Por ello, este estudio pretende indagar sobre la aplicabilidad de los corpus lingüísticos para conseguir una estimación de la frecuencia de uso de las paremias. Con tal fin, se ha seleccionado una muestra de cincuenta enunciados sentenciosos italianos, confeccionados en una lista *ad hoc* considerando criterios lingüísticos y científicos. Para la medición de la frecuencia de uso se ha optado por combinar métodos canónicos de la labor de campo —las encuestas dirigidas a informantes— con recursos computacionales. En concreto, se reflexiona sobre el papel cla-

¹ Hasta la fecha, se dispone de mínimos paremiológicos en tres lenguas, consultables en la *Biblioteca fraseológica y paremiológica* del Centro Virtual Cervantes: https://cvc.cervantes.es/lengua/biblioteca_fraseologica/minimo_paremiologico.htm [última consulta: 15/11/2025].

ve que la Lingüística de Corpus (LC) puede desempeñar como estrategia estadística para el estudio de las unidades parémicas.

La naturaleza gnómica de dichas formas justifica la aproximación mixta. En efecto, que las paremias sean piezas heurísticas vinculadas a la interacción oral queda ampliamente demostrado (Franceschi 1994; Sevilla y Crida 2013: 107; Anscombe 2022: 436; Sevilla y Barbadillo 2021: 30). Según lo observado, es precisamente su naturaleza predominantemente oral otro factor relevante de cara a la aplicación lineal de técnicas estadísticas digitales; por ende, la yuxtaposición de métodos protocolarios y computacionales garantiza una comparabilidad más fiable.

Por ello, los propósitos de este artículo se despliegan en tres direcciones principales: a) deliberar sobre la aplicabilidad de los corpus como método capaz de extraer datos de corte cuantitativo también en ámbito paremiológico; b) facilitar una serie de reflexiones metodológicas cuyo objetivo sea, mediante el empleo de los corpus, asistir al paremiólogo en su labor paremiográfica digital; y, c) demostrar que el corpus es una herramienta idónea para desestimar las incertidumbres que el paremiólogo experimenta al analizar una determinada paremia. Con relación a este último punto, el uso de corpus procesados electrónicamente y las posibilidades de extraer información no solo cuantitativa, sino también cualitativa y contextual, resultan de gran utilidad a fin de comprender ampliamente las particularidades de las paremias. A modo de ejemplo, el corpus puede auxiliar en la compilación de las fichas virtuales de proyectos paremiográficos, como el *Refranero multilingüe* (Sevilla y Zurdo 2009). En el sistema de consulta del refranero, de los numerosos elementos descriptivos que concurren a la presentación de una paremia, los coautores disponen de la opción de asignar marcadores de frecuencia de uso relativos a la distribución de la paremia en la actualidad (Sevilla 2012). Si para el español y otras lenguas existen obras de referencia que facilitan dicha tarea, el italiano no cuenta con tanta fortuna². La carencia de obras actualizadas que registren la

² A estos efectos, es imperativo mencionar las labores —todavía inéditas— que, con meticuloso rigor, se están realizando para la confección del *Mínimo Paremiológico Italiano* (Sardelli 2009; 2011).

difusión de las paremias italianas impone la necesidad de acudir a nuevos enfoques para perseguir tales fines.

2. Revisión de la noción de frecuencia de uso de las paremias

Conforme a lo expuesto en el apartado introductorio, la incógnita del estudio son las marcas de frecuencia de los enunciados sentenciosos. Para abordar el tema, conviene introducir consideraciones generales y, posteriormente, profundizar en las implicaciones de la investigación basada en corpus.

Sevilla y Crida (2013: 107), en su cometido de documentar las características formales y comunes a toda paremia, aluden a la frecuencia de uso, «la cual es gradual y va de un uso alto a estar en desuso». En este sentido, varios autores han pretendido escudriñar el estado actual y la vitalidad de las paremias: algunas investigaciones expresan inquietudes sobre la vitalidad del refranero que, según los hallazgos, se encontraría en proceso de declive por motivo de la progresiva disminución de uso tanto en la población adulta como, de manera más acentuada, entre los jóvenes (Sevilla y Cantera 2002: 255; Crida 2021:15; Asensio 2022: 157; Sevilla 2023: 78-79). En dirección contraria, otros asumen posturas menos pesimistas. Para botón de muestra, Combet (1996: 22) sostiene que las paremias no solo siguen vigentes, sino que manifiestan una continua evolución para adaptarse a las nuevas demandas de la contemporaneidad. Rigurosa es la postura de Shirley Arora (en Sevilla 2000: 14) quien observa como la frecuencia de uso de las paremias se subordina a las variables sociales, con factor determinante de la edad. Efectivamente, la paremióloga argumenta que, aun cuando los jóvenes las reconocen, su utilización práctica resulta mínima. Más allá del ámbito hispanófono, observaciones análogas se registran en la italo fonía. Temistocle Franceschi, pionero de la geoparemiología italiana, alude a un deterioro paulatino de la competencia paremiológica, tendencia todavía más alarmante entre los jóvenes. Según el autor, la causa radicaría en el nexa que los *pro-verbi*³ mantienen con la oralidad dialectal que las instituciones

³ En italiano, la ausencia de estudios taxonómicos sobre las paremias perpetúa un evidente desfase terminológico (Sardelli 2016: 85). Aunque las diversas peculiaridades

y los medios de comunicación de forma metódica han intentado segregar (en Sardelli 2010: 18).

A la luz de estos datos, resulta lógico sostener que la frecuencia de uso de las paremias está supeditada a múltiples variables, ya sean internas a la lengua o extralingüísticas. Conjuntamente, la opacidad metodológica que rodea el objeto de estudio constituye un ulterior factor de tensión. En este sentido, si la bibliografía citada hasta ahora se fundamenta en importantes investigaciones científicas, otras carecen de tanta solidez. La comunidad investigadora señala la existencia de aproximaciones científicas que indagan el fenómeno paremiológico y fraseológico desde enfoques intuitivos y personales (Gutiérrez 2022: 2). Tal es el caso de obras fraseográficas⁴ en las que se recalca con preocupación «la no existencia de índices de frecuencia de las unidades fraseológicas» (Penadés 1999: 26). El uso de criterios intuitivos expone el riesgo de establecer equivalencias injustificadas entre unidades de escaso uso y otras de mayor relevancia o constancia. Dicha desalineación obedece a las orientaciones teóricas predominantes durante las últimas décadas del siglo XX, por las que el estudio de las unidades multiverbales se ha sustentado en la observación de datos numéricamente limitados y, con frecuencia, orquestados por la intuición personal del investigador (Corpas y Gutiérrez 2023: 2).

El cambio de paradigma en la lingüística contemporánea sugiere prudencia hacia la intuición y la introspección. Según lo plantea Chafe (1991: 90), si bien estas dos habilidades contribuyen a reconocer la relevancia de un fenómeno, lo más satisfactorio y adecuado es cuantificar su ocurrencia mediante la integración de herramientas estadísticas. Efectivamente, los

de las formas parémicas se hallan reconocidas, sin justificación, sigue aplicándose el término *proverbio* como archilexema o hiperónimo que aglutina las categorías más heterogéneas de «todos estos dichos que llegan a hacerse populares» (Sidoti, 2020: 709).

⁴ Este trabajo no parte de una postura ancha que fusione fraseología y paremiología, motivo de discrepancia entre los autores. Aun así, corresponde señalar que el estudio de las UF desde la LC ha sido más fecundo que el de las paremias. Por ello, dadas las características comunes que ambas esferas del discurso repetido comparten, la vía más recomendable es atender a exploraciones de corpus aplicadas a las UF con el objetivo de integrarlas en investigaciones de corte paremiológico.

nuevos corpus a gran escala equivalen a las fuentes más fiables para la obtención de evidencias cuantitativas (Wallis 2021: 7). En términos similares, Pérez-Ávila (2007: 1) identifica en los corpus digitalizados una fuente de recursos lingüísticos que permite prescindir de la intuición; también, destaca su carácter intrínseco como cuantificadores de ocurrencias. Consolidando esta posición, Mellado (2009: 138) sostiene que, de los varios avances en la LC, el más relevante para el lingüista radica en la opción de validar empíricamente sus intuiciones acerca del uso y funcionamiento del ítem lingüístico. Igualmente, conviene recordar cómo dentro de la LC se ha trabajado para el «desarrollo de sistemas y aplicaciones basados en corpus para la detección y la extracción automatizada» de las estructuras multiverbales (Corpas 2013: 351; Corpas 2008: 75). Las paremias son un claro ejemplo de ello.

Ahora bien, habida cuenta de la naturaleza prevalentemente oral de las paremias y la insuficiencia de instrumentos metodológicos estadísticos para medir su dispersión, se revela palmaria la inadecuación para expresar —salvo en aquellos casos en los que la frecuencia de aparición sea inequívocamente manifiesta— un juicio verdaderamente objetivo. En este marco, Corpas (1998: 368) identifica en los corpus el punto de partida del estudio paremiológico. La exposición a una fuente inagotable de datos facilita una comprensión amplia y sistemática del segmento lingüístico. En esta misma línea se colocan las observaciones de Tarnovska (2005: 206), quien los considera un indicador esencial para la medición de la distribución frecuencial de las unidades parémicas. Más recientemente, Gutiérrez (2022) acredita que, de las múltiples funciones del corpus, particularmente fructífera resulta su aplicación estadística en el cómputo de las UF. En el estudio referido, el autor incorpora también una serie de paremias.

Pese a los entusiasmos que genera esta aproximación, conviene precisar los retos metodológicos que presenta el cribado digital de las paremias. Tomando prestadas las palabras de Penadés (2015: 260), indicar la frecuencia de una UF concreta es una tarea altamente intrincada, incluso cuando se limita su búsqueda a un corpus determinado. Según los hallazgos, la misma afirmación puede extenderse al estudio de las paremias basado en corpus, cuyas dificultades se resumen en el siguiente párrafo.

3. Reflexiones sobre la extracción paremiológica en los corpus digitales

La localización de las paremias en corpus digitales exige recorrer un itinerario metodológico específico de esta aproximación.⁵ Se identifican tres nodos críticos de decisión que influyen en el análisis paremiológico corpus-informado: i) evaluar la extensión y los rasgos estructurales de la paremia en cuanto unidades pluriverbales, fijas (Zuluaga 1975: 226) e idiomáticas (Pamies 2007: 173); ii) intervenir en los resultados mediante control manual o estrategias de filtrado electrónicas; y iii) precisar el tipo de resultado que ha de considerarse pertinente en la investigación y, en coherencia con ello, aquello que debe quedar excluido.

El primer punto crítico concierne a los rasgos estructurales de estos enunciados plurimembres. Sevilla y Crida (2017) caracterizan las paremias como «unidades fraseológicas (UF) constituidas por un enunciado breve y sentencioso, el cual corresponde a una oración simple o compuesta». Por ello, queda claro que el rasgo de plurilexicalidad (Corpas 1996: 18; Mellado 2004: 17), en el caso de las paremias, se intensifica hasta el punto de que su extensión máxima adopta la forma de oración compuesta. El caso prototípico en paremiología lo constituyen los dialogismos que, según la forma, llegan a presentar una estructura trimembre adornada por esquemas dialogados (Med 2019: 62; Ugarte 2022: 66). Dicha sobreabundancia de elementos léxicos es el primer factor que condiciona la ejecución de una búsqueda en el corpus tan sencilla y prototípica como la que se configura para la localización de una unidad léxica simple. En palabras de Corpas (2013: 342), la identificación de las UF en los corpus es la dificultad por antonomasia que complica su tratamiento digital.

Con el objetivo de paliar este obstáculo inicial, se acude a ajustes de búsquedas diseñados exclusivamente para las unidades polilexemáticas. En el caso de las locuciones, Corpas (2014: 145) aconseja optimizar los diseños de búsqueda mediante el uso de secuencias truncadas o la extracción de expresiones regula-

⁵ Atendiendo a la postura de Rojo (2021: 48), la LC se considera una aproximación al estudio del fenómeno lingüístico y coadyuva a la observación empírica de grandes cantidades de datos.

res. Refinando la búsqueda al esquema paremiológico, Gutiérrez (2024: 47) explica que, con el intento de reducir la inclusión de combinaciones libres de palabras, la búsqueda de una paremia debería configurarse a partir de «combinaciones de tres palabras consecutivas invariables e impropias *a priori* del discurso libre». ⁶ Efectivamente, aunque la búsqueda de la paremia completa podría constituir el método más intuitivo y usual de buscar signos lingüísticos, la potencialidad del análisis asistido por corpus queda reducida a la mera constatación de los contextos de uso en un número de ocurrencias exiguo (Miccoli 2025: 78). Así, la segmentación se convierte en el procedimiento más conveniente.

Para implementar la segmentación debe considerarse asimismo otro aspecto estructural que atañe a la longitud de la paremia: su variabilidad. Según se aprecia, la extensión de estas unidades, que suele superar con creces el bigrama, representa un rasgo problemático (Corpas 2013: 344). También Tarnovska (2005: 207) comparte esta posición y explica que un aspecto crucial es, justamente, la variable longitud de la unidad proverbial, factor determinante para medir la frecuencia de uso que propicia el corpus: según ella, cuanto más corta es la paremia, más ocurrencias serán proporcionadas. Miccoli (2025: 73) reconoce en la flexibilidad el principio orientador que debe aplicarse a la hora de segmentar la paremia en secuencias. El autor subraya dos razones principales: a) no es lo mismo extraer una secuencia consecutiva y fija de palabras para paremias cortas y aquella de mayor extensión ⁷ y b) sería conveniente ajustar la secuencia al elemento que se quiere resaltar o investigar. Resulta evidente que las decisiones sobre qué secuencia elegir sean el resultado de numerosas pruebas para verificar cuál es el segmento más productivo, cuantitativa y cualitativamente.

En cuanto al segundo punto, el uso deliberado de controles manuales o electrónicos es una repercusión directa de la acción de segmentar la paremia. Si bien las paremias —al igual que las demás UF— se caracterizan por ser fijas, dicha estabilidad se

⁶ El autor pone como ejemplo la secuencia de búsqueda «su San Martín» para la localización de la paremia *A cada cerdo le llega su San Martín*.

⁷ Se comparan *A rey muerto, rey puesto* y *Antes el vicio de pedir, está la virtud de no dar*. La diversa extensión de ambos refranes resulta ostensible.

reconoce como un rasgo gradual que cede el paso a la variación (Penadés 1996; Mellado 2004; García-Page 2008; Sevilla y Crida 2013). Variabilidad y fijación vienen configurándose como las dos caras de la misma moneda (Penadés 2022: 22-23). En los corpus, el resultado de esta dualidad se traduce en que todo elemento que no forma parte del segmento formulado, y debidamente tecleado en el motor de búsqueda, está potencialmente expuesto a procesos de variación y cambio. Esta limitación —o ventaja, dependiendo de los casos— es consecuencia directa de la aproximación basada en corpus. En este ámbito, las UF canónicas y con cierto grado de fijación aparecen con un índice de ocurrencia numéricamente inferior respecto a toda variante derivada a partir de ellas (Corpas 2014: 134). Se constata el mismo escenario con las paremias, lo que comporta intervenir con revisiones para poder limitar el número de los resultados espurios.

La revisión personal de los registros que suministra el corpus puede resultar una práctica tediosa (Corpas 2013: 353). Según lo plantea Svartvik (1992: 10), en la LC, existen fenómenos lingüísticos por los que una atenta revisión manual es imprescindible. Sustituirla con procesos rápidos y automatizados sería, por tanto, lo más cómodo, pero provocaría la pérdida de la representatividad que, en realidad, interesa recuperar. Stubbs (1995: 27) justifica el uso de revisiones personales argumentando que no siempre los procesos computarizados son los más indicados especialmente cuando es el lingüista, y no la máquina, quien tiene la formación adecuada para tipificar tendencias lingüísticas inusitadas. Son las que McEnery y Hardie (2012: 125-126) denominan *hand and eye techniques*, las únicas, según los autores, capaces de permitir al investigador examinar, o en sus palabras *escanear*, los múltiples registros suministrados. De tal modo, se optimiza la identificación de ejemplos y patrones lingüísticos relevantes que no se recuperan mediante algoritmo u otro proceso de filtrado computarizado.

Es innegable que las técnicas de observación personal son aplicables dentro de límites establecidos. Si bien son recomendables a la hora de administrar un número razonable de fragmentos de textos, en otras circunstancias, la enorme presencia de datos vuelve la revisión manual una tarea extremadamente complicada. De ahí que resulte difícil garantizar la ausencia de márgenes

de error (McEnery y Hardie 2012: 2). Ciertamente, la reducción controlada del número de ocurrencias viene siendo una solución frecuente en los estudios basados en corpus, especialmente, cuando se opera con formas propias del lenguaje vivo y oral (Mellado 2009: 142). Una posibilidad es condensar el número de instancias mediante el empleo de técnicas de filtrado⁸ cuyo objetivo es facilitar una revisión manual, optimizar la precisión del análisis y minimizar la confusión generada por el monitoreo personal de miles de formas (Miccoli 2025: 75). Además, la aplicación o no de filtros dependerá del umbral establecido de ocurrencias que el investigador está dispuesto a gestionar manualmente, asegurando la validez analítica y la replicabilidad de los datos.

El tercer punto crítico remite a la delimitación del objeto de estudio. La posibilidad de elegir qué material parémico incluir en el análisis es el beneficio vinculado a la revisión manual de los registros. Como se ha mencionado anteriormente, en la búsqueda de paremias, muchas de las instancias que recupera el corpus están sometidas a alteraciones o no son las previstas en el marco del trabajo. A tal propósito, Corpas (2014: 144) habla de *ruido documental* acerca de aquella información encontrada por el buscador, pero no relevante en cuanto demasiado genérica. También Gutiérrez (2024: 49) emplea el término *ruido* y lo describe como la aparición de datos que interfieren en la precisa realización del estudio. Pamies y Pazos (2023: 141), por su parte, estiman problemáticas las duplicaciones⁹ producto de fuentes que se plagian entre sí. El presente estudio emplea la terminología *fragmentos incidentales* (Miccoli 2025: 73) (en adelante, FI). La decisión de adoptar esta denominación responde a varios motivos: en primer lugar, más que la paremia, el corpus provee al investigador de fragmentos textuales en los que se ubica el elemento de interés.

⁸ En particular, el autor hace hincapié en las ventajas del filtro *keep lines containing* (en la herramienta de gestión de corpus *Sketch Engine*). Mediante este filtro es posible conservar únicamente aquellos fragmentos textuales en los que, además de la secuencia buscada, aparece un ítem específico de interés.

⁹ Esclarecedoras, a tal propósito, son las palabras de Hunston (2022: 41), quien alerta que el problema de la duplicación de los textos en formato electrónico ha sido un obstáculo constante en la LC. Esto ocurre con fragmentos recuperados por el corpus de periódicos, especialmente los que se encuentran en línea, que suelen publicar y referenciar artículos en múltiples ediciones. El resultado son duplicaciones y plagios.

En segundo lugar, la aparición de estos registros se origina a raíz de la configuración de búsqueda formulada. En esencia, se trata de una serie de datos contextualizados. Pues, este catálogo de fragmentos contextuales puede guardar información interesante o, en cierta proporción, recuperar datos carentes de utilidad para la investigación. Estos últimos podrían resultar pertinentes en otras líneas investigativa, circunstancia que justifica su carácter incidental.

Por último, aunque no esté directamente vinculado a estas etapas metodológicas, resulta pertinente introducir otro condicionante de la consulta paremiológica en corpus: la gestión de los signos ortográficos de puntuación. En lo que atañe a las paremias, es frecuente observar una coma o un punto y coma que enfatizan su estructura polimembre, como en el refrán italiano *Tale padre, tale figlio*.

Por lo general, procesar las marcas de puntuación no presenta dificultades significativas. En el motor de búsqueda sería suficiente distanciar los signos de puntuación digitando espacios finos, tanto delante como detrás de las palabras que integran la secuencia formulada.

A pesar de su sencilla disposición, el uso de secuencias comprensivas de signos de puntuación carece de la eficacia deseada, provocando una reducción drástica en el número de ocurrencias. Compárese, por ejemplo, los resultados obtenidos por el corpus *itTenTen20* (en *Sketch Engine*) al buscar la paremia italiana *Il lupo perde il pelo, ma non il vizio*. Las secuencias utilizadas son «il pelo ma» vs «il pelo, ma». La primera excluye la coma, mientras que la segunda la incorpora distanciándola con espacios finos. El corpus proporciona respectivamente 1721 y 493 registros. En la medida de lo posible, convendría emprender los dos tipos de búsqueda para alcanzar una comprensión completa del fenómeno.

Para concluir, es importante aclarar que dichas limitaciones, articuladas en una serie de puntos críticos, son el resultado de observaciones derivadas del uso extensivo de los corpus. Ciertamente, dichas complicaciones varían en función del tipo de *software* de tratamiento de corpus que se emplea, de su tamaño y del elemento en análisis. Asumiendo un escenario favorable, tales

complejidades tenderán a mitigarse con el tiempo, en virtud de las mejoras constantes que se observan en la LC.

4. Procesamiento del dato vía formulario

La exigencia de combinar métodos convencionales y computacionales radica en la resistencia que el objeto de estudio muestra a ser medido. A tal propósito, Sevilla y Zurdo (2016) reconocen el potencial y las ventajas tanto a nivel cuantitativo como cualitativo que ofrece el fácil acceso a bancos de datos procesables mediante herramientas automáticas. Pese a ello, y coincidiendo con las consideraciones de las dos autoras, tales avances no deben ser motivo de supresión de los métodos tradicionales de recopilación paremiográfica, los cuales son irremplazables y complementarios al tipo de documentación facilitada por la aproximación digital (Sevilla y Zurdo 2016: 18). A la luz de estas reflexiones, se ha diseñado un cuestionario comprensivo de cincuenta paremias italianas. La selección de la muestra responde a criterios científicos y lingüísticos, garantizando así la pertinencia del repertorio recopilado.

4.1. Criterios de sistematización del inventario

En lo que respecta a los criterios científicos, la lista constituye un repertorio paremiográfico organizado y seleccionado *ad hoc*. Dicho catálogo ha sido empleado en investigaciones previas a la presente (Asensio y Sciutto 2024: 192). Asimismo, el material parémico ha sido sometido a supervisiones: cada paremia del inventario ha sido localizada en obras paremiográficas de referencia, como el *Refranero multilingüe* (Sevilla y Zurdo 2009) y el *Dizionario dei proverbi Italiani* (Lapucci 2006). Esto ha favorecido la realización de los ajustes necesarios para que la transcripción refleje fielmente la grafía de la paremia tal como figura en las obras de referencia o, cuando resulte pertinente, su adaptación al italiano de uso actual. A modo de ejemplo, el enunciado *Il bove dice cornuto all'asino* (Lapucci 2006: 187 n. 828) contiene el sustantivo *bove*, más arcaizante. Se trata de una variante léxica en desuso en la actualidad. El ítem léxico ha sido sustituido por el sinónimo vigente *bue*, en la formulación *Il bue*

dice cornuto all'asino.¹⁰ Las sistematizaciones se han aplicado a todo el inventario cuando se ha considerado necesario. La inexistencia de obras de referencia exhaustivas para el italiano, los resultados satisfactorios obtenidos en la investigación exploratoria (Asensio y Sciutto 2024) y la validación cruzada de las formas en las obras de referencia aseguran la solidez científica de la lista *ad hoc*.

Si se atiende a los criterios lingüísticos, se ha procurado abarcar solo formas proverbiales que se consideran *proverbi*¹¹ en italiano. Dada la ausencia de una clasificación taxonómica de las paremias italianas, tal como se ha indicado brevemente en la nota 2, se entiende aquí por *proverbio* aquella estructura gnómica de la tradición popular que adopta la forma de enunciado breve y sentencioso (Sevilla y Crida 2015) y que presenta autonomía enunciativa y textual (Zuluaga 1980: 192; Corpas 1996: 132; Alvarado 2007: 6-7; Anscombe 2018: 576-577). Estas precisiones —bien afianzadas en la tradición paremiológica española, pero todavía en fase embrionaria en la tipificación fraseológica y paremiológica italiana— excluyen otras formulaciones de naturaleza fraseológica, como las locuciones. Con estas últimas existen fronteras a veces poco definidas, pero su dependencia enunciativa de otro elemento oracional determina una neta distinción de las paremias (Barbadillo 2024: 211). Por ello, en los cuestionarios se incluyen formulaciones bimembres (*Donna barbata / sempre piaciuta* o *A mali estremi / estremi rimedi*) cuyas propiedades formales permiten asimilarlas a lo que, en ámbito hispanófono, se denomina *refrán*. También se contemplan estructuras unimembres (*Il fine giustifica i mezzi* o *Tutti i nodi vengono al pettine*) en las que la preservación del orden canónico de los constituyentes de la frase evoca a la *frase proverbial*, otra categoría paremial muy presente en la tradición paremiológica española.

¹⁰ La paremia de uso actual con actante bue se recoge también en el *Refranero multilingüe* <https://cvc.cervantes.es/lengua/refranero/Ficha.aspx?Par=58517&Lng=8> [última consulta: 24/11/2025]

¹¹ Si bien en español *proverbio* se clasifica como una subcategoría parémica (Sevilla y Crida 2013: 109), en italiano el término se emplea como archilexema, equivalente de *paremia* en español.

4.2. Disposición del formulario

Para el acopio de los datos orales se ha usado un cuestionario accesible mediante el sistema de gestión de formularios *Google Form*. En virtud de las múltiples opciones de configuración que brinda la plataforma, se ha estructurado el formulario en tres fases secuenciales: a) un bloque inicial que documenta las variables sociodemográficas de los entrevistados; b) el eje central de nuestra investigación correspondiente a las paremias cuyo grado de difusión se pretende evaluar; y, c) una tercera sección, de carácter opcional, en la que se invita al entrevistado a comentar variantes de las paremias empleadas en la sección precedente u otra que emerja espontáneamente, tanto en la lengua estándar como en los distintos dialectos vigentes en el territorio italiano. Si bien la última sección es voluntaria, las fases anteriores son obligatorias. El cuestionario no permite avanzar si no se contesta a cada pregunta marcada visualmente con un asterisco rojo, lo cual indica su obligatoriedad.

En la primera ronda de preguntas, se solicita: 1) la región de procedencia, de entre las veinte que conforman la unidad administrativo-política italiana; 2) la provincia, indicada íntegramente o mediante su abreviatura, por ejemplo, *Roma* o *RM*; 3) la edad, agrupada en cinco rangos: 18-30, 31-40, 41-50, 51-60 y 61+;¹² y, 4) el nivel de educación formal adquirido, fraccionado según el sistema educativo italiano en: *Licenzia media*, *Diploma di Scuola Superiore*, *Laurea Triennale*, *Laurea Magistrale*, *Dottorato* y *Altro/Non Specificato*. Las demás variables socioidentitarias, basadas en supuestos esencialistas o binarios, no se consideran vinculantes para los fines de la investigación. La representatividad sociolingüística exigida queda adecuadamente cubierta mediante (1) la información de corte diatópico, dada la fuerte heterogeneidad lingüística italiana, (2) por la variable edad, puesto que el uso de las paremias se vincula ampliamente a esta dimensión y (3) por el nivel educativo, dado que provee con información de interés diastrático.

¹² Para este grupo, las reducidas capacidades digitales han obligado al entrevistador a garantizar la provisión de soporte personal, o delegado, para la correcta cumplimentación del formulario.

La segunda parte del formulario constituye el núcleo del estudio. En esta sección, se listan cincuenta paremias y para cada una se solicita indicar la frecuencia de uso conforme a la experiencia personal del informante. En este sentido, conviene señalar que la evaluación del grado de uso de una paremia puede generar ciertos niveles de confusión. En particular, este escepticismo surge si se considera, siguiendo a Mellado (2009: 148), que los estudios centrados únicamente en la medición del uso activo de las UF deberían complementarse con aquellos que indagan el grado de conocimiento y percepción de una determinada unidad en análisis, lo que remite a la competencia fraseológica pasiva. Si dentro las UF se consideran exclusivamente las paremias, «pasaremos de la competencia fraseológica a la competencia paremiológica» (Huéscar y Sevilla 2024: 171). Efectivamente, en el caso de las paremias, la competencia paremiológica activa se defiende como la habilidad que tiene el hablante de citar a tiempo y en la circunstancia adecuada la paremia más apropiada (Sevilla y Díaz 1997: 367; Martí 2018: 57). Esta competencia, a su vez, se vincula a la disponibilidad en el repertorio lingüístico del individuo de toda una variedad de informaciones que permite reconocer y comprender la paremia, su competencia paremiológica pasiva (Sevilla y Barbadillo 2005: 5). Siguiendo esta lógica, Tarnovska (2005: 205) subraya la conveniencia de emplear experimentos que midan tanto el reconocimiento pasivo como la disponibilidad activa de las paremias en los informantes. En este marco, Sevilla y Barbadillo (2021: 21) consideran fundamental, en investigaciones de corte empírico, tener en cuenta la competencia pasiva y activa de los hablantes, refiriéndose a ellas en términos de «repertorio individual y colectivo».

Del mismo modo, este estudio pretende recopilar datos integrando tanto la percepción de uso (competencia pasiva) como el uso efectivo (competencia activa) que los hablantes evalúan poseer respecto al material parémico proporcionado. Para ello, las preguntas se han configurado en una cuadrícula de respuesta múltiple (Imagen 1).

	Mai	Raramente	A volte	Frequentemente	Molto spesso
Tanto va la gatta al lardo che ci lascia lo zampino *					
Lo uso	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Lo sento o leggo	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Imagen 1. Cuadrícula de varias opciones.

Tal como se observa, se aplica una escala Likert impar de cinco puntos en orden progresivo mediante el uso de adverbios de frecuencia, de menor a mayor intensidad, que en español se traducen como: nunca, raramente, a veces, frecuentemente y a menudo. El indicador de frecuencia debe señalarse tanto para la competencia activa (entendido aquí como el uso propio del hablante) como para la competencia pasiva (considerado aquí su reconocimiento), respectivamente a través de las fórmulas *Lo uso* (Lo uso) y *Lo sento o lo leggo* (Lo escucho o lo leo). Este enfoque abarca tanto la disponibilidad oral de la paremia (mediante la acción de escuchar), como su provisión escrita (mediante la acción de leer). De tal modo, es posible abarcar toda dimensión diamésica por la que se transmite el dato.

A este respecto, si bien el número de paremias sometidas a encuesta asciende a cincuenta, esta sesión incluye tres preguntas más: ítems de control incorporados con una finalidad metodológica específica. Considerando que el sondeo se ha realizado por medios virtuales y que la cumplimentación del formulario se ejecuta sin la supervisión del entrevistador, existe el riesgo de obtener datos sesgados, derivados de un nivel de concentración insuficiente, de fatiga o de la tendencia del informante a agilizar su cometido tachando las opciones de manera mecánica. Con el fin de mitigar estos riesgos, se ha optado por introducir consultas de control destinadas, por un lado, a mantener elevado el grado de concentración del participante y, por el otro, a desestimar aquellos cuestionarios en los que la consigna no ha sido atendida correctamente. A modo de ejemplo, estos controles se formulan como instrucciones explicativas: *Si estás siguiendo con atención el cuestionario, selecciona la respuesta “raramente”*. Las otras

preguntas de control reproducen la misma proposición, aunque variando el marcador indicado. Asimismo, a fin de mantener la atención del entrevistado, los tres controles se han diseminado de forma aleatoria a lo largo del cuestionario, después de las preguntas número 10, 27 y 44. El propósito es evitar la identificación de patrones de dispersión de los controles. Por ello, aquellos cuestionarios que presentan errores en los ítems de control serán considerados inconsistentes y eliminados.

La tercera y última sección habilita un espacio abierto para aportar, de manera no dirigida, variantes de las premias previamente listadas y/o proponer otras vigentes en el repertorio individual o comunitario. Esta sección busca complementar el enfoque cuantitativo con aportaciones cualitativas, favoreciendo la recopilación de datos espontáneos que enriquecen el corpus y ofrecen futuras líneas de investigación.

Ahora bien, es oportuno señalar que previa su difusión, el cuestionario ha sido sometido a una prueba piloto en la que participaron diez informantes. A estos se les ha solicitado —además de contestar a las preguntas— observar, experimentar y evaluar la herramienta empleada. En otras palabras, su papel ha sido proporcionar retroalimentaciones sobre la aplicabilidad de la encuesta, su facilidad en ser cumplimentada y comprendida, así como sobre posibles mejoras antes de su lanzamiento. Tras recibir comentarios positivos, el cuestionario se ha difundido mediante canales mediáticos. Finalmente, para cumplir con el requisito de sincronía, siguiendo las pautas de Navarro-Brotons (2020: 116), la encuesta ha permanecido abierta durante tres meses, desde el 16 de julio de 2025 hasta el 16 de octubre del mismo año.

5. Triangulación y discusión de los resultados

Expuestas las premisas teóricas y metodológicas que rigen la presente contribución, este párrafo describe el proceso de investigación realizado.

5.1. El estudio de corpus

En cuanto a los aspectos del cribado digital, se ha acudido a la herramienta de gestión de corpus *Sketch Engine* y se ha selec-

cionado un corpus representativo del italiano estándar actual: el *Italian Web Corpus*, conocido mediante la sigla *itTenTen20*. Es el último gigacorporus de la familia *TenTen* para el italiano y cuenta con una amplitud registrada de más de 14 mil millones de tokens. Este corpus de referencia cubre una gran variedad de géneros, tipologías textuales y recursos web, con una descarga de datos realizada entre octubre y diciembre de 2019 y diciembre de 2020. De tal modo, el enfoque sincrónico del estudio queda justificado. El corpus se ha interrogado en su integridad evitando limitar las búsquedas a subcorpus menores. Se ha empleado la configuración de búsqueda concordancia (*concordance*) que ordena al corpus de proporcionar todos los fragmentos textuales en los que aparece la secuencia parémica tal cual se ha digitado en el motor de búsqueda. Siguiendo esta configuración, se ha seleccionado el tipo de consulta (*query type*) frase (*phrase*) que técnicamente se emplea para la identificación de secuencias de palabras.

Se ha procedido a segmentar las paremias en secuencias distintas para verificar cuál equivale a la más prolífica en términos de resultados cuantitativos, considerando las premisas expuestas en el párrafo 3 sobre flexibilidad y puntuación. De manera puntual, para enunciados breves como *Uomo avvisato, mezzo salvato*, el segmento extraído consiste en un número reducido de palabras consecutivas, como «uomo avvisato». En el caso de paremias más extensas, pues, se sigue la lógica de que, a mayor extensión de la paremia, mayor será la extensión del segmento extraído. A modo de ejemplo, «occhio del padrone» para *L'occhio del padrone ingrassa il cavallo*.

El paso sucesivo ha sido la revisión. Estas han sido manuales cuando el corpus ha proporcionado un número de segmentos que no superaba más de mil registros. Cuando las ocurrencias excedían el umbral establecido, se ha optado por operaciones automáticas orientadas a su acotación. Es el caso del filtro *keep lines containing* (nota 8). Limitar el número de ocurrencias a una cantidad operativamente gestionable ha facilitado la observación de los resultados y, por ende, ha permitido compartimentar los FI.

Con respecto a los FI, se establecen criterios de selección que incluyen todo tipo de variación parémica surgida a raíz de la búsqueda. Esto excluye las combinaciones libres de palabras.

Si se piensa en la secuencia «amore è» para la frase proverbial *L'amore è cieco*, es indudable la naturaleza libre, y menos repetida, del sintagma. A través de las estrategias de filtrado por reducción numérica se ha acotado el número de fragmentos textuales que incluyen combinaciones libres, que para este estudio se considerarán los únicos FI. La decisión de incluir todas las modificaciones realizadas a partir de la forma de referencia¹³ radica en el supuesto de competencia paremiológica que se ha adoptado a lo largo del estudio. En términos generales, la capacidad de los hablantes de modificar las estructuras fraseológicas y paremiológicas, según sus propias exigencias, es *sine qua non* un indicador de competencia activa (Martí 2019: 12).

Tal como se puede intuir, toda variación, voluntaria o involuntaria, implica cierta disponibilidad de competencia paremiológica tanto individual, pero primariamente compartida y comunitaria. Por ello en este estudio, aceptamos los registros donde aparezcan: a) desautomatizaciones o manipulaciones creativas, como *Chi va con lo zoppo impara il twist*, *Donald Trump batte dove il dente della Cina duole* o *I lupi di Wall Street perdono il pelo ma non il vizio*; b) hipotéticas variantes marcadas o no, como *La volpe perde il pelo ma non il vizio*, *A buon intenditore basta mezza parola*, *Tra i due contendenti il terzo gode*, *Il cervo che dice cornuto al bue*; c) estructuras en las que se verifica una inversión de sus constituyentes, como *Poche parole al buen intenditore*; d) variaciones estructurales, como *Dal dire al fare*, *c'è di mezzo il mare*, *Via la gatta, i topi ballano*; e) paremias aludidas o diluidas, como *Con la botte piccola, il vinaiolo cura di più la qualità che la quantità*; f) estructuras parémicas fraccionadas por palabras intercaladas, comentarios propios del hablante o un presentador paremiológico, como *A caval donato, dice il detto, non si guarda in bocca*; g) formulas en las que se superponen varios procesos de variación, como *I topi ballano malgrado (e forse grazie a) la presenza del gatto*. Y otras que, por obvias cuestiones de espacio, no se listan.

¹³ En este trabajo es la paremia empleada en el formulario. Para iniciar la labor de segmentación, por lo general se acude a la forma canónica o de referencia de la paremia. Para la definición de forma canónica de una paremia consúltese Klein (2006: 163).

5.2. Resumen de los resultados del formulario

En cuanto a los datos ofrecidos por los informantes, la encuesta ha recibido un alcance fortuito, totalizando 485 cuestionarios remitidos. Las respuestas han sido luego trasladadas a una hoja de cálculo *Excel* para facilitar su gestión y conteo gracias a una visualización más esquemática. Del total de los formularios recibidos, se han excluido 17 que no respetan las órdenes impartidas por los puntos de control. Se ha encuestado a un total de 468 sujetos.

En cuanto a la dispersión geográfica, el cuestionario ha sido cumplimentado en casi todas las regiones italianas, en más de 70 provincias diseminadas a lo largo de la península. En cuanto a las variables edad y nivel de formación formal, se visualizan respectivamente en los Gráficos 1 y 2.

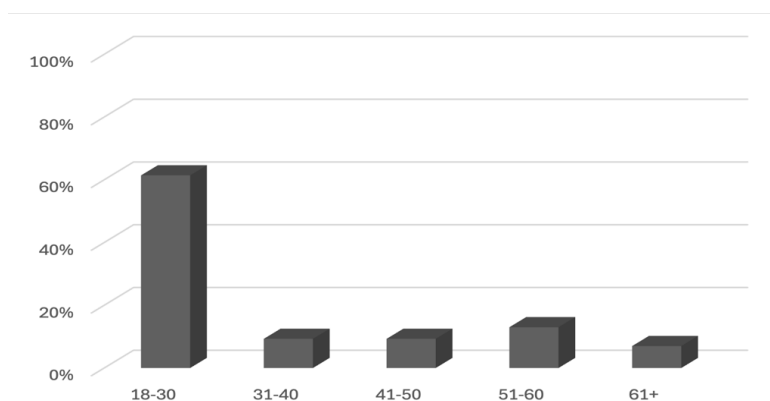


Gráfico 1. Edad de los informantes.

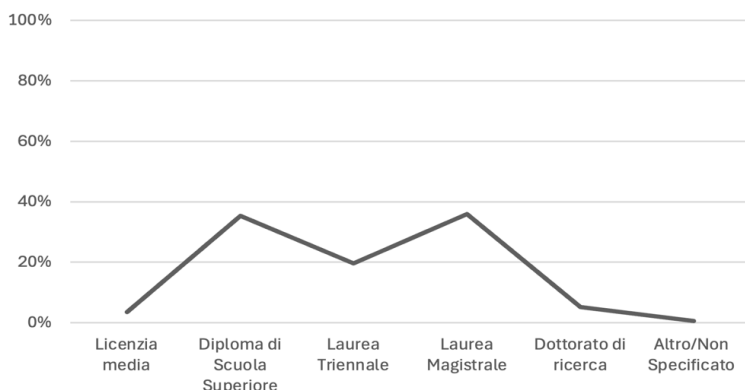


Gráfico 2. Nivel de formación formal de los informantes.

5.3. Validación cruzada de los resultados: corpus vs encuesta

La etapa más espinosa del análisis corresponde a la triangulación de los resultados obtenidos por dos medios de recopilación muy heterogéneos. Por un lado, ha sido necesario contabilizar los registros proporcionados por el corpus; por el otro, aunque el formulario facilita cifras numéricas claras, en términos estadísticos, queda pendiente la creación de un método de comparación apto para triangular los datos. Por ello, se ha decidido considerar solo la vertiente perceptiva de los informantes. De esta manera, se valora la distribución de la unidad lingüística conforme a la experiencia colectiva y no individual.

A modo de ejemplo, presentamos los datos de cinco parejas. Los resultados muestran patrones distribucionales similares tanto en los formularios como mediante el cribado digital. Las cifras numéricas quedan resumidas en la Tabla 1. En la columna *Encuesta* se indica el cálculo de la media.¹⁴

¹⁴ Con el fin de obtener un valor frecuencial, hemos decidido optar por cálculos usuales de la estadística descriptiva: se establece la media de las respuestas proporcionadas por los informantes. En este caso, el proceso es de sencilla resolución. A cada categoría de la escala Likert se le asigna un valor numérico, desde 0 hasta 1, con incrementos de 0,25: Mai: 0 / Raramente: 0,25 / A volte: 0,5 / Frequentemente: 0,75 / Spesso: 1. Asignados los valores, se multiplica el número de respuestas de cada categoría por el valor correspondiente. Los resultados se suman y se dividen entre el número total de participantes (468). El dato resultante es un índice de frecuencia que se coloca entre 0

Tabla 1. Triangulación de los resultados.

	Paremia	Encuesta	itTenTen20 - FA ¹⁵
<i>a</i>	Chi va con lo zoppo, impara a zoppicare	646	641
<i>b</i>	Morto un papa se ne fa un altro	731	1024
<i>c</i>	Sbagliando, s'impára	772	1700+
<i>d</i>	L'occhio del padrone ingrassa il cavallo	136	207
<i>e</i>	Gallina vecchia fa buon brodo	480	461

Las cifras en la tabla evidencian que a un mayor número de registros propiciados por el corpus responde un índice de frecuencia más alto señalado por los entrevistados. Se puede apreciar la misma proporcionalidad en los resultados de menor rendimiento. La paremia *c* es la que registra más ocurrencias en el corpus y, al igual, su media en los cuestionarios responde a un índice de frecuencia superior a 0,75: según los informantes se usa *frecuentemente*. Por otro lado, si se considera la paremia *d*, el *itTenTen20* indica el nivel de ocurrencias más bajo. En términos proporcionales, conclusiones análogas se sacan mediante formulario. Aquí, el índice de frecuencia se sitúa entre *nunca* y *raramente*. Para las paremias *a* y *e* se observan valores numéricos que se acercan al punto medio de la escala Likert. Los indicadores del corpus respaldan la encuesta. Cabe observar que los cambios mínimos en la puntuación decimal de la encuesta responden a cambios exponenciales en el corpus. Efectivamente, comparando *b* y *c*, al cambio mínimo decimal (de 0,73 a 0,77), responde en el corpus un cambio exponencial (de 1024 a 1700 ocurrencias): casi 700 ocurrencias más por un 0,04 decimal.

Los ejemplos en la tabla muestran equilibrio entre los datos recopilados mediante el método convencional y el digital. Sin embargo, es imperativo indicar que, aunque la mayoría de las

y 1. Si el resultado es 0,5 (o cercano) la paremia tiene un grado de frecuencia medio. De manera paralela, cuanto más se acerca a 1 más se utiliza la paremia y, a la inversa, cuando la cifra se aproxima a 0 la paremia se etiqueta como en desuso. Para proyectar el decimal a un número entero, se multiplica por 1000. A modo de ejemplo, para la paremia *a* se observa un valor posicional decimal de 0,6464. Multiplicando por 1000, el número entero comparable será 646,4, que se redondea a 646.

¹⁵ En LC, acrónimo de Frecuencia Absoluta.

paremias analizadas muestra patrones proporcionales bastante armoniosos, otros casos son discordantes. De manera puntual, la célebre paremia *Una rondine non fa primavera*, presente en la mayoría de los repertorios paremiológicos indoeuropeos (Anscombre 2022: 428), presenta una frecuencia considerable en el corpus, con un total de formas registradas que supera las 1500 ocurrencias. En cambio, no se percibe con la misma frecuencia en el cuestionario, donde solo veinte informantes señalan que la escuchan *a menudo* y casi 300 individuos la colocan entre *nunca* y *raramente*. Al contrario, otras formas que en corpus producen resultados escasos, en los cuestionarios registran una frecuencia intensa. Es el caso de *Nella botte piccola c'è il vino buono* que, según los entrevistados se posiciona cerca de *frecuentemente*, aunque en el corpus solo se recogen unas 500 ocurrencias. Otro ejemplo análogo, y más drástico todavía, es relativo a *Parli del diavolo e spuntano le corna* que en el corpus registra poco más de 90 formas; en cambio los hablantes la perciben con destacada frecuencia: 185 votos *a menudo* y 135 *frecuentemente*. Solo 8 personas han tachado la casilla *nunca*.

Dicha asimetría en los resultados constituye una evidencia adicional sobre lo arduo que es realizar un análisis de este tipo, en el que nociones como la frecuencia de uso son muy inconstantes y de compleja clasificación. Acudir a varios métodos que complementen a la vez la escritura y la oralidad es la aproximación más indicada. Por lo general, es posible asumir que algunas formas conviven en ambos canales diamésicos, mientras que otras muestran cierta reticencia en formar parte de la escritura privilegiando el canal donde fueron originadas, la oralidad.

6. Consideraciones conclusivas

Este trabajo pretende demostrar la aplicabilidad de los corpus para el estudio de un fenómeno tan controversial como la frecuencia de uso de las paremias que, hasta la fecha, sigue generando divergencias analíticas en la comunidad científica. La incógnita de partida del trabajo versa sobre qué metodología resulta la más idónea para registrar la intensidad de la unidad lingüístico-paremial, un rasgo de inmediata intuición, pero problemático a la hora de ser catalogado o demostrado. En el caso

específico de las paremias, su naturaleza esencialmente oral dificulta dicha empresa ulteriormente, instando a la coordinación de varios métodos de consulta para medir, a veces de manera exitosa y otras no, la distribución del evento proverbial.

Siguiendo esta lógica, se introduce una metodología mixta para la estimación de la frecuencia de uso de 50 paremias italianas. Combinar más métodos tiene como objetivo el cotejo de múltiples perspectivas y la triangulación de los datos. La falta de obras de referencia que clasifiquen las paremias italianas según su frecuencia, la ausencia de métodos estadísticos digitales y la incertidumbre que sufre el paremiólogo para comprender plenamente dicho fenómeno justifican este planteamiento. Siguiendo esta postura, se ha recurrido al uso de herramientas tradicionales de la labor de campo, como los formularios dirigidos a informantes, y por el otro, el uso de recursos estadísticos computacionales. Estos últimos, los corpus, son imprescindibles cuando el tema es medir la ocurrencia de un fenómeno. Disponer de una fuente ilimitada de datos digitalizados es algo que ya no se puede desestimar en los estudios de corte paremiológico. Por ello, se ha propuesto una metodología de búsqueda articulada en varios puntos críticos que el investigador debería considerar en su cometido de localizar, acotar y tratar estas estructuras tan complejas a nivel no solo estructural, sino también variacional.

Una vez obtenidos los resultados, se ha pasado a la triangulación de los registros. En términos generales, ambos métodos de consulta, censal y cribado digital, permiten establecer patrones simétricos en la difusión de las paremias. Las indicaciones aportadas por los entrevistados y las cuantificaciones establecidas en el corpus coinciden, aunque se presentan excepciones. De hecho, pese a las apreciaciones favorables iniciales, la hipótesis planteada no siempre se verifica. En concreto, por una cifra reducida de paremias, la simetría mencionada se altera hacia asimetría y, dependiendo del caso, con fuerte desproporción. Algunas de las paremias analizadas son muy recurrentes en la oralidad, pero apenas se aprecian en los fragmentos escritos recogidos por el corpus. Contrariamente, otras presentan una notable presencia en el corpus, pero revelan una reducida frecuencia de uso según la encuesta.

Esto permite concluir que, si bien algunos enunciados sentenciosos han entrado a formar parte del repertorio escrito del hablante, otros muestran cierta resistencia a vivir en ambas diamesías, quedándose principalmente relegadas a la oralidad donde nacieron y donde los hablantes las perciben con mayor frecuencia.

Cabe destacar que los resultados que se discuten en este trabajo han de ser interpretados en su contexto: tal vez, acudir a corpus de diferente tipología, como los orales o los mixtos, puede ser un punto de partida igual de satisfactorio. Asimismo, la posibilidad de establecer criterios de proporcionalidad matemáticamente más afinados puede generar resultados más próximos a la realidad. El uso coordinado de más corpus de referencia para el italiano constituye otra posibilidad, dado que lo aconsejable siempre es trabajar ampliando los datos.

Se puede concluir con que el uso de los corpus como herramienta estadística orientada a la medición de la frecuencia de uso representa una aproximación hoy indispensable en las investigaciones paremiológicas. Su uso no se limita al análisis cuantitativo, sino que representa una rica fuente de muestras cualitativas. Si, por un lado, su uso integrado con otras metodologías proporciona una visión ampliada y nueva de cómo actúan estas frases sentenciosas en la actualidad, parece apropiado indicar que para el estudio de la frecuencia de uso de las paremias no es empleable como método exclusivo o principal. Por lo menos, no todavía. El corpus se configura, así, como herramienta de soporte adicional a las técnicas de cribado ya consolidadas. Su función principal es acertar, justificar o desmentir las hipótesis planteadas y las intuiciones que madura el paremiólogo, respetando las funcionalidades propias del estudio basado en corpus.

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STUDY ON THE FREQUENCY OF USE OF PROVERBS: REFLECTIONS FROM CORPUS LINGUISTICS

Abstract: This study examines the applicability of corpora as a computational tool for evaluating the frequency of use of proverbs. The concept of frequency of use, seemingly straightforward, is a complex variable to systematize due to difficulties in its cataloging process. To address this, in this work traditional methodologies are combined with corpus-oriented approaches. Both approaches present heterogeneous methodological aspects; however, despite their different natures, the results show a singular convergence in the frequency patterns. Aside from a few irregularities, data triangulation reveals a proportional consistency in the frequency of use of paremias across both screening methods. The corpus-linguistic approach, thus, emerges as a complementary method for extracting information that is not only quantitative but also qualitative and contextual, providing a richer and unconventional understanding of the proverbial phenomenon.

Keywords: digital paremiography, paremiographic survey, frequency of use, corpus linguistics, Italian proverbs

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<https://doi.org/10.29162/pv.43.1.1173>

UDC 811.135.1'36'373.7:81'322=111

Original scientific paper

Received on 10 January 2026

Accepted for publication on 12 April 2026

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IN SEARCH OF PROVERBIALITY: “THE ROOT OF ALL EVIL” CONSTRUCTION IN ROMANIAN

Abstract: The paper examines the Romanian construction *A este X tuturor Y* ‘A is the X of all Y’, as in *Iubirea de arginți e rădăcina tuturor relelor* ‘The love of money is the source of all evils’, from a corpus-based and probabilistic perspective on proverbiality. The study approaches the construction and its contextual instantiations as a productive network whose proverbial identity emerges from evaluative force, collocational strength and distributional constraint. Drawing on a small, curated corpus of 81 attestations spanning 1581 to 2008, the analysis describes and interprets the contextual syntagmatic dynamics across the three constructional slots (A, X, Y). The results show clear asymmetries: the A-slot allows controlled variation, while the X and Y slots display high degrees of lexical constraint and collocational convergence. The discussion maps the corpus findings onto a multidimensional model of proverbiality, addressing traditionality, stability, evaluativity, generality, grounding, symbolicity, and transferability. The study suggests that proverbiality is a probabilistic effect arising from recurrent structural alignment, semantic constraint and cultural reuse over time.

Keywords: proverbiality, corpus-based analysis, construction grammar, semantic clusters, Romanian proverbs.

1. Introduction

In everyday discourse, many things are designated as *the root of all evil*. A survey of several dictionaries of English proverbs shows an open set of items built on the same syntactic scheme:

Avarice is the root of all evil (Mieder, Kingsbury and Harder 1992: 31).

Covetousness is the root of all evil (Tilley 1950: 124/ C746).

Crime is the root of all evil (Mieder, Kingsbury and Harder 1992: 126).

Idleness is the root of all evil (Simpson and Speake 2004: 157; Mieder, Kingsbury and Harder 1992: 324).

Honesty is the root of all evil (Taylor and Whiting 1967: 186, 230).

Lonesomeness is the root of all evil (Mieder, Kingsbury and Harder 1992: 383).

Money is the root of all evil (Simpson and Speake 2004: 206; Mieder, Kingsbury and Harder 1992: 186).

Pride is the root of all sin (Tilley 1950: 556/ P578).

Procrastination is the root of all evil (Mieder, Kingsbury and Harder 1992: 187).

Women are the root of all evil (Mieder, Kingsbury and Harder 1992: 186).

The striking feature of the inventory is not the meaning of each statement, but the ease with which the same syntactic model supports divergent fillers. This productivity is not language-specific. Turner (1991: 198–215) identifies this construction as an “xyz metaphor” specialized to evoke blending (Turner and Fauconnier 1999: 413–414). The proverb *Money is the root of all evil* instantiates the xyz metaphor by mapping an x constituent (*money*) in relation to a z constituent (*evil*) through the familiar relationship between the y constituent (*root*) and an unmentioned fourth constituent w (*plant*) to conceptualize riches as the hidden source of misfortune in the same way the root sustains the plant. The cross-linguistic productivity of the construction is well documented. Strauss (2012: II/678, no. 782) records modern European equivalents, while Singer (1995: I/405, no. 1.2) offers a more comprehensive diachronic picture.

Romanian proverb dictionaries typically include the proverbs *Beția este ușa tuturor răutăților* (Muntean 1984: 53, no.

1416) and *Trândăvia este muma tuturor răutăților* (Muntean 1984: 277, no. 7391), which translate to ‘Drunkenness is the door of all evils’ and ‘Idleness is the mother of all evils’, respectively. However, extended evidence suggests a larger family:

Banul este rădăcina tuturor relelor (Pop 1993: 11) ‘Money is the root of all evils’; *Ignoranța este rădăcina tuturor relelor* (*Realitatea Ilustrată* 1927: 3) ‘Ignorance is the root of all evil’; *Lăcomia este rădăcina tuturor răutăților* (*Letopiseșul Cantacuzinesc* 1988: 100) ‘Greed is the root of all evils’; *Lenea este muma tuturor viciilor* (Paschia 1970: 138) ‘Sloth is the mother of all vices’.

The construction originates in St. Paul’s Epistle to Timothy: “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1 Timothy 6: 10; Holy Bible 1982: 800). Here, the Apostle of Christ uses an “emphatic, rhetorical, statement” to warn against φιλαργυρία (philargyria), or the “miser’s sin”, which is defined as greed of riches (Bernard 1899: 96). St. Paul’s words echo the long-standing tradition of root metaphors that nourish the proverbial imagery of the Bible: “A man is not established by wickedness, but the root of the righteous cannot be moved” (Proverbs 12:3, Holy Bible 1982: 435; see also Proverbs 12:12; Job 19:28; Matthew 3:10, and Luke 3:9). Such examples attest that the source domain of this potent metaphor is biological. While Alan Dundes (1999: 6) argues that the Bible is essentially codified oral tradition, Wolfgang Mieder (1990: 6) states that a book of such importance to the daily lives of the Christians has exerted a major influence on the languages and proverbs of the people.

The use of formulaic style, typical of ancient wisdom literature, predates Christianity. Consider the memorable saying of Diogenes the Cynic, a classical Greek philosopher from the fourth century BC, who famously said: “Philargyria metropolin pantōn tōn kakōn”, which translates as “Avarice is the mother-city of all evils” (Hard 2012: 36). Of lesser importance is the fact that the same construction has been attributed to such other philosophers as Bion of Borysthenes or Democritus (Hard 2012: 196). More importantly, it is worth noting that the idea of blaming avarice or greed as the cause of all ills has transferred

from philosophy and religion to historical chronicles such as the work of the Latin writer Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*. A contemporary of St. Jerome, who translated the Vulgate, the fourth-century historian explains the fall of Rome's military might by identifying a single moral cause, the appointment of corrupt commanders to defend the frontiers of the empire, as he writes "Their treacherous greed was the source of all our evils" (Ammianus Marcellinus XXXI: 4,9).

Singer (1995: I/405, no. 1.2) attests that the formula travels from St. Jerome's Vulgate into the vernacular literatures of medieval Europe, appearing in Old and Middle French, Provençal, Italian, Spanish and Middle English, from patristic commentary through Chaucer and into the early modern period. Across all these traditions, the syntactic scheme remains stable and accommodates lexical variation. Covetousness, greed and avarice alternate in the subject slot, while root, foundation and beginning compete in the metaphorical slot. From classical sources to present-day discourse, the construction formalized as *A este X tutor Y* invites closer scrutiny of the conditions under which such units of language, style, and culture are recognized as proverbs.

2. "The Perception of Proverbiality"

The present study revisits the scholarly literature to identify the dimensions of proverbiality that corpus-based analysis can measure, turning theory into practice. Within the extensive body of work devoted to proverbs, these artistic miniatures of wisdom (Permyakov 1979: 163) have been treated as sayings and socio-cultural resources (Ojo Arewa and Dundes 1964), as speech acts (Meschonnic 1976), textual artifacts (Norrick 1985), complex multi-layered signs (Grzybek 1987), verbal stereotypes (Lewandowska, Antos and Gläßer 2015: 162–182), and as blends (Andersson 2013).

Proverbiality has been interpreted as an incommunicable quality of some impersonal linguistic vehicles used for personal communication (Taylor 1962: 6; Ojo Arewa and Dundes 1964: 70) and "one of the major concerns of paremiologists is to get to the bottom of that" (Mieder 2014: 21). Correspondingly, proverb research has developed as a multifaceted field spanning ethnog-

raphy and folklore, philology, philosophy of language, rhetoric and stylistics, linguistics, semiotics, pragmatics, and the cognitive sciences. The multiplicity of perspectives has had direct consequences for how scholars approach the object of research, and recent critique has shown that disagreements concerning proverb definition and use often reflect distinct, even colliding methodological choices. As Ferdinand de Saussure observed, “far from it being the object that antedates the viewpoint, it would seem that it is the viewpoint that creates the object” (Saussure 1959: 8). In this regard, Villers (2024) argues that “definition matters” not as a theoretical milestone but as an operational tool.

The following theoretical survey identifies seven dimensions of proverbiality that corpus-based analysis can integrate as statistical parameters. The present study does not seek to explore these major strands of research in paremiology, but to pinpoint the semiotic properties that will be put to a test as a proverbiality matrix. Frequency scores drawn from the corpus data will be integrated into this multidimensional index.

In the first issue of *Proverbium*, the flagship journal of proverb research, Shirley Arora (1984: 1–38) published an article entitled “The Perception of Proverbiality”. The article explores proverbiality as a salient effect of communicative experience. Specifically, Arora shifts the focus from the structural definition of the proverb itself to listeners’ perception of proverbiality. Beyond its linguistic and stylistic properties, a proverb is what the listener perceives it to be. Proverbiality can be “mimicked” or “fabricated” to a certain extent and features such as metaphor, rhyme, alliteration, and parallelism, along with other formal markers, serve as cues used to categorize and validate products of traditional wisdom. The “camouflage” of proverb-like utterances supports both the creation of new proverbs and the vitality of the genre. Arora argues that traditionality is a property of proverbiality, understood as the degree to which a construction is perceived as representative and empirically classified as a proverb. Statistically, the recruitment of the similar lexical choices to fill the structural slots of the construction *A este X tuturor Y*, regardless of source type and time frame, will be interpreted as distributional evidence of traditionality.

In order to survive and thrive within a tradition, a proverb must be memorable. Its structure must align with linguistic patterns that enable the human mind to easily process, store, recall, and adapt it. In this respect, Odlin (1986: 125–151) argues that stability, as a property of proverbiality, designates the dynamic preservation of simplicity, memorability, and adaptability of proverbs over time. From the standpoint of a corpus-based analysis, Odlin's perspective signifies that a given construction that has become stable over time should not allow a high degree of combinatorial freedom. The asymmetrical constraints across the structural slots of the construction *A este X tutoror Y* indicate the stability of the formula. The greater the combinatorial restrictions in a given slot, the stronger the syntagmatic stability.

Proverbs are readily available devices for evaluation. They function both implicitly and explicitly in serving this purpose (Čermák 2019: 128). Defined as “verbal stereotypes of knowledge”, proverbs enable individuals to evaluate situations “with the help of known social clichés” (Lewandowska, Antos and Gläßer 2015: 162). In a contrastive study on the equivalence of proverbs in translation, Frackiewicz (1988: 27–37) notes that no proverb is truly neutral in active communication because proverbs are effective constructions for judging, teaching, warning, and influencing. Norrick (1985: 22) formulates a similar conclusion: “Proverbs retain their fundamentally evaluative character even in allusions and otherwise alienated forms”. A corpus-based approach to evaluativity examines the semantic profile of the constructional slot fillers and considers whether they cluster around morally charged concepts. The authority of proverbs is essentially the manifestation of collective judgement.

Proverbs are commonly perceived as context-free, indisputable truths (Matta 1988: 75). The characteristics of a proverb reveal its generality: brevity, isolation, independence, closedness, fixed syntactic composition, a claim to general validity, and the semantic codification of a general thought that functions as a sentence of experience (Matta 1988: 81). In the present study, proverbial generality will be understood as the virtual applicability to a broad, non-specific class of situations rather than to a single case. Applied to corpus analysis, this property can be explored by observing such markers as abstract nouns, plural

forms, generic articles, universal quantifiers and their use across time and contexts.

Proverbs reveal a socially developed sense of practical reasoning (Goodwin and Wenzel 1981), and they are used to justify actions, warnings, and evaluations in everyday judgement of real-life situations. When a speaker invokes a proverb, they are not merely stating a belief but grounding a practical conclusion in socially authorized wisdom. As a proverbial property, grounding reveals that practical reasoning is legitimate without requiring further proof. In the present analysis, grounding statistically measures the degree of authority of the written sources used to compile the corpus, based on the assumption that proverbs are rhetorical carriers of legitimacy, or, simply put, they serve as undisputed arguments invoked to justify a certain pragmatic stand.

Proverbs communicate deeply entrenched symbolic values. Within a given culture, complex semantic, syntactic and pragmatic networks shape a proverb's semantic indefiniteness into culturally salient and conventionalized meanings (Grzybek 2021: 88), ensuring that it effectively communicates shared values. In this respect, the proverbial property labelled here as symbolicity defines the activation of a certain worldview. Datasets can reveal powerful images that recur in various contexts and encode relevant facets of a shared mentality.

Historical and philological research shows how authoritative sources produce phraseology that can differ in form and function across languages and contexts. For instance, Földes (1990: 57–75) examines the Bible as a significant source of idioms and concludes that biblical collocations, constructions, verses and scenes enter everyday language through multiple channels of translation and cultural adaptation. In a similar vein, Dundes states that transferability characterizes proverbs: “oral tradition by its very nature has variation as one of its principal defining characteristics” (Dundes 1999: 19). In a corpus-based approach, the circulation of proverbs across time, space and style of communication reflects the diffusion from talk to text and hypertext.

The seven dimensions, namely traditionality, stability, evaluativity, generality, grounding, symbolicity and transferability constitute a set of parameters through which proverbiality emerges as a probabilistic and productive property of formulaic

language in use. This multidimensional index of proverbiality will outline the extent to which the Romanian construction *A este X tuturor Y* functions as a proverbial resource by virtue of its contextual vitality.

3. Objective and research question

The Romanian construction under scrutiny is used in a grey area situated between canonical proverbiality, as traditionally asserted through glossaries, dictionaries and taxonomies, and productive, yet stereotypical language that, to our knowledge, has not previously been approached as an object of systematic inquiry. In paremiological scholarship, such items are treated as variants of a canonical proverb, or classified as biblicisms (Mokienko 2011: 91–100), stereotypes (Litovkina 2011) or equivalents (Frackiewicz 1988). Further difficulties arise from the apparent tension between variation and fixity, as the construction allows for considerable flexibility, yet this flexibility is constrained, and not all realizations are perceived as proverbial.

Given the breadth of each of the seven dimensions of proverbiality, one might expect that a corpus-based analysis would require large datasets in order to work out robust models or to identify trends. Fixity and variability in form and meaning, the functional and contextual effectiveness of stock phrases, as well as proverb origin, circulation and translation are complex phenomena. The present study, however, adopts a more modest yet unconventional objective, which is to test, on the basis of frequency, collocational strength and convergence scores, a multidimensional index viewed as a probabilistic representation of proverbiality. The construction of such a matrix does not require large amounts of data, but rather contrasting data. From the older attestations to more recent ones, from religious texts to historical chronicles, news and fiction, the contextual diversity becomes analytically meaningful when it reveals the dispersion between the central and marginal uses of proverbial language. Moreover, not all seven dimensions are equally accessible to large-scale corpus analysis. For instance, traditionality, grounding and symbolicity require a wealth of historical and contextual knowledge that is difficult to capture through automatic processing of large

datasets. Smaller, manually curated corpora allow the researcher to verify every token, check every source, observe every context, and assess each attestation both quantitatively and qualitatively. In other words, if larger corpora identify trends, smaller datasets identify mechanisms and reveal more granular differences that might otherwise go unnoticed in a broader statistical picture. Therefore, the present study acknowledges the limitations entailed by building and using a small, selective corpus, and it does not seek to capture a definitive inventory of proverbiality triggers or markers, but rather to approach frequency as a common denominator of the seven dimensions of proverbiality, regarded as measurable indicators.

What can a small, curated corpus of the Romanian language reveal about the interplay of the dimensions of proverbiality? More specifically, how do frequency and collocational strength highlight the perception of proverbial identity in the construction *A este X tuturor Y*? The aim of the analysis is not to redefine the proverb as a genre or to propose a new theoretical model, but to determine the productivity of a construction in the light of its contextual diversity. In what follows, section 4 presents the corpus design and methodological procedures. Section 5 presents the corpus analysis, section 6 discusses the findings, and the concluding section synthesizes the results and outlines directions for future research.

4. Methodology

The analysis uses a curated, small-scale corpus built around a single grammatical schema: “a simple NP as subject and a genitive (noun-noun) construction as predicate” (Mac Coinnigh 2013: 125): *A este X tuturor Y*. In Romanian, the A slot is occupied by the subject and is mostly realized as a definite noun phrase in the nominative case. The copula *este* functions as a linking verb. The predicate nominal consists of a head noun (X slot), also a definite noun phrase, followed by the genitival determiner *tuturor*, a plural quantificational form, and a genitival attribute (Y), realized as a plural noun phrase. Morphological verb variation [(*nu*) *este*/ (*nu*) *e*/ (*nu*) *a fost*/ *suntem*] and verb substitution (two tokens: *iată* ‘behold’, interjection, and *constitue* ‘constitutes’,

verb, present tense, third person, singular) confirm the stability of the genitival phrase *X tutoror Y*.

A total of 81 distinct textual contexts, extending from 1581 to 2008, were compiled in the corpus. Forty-five contexts were retrieved via the Arcanum platform, an online bibliographical database for historical press. The remaining contexts come from non-periodical sources: sermons, religious texts, chronicles, fiction, and lexicographic material.

Data collection combined targeted online searches with manual inspection. Searches were guided by the Y-slot, beginning with genitival plural noun phrases attested in the earliest 16th century texts, such as “tutoror relelor/ răutăților” ‘of all evils’ and “tutoror bunătăților” ‘of all good things’, to capture the diversity of A-slot and X-slot fillers. Candidate contexts were examined to exclude literal uses, and each context was treated as a single corpus token. Each context was further segmented into constructional slots: A-slot (focus) // X-slot (operator) // Y-slot (generic domain). Contexts containing coordination, reformulation, or parallel structuring contributed more than one instantiation of the construction. This procedure yielded a network of 101 lemmatized A-X-Y triplets. Once identical combinations were grouped together, these reduced to 85 distinct A-X-Y constructional types, which form the basis for quantitative analysis. All tokens were annotated for the three constructional slots, with both surface form and lemmatized forms recorded. Lemmatization and normalization were carried out manually to account for historical spelling variation, inflectional diversity, and lexical alternation. The corpus encodes multiple raw frequency layers: context frequencies, constructional token frequencies, slot-specific lemma frequencies, co-occurrence frequencies, and type frequencies. This layered frequency dataset allows the analysis to distinguish between attestation, productivity, distributional diversity, and slot constraint.

Three analytical instruments, evidenced in sections 5.4 and 5.5, are used to examine the distributional properties of the construction. The first is the convergence score. For each A-X-Y triplet, the score is calculated by multiplying two counts: the number of times the A lemma appears with that specific X lemma anywhere in the corpus, and the number of times the same

A lemma appears with that specific Y lemma anywhere in the corpus. The result shows how strongly a given A lemma is simultaneously attracted to both its X operator and its Y domain. If both counts are high, the score is high.

The second instrument is the LogDice score, reported alongside the raw co-occurrence frequency measurement. LogDice indicates how strongly each X-Y pairing is bound together, regardless of which A lemma fills the subject slot. The score ranges from 0 to 14, where 14 is the maximum possible value. In this corpus, scores range from 9.61 to 13.42, which means every attested X-Y pairing shows genuine attraction. However, one limitation is worth noting. In a small corpus, rare pairings can score artificially high, because the formula can reach its maximum when both items are infrequent and happen to co-occur even once. For this reason, raw co-occurrence frequency counts how many times a specific X lemma and a specific Y lemma appear together in the same attestation across the entire corpus. The two measurements work best read together, as raw co-occurrence frequency shows how often X and Y actually appear together, while LogDice shows how strongly they are drawn to each other relative to how often each appears independently.

The proverbiality matrix synthesizes the seven dimensions of proverbiality surveyed in section 2. Traditionality counts how many distinct publications contain at least one attestation of a given A-X-Y triplet. Each distinct publication adds one point to the score. Stability counts distinct A lemmas per X-Y pair. Each distinct A-slot lemma adds one point to the score. Evaluativity is measured at the level of the Y slot. Each Y lemma receives 1, 2 or 3 points depending on its semantic orientation. Y lemmas that denote evil or negative outcomes receive 3 points, as they carry the strongest moral charge, Y lemmas that denote good or positive outcomes receive 2 points, and Y lemmas that are semantically neutral receive 1 point. Generality counts distinct A-X-Y type combinations per X-Y pair. Each distinct combination adds one point to the score. To avoid confusion, stability measures how many different A-slot lemmas appear with the same X-Y pair, while generality measures how many distinct A-X-Y combinations with that same X-Y pair are attested across the corpus. Grounding assigns a weight to each source type according to its

authority as a repository of communal wisdom. Each attestation in a sermon, proverb collection or speech contributes 3 points. Each attestation in a biblical text, encyclical, chronicle or lexicographic source contributes 2 points. Each attestation in a literary or news source contributes 1 point. The grounding score of each triplet is the sum of all source type weights across all its attestations. Symbolicity is measured at the level of the X slot. Each X lemma receives a score on a scale of 1 to 5 according to the semantic class it belongs to, as described in section 5.3. Transferability measures how many distinct source types contain at least one attestation of a given triplet. Each distinct source type adds one point to the score. Unlike grounding, which weights sources by their authority, transferability simply counts how many different communicative contexts the triplet has reached. Once all seven raw scores are calculated, each is normalized to a scale of 0 to 100 by subtracting the minimum observed value, dividing by the range, and multiplying by 100. The seven normalized scores are then averaged to produce a single proverbiality index for each triplet.

5. *Corpus analysis*

The experimental, small-scale corpus compiled to explore the proverbiality of the Romanian construction *A este X tutoror Y* presents several findings that can be further tested against larger datasets. The 81 extracts were drawn from 41 distinct sources across 9 source types: news (38 contexts), sermons (19 contexts), lexicography (10 contexts), literature (4 contexts), historical chronicles (4 contexts), biblical verses (3 contexts), one educational brochure, one Synod encyclical and one speech. The database includes 22 newspaper titles, ranging from 1857 to 2008. The decision to explore biblical sources, in relation to collections of sermons and newspaper articles, aimed to capture the dimensions of proverbiality in some of the most dynamic sectors of proverb diffusion. The most important raw frequencies of the noun phrases that filled the structural slots of the construction *A este X tutoror Y* are shown in Table 1:

Table 1. Most frequent A-, X- and Y-slot lemmas in the construction A este X tuturor Y (N = 101)

#	A lemmas	freq.	X lemmas	freq.	Y lemmas	freq.
1	lenea 'the laziness'	11	rădăcina 'the root'	20	relelor 'of evils'	37
2	iubirea de arginți 'the love of money'	5	mama 'the mother'	15	răutăților 'of evils'	31
3	păcatul 'the sin'	5	izvorul 'the spring/ source'	15	bunătaților 'of good things'	15
4	[persoană publică] 'public figure'	5	începutul 'the beginning'	10	neajunsurilor 'of shortcomings'	4
5	dragostea 'the love'	5	pricina 'the cause'	5	viciilor 'of vices'	3
6	lăcomia 'the greed'	4	capul 'the head'	5	aflărilor 'of discoveries'	2
7	zavistia 'the envy'	4	obârșia 'the origin'	4	fericirilor 'of beatitudes'	2
8	gândurile rele 'the bad thoughts'	4	temeiul 'the foundation'	3	prigonirilor 'of persecutions'	2
9	avaritia 'the avarice'	3	ușa 'the door'	2	crimelor 'of crimes'	1
10	beția 'the drunkenness'	3	fântâna 'the fountain'	2	sărăciei 'of poverty'	1
11	diavolul 'the devil'	3	originea 'the origin'	2	invențiilor 'of inventions'	1
12	iață 'behold'	3	leacul 'the cure'	1	darurilor 'of gifts'	1
13	nevoia 'the need'	3	urzitorul 'the originator'	1	nenorocirilor 'of misfortunes'	1
14	rugăciunea 'the prayer'	3	temelia 'the foundation'	1		

15	trufia 'the pride'	2	vârful 'the peak'	1		
16	egoismul 'the egoism'	2	tatăl 'the father'	1		
17	minciuna 'the lie'	2	sursa 'the source'	1		
18	lenevia 'the sloth'	2	încetegarea 'the formation'	1		
19	pacea 'the peace'	2	doamna 'the mistress'	1		
20	libertatea 'the freedom'	2	focarul 'the focus/ hearth'	1		
21	munca 'the work'	2	autorul 'the author'	1		

The expected asymmetry across the slots is uneven. The A-slot lemma pool allows for the greatest lexical breadth, with one most frequent item and weak distributive constraint for the others. The X-slot lemma pool reveals a nucleus of four fillers and a tail of less frequent items. In the Y slot lemma pool only three lexical fillers are significantly more frequent than the others. This highly polarized distribution indicates that the proverbiality of the construction concentrates on the X-Y pairings. The uneven distribution also indicates that the proverbiality of the construction can also emerge in the absence of A-slot fillers. This selectivity attracts the adoption of international snowclones such as *mama tuturor bățăliilor* 'the mother of all battles', inspired by the speech of the Iraqi dictator, Saddam Hussein, delivered on the eve of the First Gulf War (Hartmann and Ungerer 2024: 610–615), widely reported in the Romanian media (Zafiu 1991: 4).

5.1. A-slot lemma pool

The 47 definite noun phrases identified across the 101 attested A-X-Y triplets cluster in ten semantic classes, shown in Table 2. The dominant class, labelled MORAL FAILINGS (55 occurrences, 54.46%), denotes faults or vices that foreground the evaluativity of the construction.

Table 2. A-slot semantic classes (N = 101), with lemma inventories, token counts and percentage distribution.

Class	A-slot lemmas	Total	%
MORAL FAILINGS	lenea ‘the laziness’ (11); iubirea de arginți ‘the love of money’ (5); păcatul ‘the sin’ (5); dragostea ‘the love’ (5); lăcomia ‘the greed’ (4); zavistia ‘the envy’ (4); avarifița ‘the avarice’ (3); beția ‘the drunkenness’ (3); trufia ‘the pride’ (2); egoismul ‘the egoism’ (2); lenevia ‘the sloth’ (2); [inacțiunea] ‘the inaction’ (1); amibiția ‘the ambition’ (1); mânia ‘the anger’ (1); viciul ‘the vice’ (1); invidia ‘the envy’ (1); zgârcenia ‘the stinginess’ (1); dragostea de lume și de bogăție ‘the love of worldly possessions and of wealth’ (1); cupiditatea ‘the cupidity’ (1); dezordinea ‘the disorder’ (1);	55	54.46
MINDSET	gândurile rele ‘the evil thoughts’ (4); minciuna ‘the lie’ (2); neștiința ‘the ignorance’ (1); inima ‘the heart’ (1); cugetul bun ‘the good conscience’ (1);	9	8.91
STATUS	nevoia ‘the need’ (3); pacea ‘the peace’ (2); libertatea ‘the freedom’ (2); sărăcie ‘the poverty’ (1);	8	7.92
DEVOTION	rugăciunea ‘the prayer’ (3); credința ‘the faith’ (1); legea lui Dumnezeu ‘the law of God’ (1); crucea ‘the cross’ (1); postul ‘the fasting’ (1);	7	6.93
ACTORS	[persoană publică] ‘public person’ (5); maghiarii (1) ‘the Hungarians’; [ziariștii] ‘the journalists’ (1);	7	6.93
INSTITUTION	inegalitatea socială ‘the social inequity’ (1); legea ‘the law’ (1); votul ‘the vote’ (1); centrul ‘the center’ (1); dreptul ‘the law’ (1); învățătura ‘the education’ (1);	6	5.94
SUPERNATURAL	diavolul ‘the devil’ (3)	3	2.97
DISCOURSE	iată ‘behold’ (3)	3	2.97

ACTION	munca ‘the work’ (2)	2	1.98
PLACE	Orientul ‘the Orient’ (1)	1	0.99
Total		101	100

Pragmatically, the A-slot fillers adapt the construction to communicative purposes such as evaluation, explanation, argumentation, guidance or warning. In sermons, for instance, the construction rhetorically assumes a gnomic function. Examples like “*Că izvorul și rădăcina tuturor realelor iaste păcatul*” (Coresi, 1581) / ‘For the source and root of all evils is the sin’ emphasize sacred precepts. In other contexts, assertive sayings serve as a basis for directive acts, when the evaluation is followed by an explicit exhortation that becomes the argumentative premise for action: “*putem dzice cu tot dreptul că lenea este începutul tuturor relelor. Luptați-ve, iubiții mei, contra lenei*” (*Telegraful Român*, 1891) / ‘we can rightly say that laziness is the beginning of all evils. Fight, my beloved ones, against laziness’. Furthermore, an expressive speech act, intensified by interjections, rhetorically amplifies the speaker’s emotional state: “*O, lăcomie fără de asemănare, începătura și rădăcina tuturor răutăților!*” (Miniat, 1742) / ‘O, greed with no compare, the beginning and the root of all evils!’.

In polemical discourse, the construction attributes responsibility to specific agents, approaching declarative functions through its effect of social labeling: “*sântem înfățișați ca niște agitatori înverșunați, aici noi sântem capul tuturor răutăților.*” (*Tribuna*, 1884) / ‘we are portrayed as fierce agitators; here, we are the head of all evils.’.

There is also evidence that the A-slot fillers can be substituted by deictic markers, such as interjections: “*Iată cauza relei stări a afacerilor în țară, iată rădăcina tuturor relelor de care suferim*” (*Românul*, 1888) / ‘Behold the cause of the poor state of affairs in the country; behold the root of all the evils from which we suffer’. Again, the examples reveal that the proverbial load of the construction is concentrated in the genitival phrase *X tuturor Y*. In the proverbiality matrix, the stability score of a given X-Y pair is determined by the number of distinct A-slot lemmas that combine with it across the corpus.

5.2. X-slot lemma pool

The 29 definite noun phrases identified across the 101 attested A-X-Y variants indicate that the slot fillers cluster into two major semantic classes, ranked by frequency. The X-slot lemmas were semantically labelled on the basis of their capacity to encode agency, or, alternatively, non-agentive grounding, as shown in Table 3:

Table 3. X-slot semantic classes (N = 101), with lemma inventories, token counts and percentage distribution

Class	Subclass	X lemmas	Total	%
AGENTIVE	AGENT	mama ‘the mother’ (15); capul ‘the head’ (5); autorul ‘the author’ (1); doamna ‘the mistress’ (1); făcătorul ‘the maker’ (1); tatăl ‘the father’ (1); urzitorul ‘the originator’ (1); zămislitoarea ‘the begetter’ (1)	26	25.74
	Agentive		26	25.74
NON-AGENTIVE	BASE	rădăcina ‘the root’ (20); temeiu ‘the foundation’ (3); temelia ‘the foundation’ (1)	24	23.76
	SOURCE	izvorul ‘the spring/source’ (15); fântâna ‘the fountain’ (2); sursa ‘the source’ (1)	18	17.82
	EMERGENCE	începutul ‘the beginning’ (10); încetegarea ‘the formation’ (1); începătura ‘the beginning’ (1); sămânța ‘the seed’ (1)	13	12.87
	CAUSE	pricina ‘the cause’ (5); cauza ‘the cause’ (1)	6	5.94
	ORIGIN	obârșia ‘the origin’ (4); originea ‘the origin’ (2)	6	5.94
	CONTAINMENT	focarul ‘the focus/hearth’ (1); matca ‘the matrix’ (1)	2	1.98
	ACCESS	ușa ‘the door’ (2)	2	1.98
	PEAK	vârful ‘the peak’ (1); culmea ‘the peak’ (1)	2	1.98

	CURE	leacul ‘the cure’ (1)	1	0.99
	ESSENCE	răul ‘the evil’ (1)	1	0.99
	Non-agentive		75	74.26
Total			101	100

The X-slot lemma pool is dominated by non-agentive fillers. Out of the total 101 A-X-Y constructional combinations, 75 occurrences (74.26%) belong to this class, while the agentive class accounts for 26 occurrences (25.74%). The asymmetry not only indicates a sharp polarization toward the non-agentive class, but also a strong concentration in three subclasses, labelled BASE, SOURCE, and EMERGENCE. This evidence confirms the expectation that *xyz* metaphors project “conceptual domains that we know very well” as “basic source domains for metaphoric understanding” (Turner 1991: 199). This semantic classification is particularly relevant for assigning values to the symbolicity dimension of the proverbiality matrix. Based on frequency, X lemmas belonging to the BASE, SOURCE and EMERGENCE subclasses receive 5 points. X lemmas belonging to the AGENT subclass receive 4 points. X lemmas belonging to the ORIGIN and CONTAINMENT subclasses receive 3 points. X lemmas belonging to the CAUSE, ACCESS and PEAK subclasses receive 2 points. X lemmas belonging to the CURE and ESSENCE subclasses receive 1 point. The two main semantic classes identified in the X-slot noun pool reveal two conceptual schemas: the ACTOR schema and the GROUND schema.

5.2.1. The ACTOR schema

The ACTOR schema unites interpretations in which the relation between X and Y is constructed as agentive and asymmetric. Within this schema, X is interpreted as an acting or controlling participant whose intervention brings about Y. The X-Y relation is framed in terms of action, responsibility, or generative authority. Statistically, the ACTOR schema is less frequently used to create *A este X tutorul Y* constructions. In some contexts, X functions as an agent whose action directly produces Y: “*Oricare i-a fost travestirea, el (diavolul - n.r.) a fost făcătorul tuturor relelor*” (*Voința Națională*, 1897) / ‘Whatever this dis-

guise, however, he [the devil] was the maker of all evils'. In other cases, X is presented in terms of responsibility of authorship, without reference to a specific act: "*Pentru noi, cari am susținut și susținem că autorul tuturor relelor în această țară este înaintea de toate M. Sa, nu ne miră deloc teoria expusă de ziarul francez*" (*Evenimentul*, 1895) / 'For us, who have maintained and continue to maintain that the author of all evils in this country is first and foremost His Majesty, the theory put forward by the French press does not surprise us at all'. Further examples present X as a generative source: "*Pace vouă*" - zice, „*Pace tuturor*". *Pentru ce? Pentru că pacea este mama tuturor bunătăților, pentru că ea este obiectul bucuriei și al veseliei*" (*Telegraful Român*, 1962) / "Peace be with you", the Lord says, "peace to all". Why? Because peace is the mother of all good things, because it is the object of joy and rejoicing'. The ACTOR schema defines one interpretive pathway made available by the construction, without exhausting its semantic potential.

5.2.2. The GROUND schema

The GROUND schema unites interpretations in which the relation between X and Y is non-agentive and asymmetric. Within this schema, X functions as a reference element relative to which Y is interpreted. In other words, Y is established as totality that rests on, emerges from, or is oriented by X. Statistically, the GROUND schema is most frequently used to create *A este X tuturor Y* constructions. BASE categorizes biological metaphors, as in "*Sgârzenia e rădăcina tuturor răutăților, eară resipirea e un pom încărcat cu poame amare.*" (*Telegraful Român*, 1857) / 'The stinginess is the root of all evils, whereas the wastefulness is a tree laden with bitter fruits.' SOURCE categorizes flow metaphors, as in "*Munca este izvorul tuturor bunătăților*" (*Voința Națională*, 1896) / 'The work is the source of all good things'; "*Neștiința și sărăcia sunt izvorul tuturor relelor*" (*Tim-pul*, 1897) / 'The ignorance and the poverty are the source of all evils'. EMERGENCE categorizes developmental metaphors, as in "*Dar lenea e și începutul tuturor răutăților, ea pe lângă aceea că aduce sărăcie și boale, și scurtează viața omului făcându-l neputincios*" (*Albina*, 1899) / 'But laziness is also the beginning of all evils; besides bringing poverty and illness, it shortens the

man's life by making him powerless'. CAUSE categorizes generative metaphors, as in "*Pentru aceste gânduri reutaciose i-a mustrat Iisus aspru, pentru că el știa, că gândurile cele rele sunt începutul și pricina tuturor răutăților și tuturor prigonirilor*" (*Telegraful Român*, 1902) / 'For those malicious thoughts Jesus rebuked them harshly, because he knew that evil thoughts are the beginning and the cause of all evils and all prosecutions.'. ORIGIN categorizes starting point metaphors, as in "*Legea repausului duminical este origina tuturor relelor; toți descreerații și resvrățitorii, fie evrei, greci, români au destul timp să se ocupe de asemenea distracție după ce s'au îmbătat*" (*Constituționalul*, 1897) / 'The law of Sunday rest is the origin of all evils; all the scatter-brained and rebellious people, whether Jews, Greeks or Romanians, have enough time to engage in such amusements after they have gotten drunk'. CONTAINMENT categorizes accumulation metaphors, as in "*o privire numai să aruncăm pe hărți, și vom vedea ca focarul tuturor răutăților nu este decât Orientul*" (*Românul*, 1887) / 'If we cast but a glance at the maps, we shall see that the focus of all evils is none other than the Orient'. ACCESS categorizes gateway metaphors, as in "*Beția este ușa tuturor răutăților*" (Anton Pann, 1852) / 'Drunkenness is the door to all evils.'. PEAK categorizes ascensional metaphors, as in "*Culmea tuturor relelor inse este ministrul-președinte Bánffy Dezső*" (*Tribuna Sibiului*, 1895) / 'The peak of all evils, however, is Minister-President Bánffy Dezső'. CURE categorizes healing metaphors, as in "*Țara glumește asupra maniei pe care o au unele ziare ca să susție că votul obștesc e leacul tuturor relelor, un fel de buruiană universală*" (*Universul*, 1894) / 'The country jokes about the mania some newspapers have for claiming that universal suffrage is the cure of all evils, a kind of universal healing herb'. ESSENCE categorizes identity metaphors, as in "*Dar un rău mult mai mare produce instinctul conservățiunii împins pînă la extreme, individualismul ajunge atunci egoism, răul cel mai mare și originea tuturor relelor*" (*Românul*, 1861) / 'But an even greater evil is produced by the instinct of self-preservation pushed to the extreme; individualism then becomes egoism, the greatest evil and the origin of all evils.'

5.3. *Y-slot lemma pool*

The 13 abstract genitival nouns identified across the 101 attested variants cluster into three semantic classes, shown in Table 4:

Table 4. Y-slot semantic classes (N = 101), with lemma inventories, token counts and percentage distribution

Semantic class	Y lemmas	Total	%
NEGATIVE	relelor 'of evils' (37); răutăților 'of evils' (31); neajunsurilor 'of shortcomings' (4); viciilor 'of vices' (3); nenorocirilor 'of misfortunes' (1); prigonirilor 'of persecutions' (2); crimelor 'of crimes' (1); sărăciei 'of poverty' (1)	80	79.21
POSITIVE	bunătăților 'of good things' (15); fericirilor 'of beatitudes' (2); darurilor 'of gifts' (1)	18	17.82
OBJECTIVE	afărilor 'of discoveries' (2); inventiilor 'of inventions' (1)	3	2.97
Total		101	100

The NEGATIVE class (80 occurrences, 79.21%) clearly dominates the Y-slot and highlights the strong evaluativity of the construction. Class membership concentrates around two high-frequency synonyms, *relelor* and *răutăților*. The POSITIVE class (18 occurrences, 17.82%), displays significantly lower frequencies, while the OBJECTIVE class (3 occurrences, 2.97%) appears only occasionally and marginally. Despite their statistical weight, the minor semantic classes indicate that the construction is not exclusively marked as negative.

5.4. *Collocational strength and convergence*

Beyond slot internal distributions, the *A este X tuturor Y* construction also displays systematic preferences at the level of X-Y co-occurrence. Certain X and Y lemmas combine more strongly than others, forming recurrent pairings that can be interpreted as statistical evidence of proverbiality. To capture this syntagmatic affinity, Table 5 ranks X-Y pairings within the construction ac-

cording to their associative strength. LogDice and the raw co-occurrence frequency highlight selective associations.

Table 5. Strongest X-Y associations in the genitival phrase *X tuturor Y*

X lemma	Y lemma	LogDice	raw co-occurrence frequency
rădăcina 'the root'	relelor 'of evils'	12.49	10
fântâna 'the fountain'	neajunsurilor 'of shortcomings'	13.42	2
obârșia 'the origin'	viciilor 'of vices'	13.19	2
rădăcina 'the root'	răutăților 'of evils'	12.13	7
temeiul 'the foundation'	darurilor 'of gifts'	13	1
mama 'the mother'	aflărilor 'of discoveries'	11.91	2
izvorul 'the source'	relelor 'of evils'	12.11	7
mama 'the mother'	răutăților 'of evils'	12.06	7
izvorul 'the source'	fericirilor 'of beatitudes'	11.91	2
mama 'the mother'	bunătaților 'of good things'	11.68	3
începutul 'the beginning'	răutăților 'of evils'	11.64	4
pricina 'the cause'	nenorocirilor 'of misfortunes'	12.42	1
temeiul 'the foundation'	bunătaților 'of good things'	11.83	2
capul 'the head'	bunătaților 'of good things'	11.68	2
începutul 'the beginning'	sărăciei 'of poverty'	11.54	1

LogDice shows how strongly X and Y are drawn to each other relative to how often each appears independently, while the raw co-occurrence frequency records how many times they actually appear together in the corpus. The main finding is that only three

pairings score highly on both measures simultaneously. The pairing *rădăcina-relelor* appears 10 times and scores 12.49 on Log-Dice. The semantically equivalent pairing *rădăcina-răutășilor* appears 7 times and scores 12.13. The pairing *mama-răutășilor* appears 7 times and scores 12.06. The pairing *izvorul-relelor* appears 7 times and scores 12.11. These are the combinations that Romanian speakers have used most consistently across centuries and genres.

The overall picture is clear. Four pairings carry most of the collocational weight and a handful of others contribute modestly. The rest are one-off coinages at the margins of the construction. By collocational strength, the prototypical candidates detach themselves from the group.

Table 6. The convergence scores in the construction *A este X tuturor Y*:

A lemma	X lemma	Y lemma	Score
lenea 'the laziness'	începutul 'the beginning'	răutășilor 'of evils'	35
lenea 'the laziness'	mama 'the mother'	răutășilor 'of evils'	28
iubirea de arginți 'the love of money'	rădăcina 'the root'	răutășilor 'of evils'	15
lenea 'the laziness'	începutul 'the beginning'	relelor 'of evils'	15
iubirea de arginți 'the love of money'	rădăcina 'the root'	relelor 'of evils'	10
dragostea 'the love'	temeiul 'the foundation'	bunătaților 'of good things'	10
avaritia 'the avarice'	rădăcina 'the root'	relelor 'of evils'	9
păcatul 'the sin'	izvorul 'the spring'	relelor 'of evils'	8
păcatul 'the sin'	rădăcina 'the root'	relelor 'of evils'	8
lăcomia 'the greed'	rădăcina 'the root'	răutășilor 'of evils'	8
lenea 'the laziness'	doamna 'the mistress'	răutășilor 'of evils'	7
nevoia 'the need'	mama 'the mother'	afărilor 'of discoveries'	6

lenea 'the laziness'	începutul 'the beginning'	sărăciei 'of poverty'	5
dragostea 'the love'	capul 'the head'	bunătăților 'of good things'	5
dragostea 'the love'	vârful 'the peak'	bunătăților 'of good things'	5

The convergence scores, shown in Table 6, measure how strongly a given A-slot lemma combines with a specific X-slot lemma and a specific Y-slot lemma across the corpus. One particular A-slot lemma, *lenea*, is frequently attracted to combine with three X-slot fillers, namely the nouns *începutul*, *mama*, and *rădăcina*, and with the most prominent Y-slot noun, which is *răutăților* 'of evils'. The convergence foregrounds the triplets that are most likely to be recognized and used as folk proverbs: *Lenea este începutul / mama / rădăcina tuturor răutăților*. A second recurrent A-slot lemma, the definite noun phrase *iubirea de arginți*, is attracted to combine almost exclusively with the X-slot noun *rădăcina*, and the Y-slot synonyms *răutăților* and *relelor* foreground the Biblical construction *iubirea de arginți este rădăcina tuturor răutăților / relelor*.

This statistical picture tells an interesting story. St. Paul's memorable words were accurately transmitted through various types of religious translations but, at the same, time they gave rise to a set of proverbial cognates mainly used in sermons. Drawing on the authoritative rhetorical model of the apostolic epistles, the Christian preachers have created an epideictic discourse used to condemn moral failings: "*Că izvorul și rădăcina și muma a tuturor păcatelor iaste*" (Coresi, 1581) / 'For the source, the root and the mother of all evils is the sin', and to praise theological virtues such as love: "*Că ca un temelie și vîrîh iaste a tuturor bunătăților iubovul*." (Coresi, 1581) / 'For the foundation and the peak of all good things is love'. This discursive tradition has continued to the present day, as evidenced by occasional sermons published as newspaper articles: "*Trebuie să știm și să înțelegem că tatăl tuturor răutăților și izvor a tot vicleșugul este diavolul*." (Informația Zilei, 2008) / 'We must know and understand that the father of all evils and the source of all deceit is the devil.' vs. "Pentru că pacea este mama tuturor

bunătaților, pentru că ea este obiectul bucuriei și al veseliei” (*Telegraful Român*, 1962) / ‘Because peace is the mother of all good things, because it is the object of joy and rejoicing’. At the same time, the proverbial cognates originally created in sermons made their way into other texts such as the historical chronicles, and, after the 1830s, into the first Romanian newspapers and dictionaries of proverbs. This complex transfer gave rise to folk proverbial equivalents, empirically focused on human behavior, such as laziness, and built on the same *A este X tuturor Y* syntactic scheme. Even if larger corpora are needed to document the ramification process, there is little doubt that the path opened by the translation of the sacred texts led to the formation of folk proverbs, as advocated by Mieder (1990).

5.5. *The proverbiality matrix*

The multidimensional proverbiality index (PI) was assembled according to the description presented in the methodology (Section 4). The matrix shown in Table 7 produces a ranked inventory of 85 unique A-X-Y triplets with scores ranging from 10.7% to 92.9%. The distribution is strongly skewed towards the periphery. Sixty-four triplets score below 40%, 18 between 41% and 70%, and only two above 71%. The PI reveals that the network of constructions based on the syntactic scheme *A este X tuturor Y* has a small core of highly marked candidates, a middle zone of moderately stable variants, and a long tail of occasional coinages. The core includes instantiations with very strong collocational convergence, very high grounding and high traditionality scores, such as *avaritia-rădăcina-relelor* and *lenea-mama-răutăților*. The middle zone consists of triplets with high stability, generality and symbolicity, such as *sărăcia-izvorul-relelor*. The occasional coinages such as *munca* ‘work’ - *izvorul* ‘the source’ - *bunătaților* ‘of all good things’ score high on symbolicity, but low on the other parameters. At the end of the tail, triplets like *votul* ‘the vote’ - *leacul* ‘the cure’ - *relelor* ‘of all evils’ fail to achieve proverbiality, due to the very low rankings on six of the seven dimensions, although evaluativity still receives a high score. Structural conformity does not grant proverbial status. This comet-like model is consistent with a probabilistic approach.

Table 7: The corpus-based proverbiality matrix of the construction A este X tuturor Y

#	A slot	X slot	Y slot	TRAD	STAB	Eval	GEN	GRND	SYMB	TRANS	PI
1	avaricia 'avarice'	rădăcina 'root'	relelor 'of evils'	66,7	100	100	100	83,3	100	100	92.9
2	lenea 'laziness'	mama 'mother'	răutăților 'of evils'	100	55,6	100	40	100	75	50	74.4
3	iubirea de arginți 'love of silver'	rădăcina 'root'	relelor 'of evils'	0	100	100	100	83,3	100	0	69
4	iubirea de arginți 'love of silver'	rădăcina 'root'	răutăților 'of evils'	66,7	66,7	100	60	83,3	100	0	68.1
5	inacțiunea 'inaction'	rădăcina 'root'	relelor 'of evils'	0	100	100	100	0	100	0	57.1
6	inegalitatea socială 'social ineq- uity'	rădăcina 'root'	relelor 'of evils'	0	100	100	100	0	100	0	57.1
7	păcatul 'sin'	rădăcina 'root'	relelor 'of evils'	0	100	100	100	0	100	0	57.1
8	trufia 'pride'	rădăcina 'root'	relelor 'of evils'	0	100	100	100	0	100	0	57.1
9	lenea 'laziness'	începutul 'begin- ning'	răutăților 'of evils'	33,3	33,3	100	40	33,3	100	50	55.7
10	lenea 'laziness'	începutul 'begin- ning'	relelor 'of evils'	33,3	22,2	100	20	50	100	50	53.6
11	lenea 'laziness'	izvorul 'source'	relelor 'of evils'	0	66,7	100	100	0	100	0	52.4
12	păcatul 'sin'	izvorul 'source'	relelor 'of evils'	0	66,7	100	100	0	100	0	52.4
13	neștiința 'ignorance'	izvorul 'source'	relelor 'of evils'	0	66,7	100	100	0	100	0	52.4
14	sărăcia 'poverty'	izvorul 'source'	relelor 'of evils'	0	66,7	100	100	0	100	0	52.4
15	ambiția 'ambition'	izvorul 'source'	relelor 'of evils'	0	66,7	100	100	0	100	0	52.4
16	iață 'behold'	izvorul 'source'	relelor 'of evils'	0	66,7	100	100	0	100	0	52.4
17	zavistia 'envy'	rădăcina 'root'	răutăților 'of evils'	0	66,7	100	60	33,3	100	0	51.4
18	lăcomia 'greed'	rădăcina 'root'	răutăților 'of evils'	0	66,7	100	60	16,7	100	0	49.1
19	zgârcenia 'stinginess'	rădăcina 'root'	răutăților 'of evils'	0	66,7	100	60	0	100	0	46.7
20	zavistia 'envy'	mama 'mother'	răutăților 'of evils'	0	55,6	100	40	16,7	75	0	41

Interpreted through the statistical lens of frequency, the seven dimensions of proverbiality align differently for each of the 85 A-X-Y constructional types. As a usage-based dimension, traditionality (TRAD) reveals itself by shared recognition. On the one hand, the highest ranked triplet in the TRAD column brings forth the folk proverb *Lenea este mama tuturor răutăților*. Interestingly, this formula does not appear in Romanian dictionaries of proverbs. The lexicographic sources usually attest the proverb *Lenea este începutul răutăților / relelor*, which is also used to make reference to laziness. On the other hand, the biblical formula *Iubirea de arginți este rădăcina tuturor răutăților* also enjoys traditional recognition. A cognate formula, *Avariția este rădăcina tuturor relelor*, was most probably coined by men of the cloth and delivered in sermons as well as other types of religious sources. These findings validate Arora's (1984) insights on the perception of proverbiality.

Stability (STAB) is the statistical mirror of collocational strength and convergence scores. It reflects the frequency with which A-slot lemmas combine with X-Y pairings. It basically shows that the syntactic scheme has been in continuous use in Romanian language and culture since the sixteenth century. Despite the constructional asymmetries that have favored contextual plasticity, the formula is robust and it has a long tail of occasional coinages. Following Odlin (1986), the corpus analysis confirms the dynamic preservation of simplicity, memorability, and adaptability of proverbs over time.

Evaluativity (EVAL) is explicitly marked. The attraction between the dominant A-slot semantic class MORAL FAILINGS (54.46% of all tokens) and the prominent Y-slot NEGATIVE class members (79.21%) reveals that speakers capitalize on this evaluative potential, mostly to guise critical judgement in the proverbial wisdom of the folk. This finding aligns with both Arora's (1984) inference on the "camouflage" of proverbiality and Norrick's (1985: 22) remarks on the fundamentally evaluative character of proverbs.

Generality (GEN) measures how many distinct A-X-Y triplets with the same X-Y pair are attested across the corpus. A marked preference for abstract A-slot lemmas that single out MORAL FAILINGS, the prevalence of NON-AGENTIVE

X-slot items, and the dominance of NEGATIVE generic plural nouns that fill the Y slot build a semantic profile that favors moral axioms over event-based explanation. As argued by Grigas (2002: 149), proverbiality expands beyond a specific statement.

Grounding (GRND) measures the authority of the written sources used in the compilation of the corpus. This dimension reveals that the A-X-Y triplets attested in sermons, proverb collections and printed speeches score highest. Following Goodwin and Wenzel (1981), when speakers invoke a proverb, they do not merely state a belief but ground a practical conclusion in collective wisdom. This is the case with the top-ranking construction *Lenea este mama tuturor răutăților*.

The symbolicity (SYMB) scores are mainly assigned on the basis of the semantic profile codified by the X-slot fillers. Older, more stable and highly entrenched metaphors receive higher scores. This detail explains why the A-X-Y triplets containing the root (*rădăcina*), the source (*izvorul*) and the spatial origin (*începutul*) metaphors are more prominent than the parent metaphor (*mama*). In the early Romanian collections of sermons, the interference between the sacred words of St. Paul's Epistle to Timothy and the popular wit is already visible: "Că izvorul și rădăcina și muma a tuturor rălelor păcatul iaste" (Coresi, 1581)/ 'For the source, the root and the mother of all evils is the sin'. However, the parent metaphor is not as entrenched in the written sources as the other dominant X-slot fillers.

Transferability (TRANS) captures the use of the construction under scrutiny across sources. Out of the 85 unique A-X-Y triplets only two were attested in more than one source. Even if a larger corpus is needed to assess this dimension of proverbiality more adequately, the experimental matrix reveals that one triplet strongly connected with the apostolic quote (*avaritia-rădăcina-relelor*), and one triplet illustrating the folk model (*lenea-mama-răutăților*) rise to prominence. Therefore, one can conclude that the Romanian construction *A este X tuturor Y* gradually developed two poles of proverbiality, the biblical core and the vernacular nucleus.

6. Discussion

The main finding of this unconventional experiment is that two poles of proverbiality emerge from the matrix. The biblical quote “*rădăcina tuturor răutăților este iubirea de arginți*” and its cognates anchored in the Pauline tradition score highly on stability, evaluativity, generality and symbolicity. This convergence of dimensions highlights the creation, within the religious milieu, of an iconic moral stance on avarice as the cause of misfortunes, which progressively expands to refer to the deadly sins: pride (*trufia*), greed (*lăcomia*), envy (*zavistia*), anger (*mânia*) and sloth (*trândăvia*). This complex process of stylistic refurbishment deserves more attention in line with Mokienko’s (2011) distinction between direct and indirect biblicisms. It is equally important to notice that this core of widely known Christian maxims was selectively adopted by the folk. In Romanian culture, popular wisdom has pragmatically focused on the moralization of idleness, due to the striking antagonism with the praise of diligence, but this may not be the case in other cultures. The high scores on evaluativity and grounding converge with the moderate transferability of the proverbial template *Lenea este rădăcina / izvorul / începutul / mama tuturor răutăților*.

The speaker’s familiarity with the two poles of proverbiality should not overshadow another important finding. The X-slot nouns *rădăcina*, *mama*, *începutul* and *izvorul* act as “attractors” and metaphorical markers of proverbiality, the oldest, most stable and the most productive of them being *rădăcina*. Over time, the PLANT metaphor (*rădăcina*) gave rise to three additional codifications of cause: SOURCE (*izvorul*), SPACE (*începutul*) and PARENT (*mama*). This dispersion confirms Turner’s (1991) prediction regarding the prominence of basic source domains for the understanding of the xyz metaphors.

Another interesting finding concerns the productive synonymy documented in the sources. As the corpus and the matrix indicate, the constructional variants with the highest proverbiality index easily trigger equivalents. The concept of AVARICE, canonically instantiated by the archaic biblical collocation *iubirea de arginți* ‘the love of money’, which is undoubtedly a translation calque, proverbially equates with noun and noun phrases such as *iubirea argintului* (Coresi, 1851), *scumpeatea* (Flower of Virtue,

1592), *lăcomia avuției* (Varlaam, 1643), and *sgârcenia* (Telegraful Român, 1857). The notion of LAZINESS encompasses such lexical choices as *trândăvia*, *lenea* and *lenevia*. On the Y slot, the dominant NEGATIVE fillers *răutășilor* and *relelor* are interchangeable, despite their inherent denotative differences. At the other end of the spectrum of synonymic diversity, journalistic coinages score between 14% and 28% on the proverbiality index and the low rankings unveil the linguistic fashion of creating snowclones that “illustrate the interplay between flexibility and rigidity” (Hartmann and Ungerer 2024: 601). In the Romanian journalistic discourse, this process was particularly active at the end of the 19th century. When placed in a popular newspaper column titled “O cugetare pe zi” ‘A Thought for the Day’, a formula such as *Viciul e mama tuturor relelor* / ‘Vice is the mother of all evils’ creates a salient contrast with its stylistic twin, *Nevoia e mama tuturor invențiilor* / ‘Need is the mother of all inventions’, as both statements appear within the same graphic box (Figure 1).

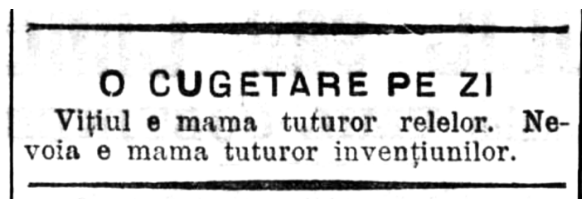


Figure 1. Newspaper column titled *O cugetare pe zi* ‘A Thought for the Day’, illustrating Romanian attestations of the construction *A is the X of all Y* (*Universul*, 1895, p. 3).

On the Y-slot, the stylistic contrast between the nouns *relelor* and *invențiilor* sets the stage for constructional creativity. Unlike the abstract plural noun *relelor*, which is negatively marked, the plural noun *invențiilor* does not carry an evaluative load. Within the contextual opposition, however, the plural form that designates inventions acquires a positive value, to compensate for the negativity of its parallel counterpart. From a diachronic perspective, the positive evaluative potential of the construction most likely originated in the religious discourse as an effective rhetorical device to blame sins and to praise virtues, since corpus data attests that the use of the proverbial formula in sermons has continuously maintained its grounding between 1581 and 2008.

The corpus also reveals that, in Romanian culture, early dictionaries of proverbs did not capture proverbial usage attested in the journalistic discourse. In fact, the lexicographic material included in the first Romanian dictionary of proverbs (Hintescu, 1877) is indebted to literary sources, and the dictionaries that followed up to the middle of the 20th century simply copied, re-framed and occasionally expanded that linguistic material. The sharp discrepancy between what proverbs are believed to be from a dictionary-like perspective and how proverbial language is actually used demands closer scrutiny. A wealth of proverbs used by journalists in their articles invites researchers to document and improve Romanian proverb lexicography. An excellent model for this future major scientific enterprise is Mieder, Kingsbury and Harder (1992).

7. *Conclusions*

The present study set out to investigate the Romanian construction *A este X tututor Y* in order to test how proverbiality manifests itself. More precisely, the research asks which semiotic traits make some instantiations more proverbial than others. To answer the research question, the experiment approaches proverbiality from a corpus-based perspective and regards frequency of use as the common denominator that allows the measurement of several key properties of proverbiality: traditionality, stability, evaluativity, generality, grounding, symbolicity and transferability. The targeted literature survey that precedes the analysis advocates that proverbiality emerges from the interplay of the seven dimensions. The corpus analysis of the 81 contexts extracted from various written sources, spanning 1581 to 2008, yields a network of 101 lemmatized triplets. The results show that across the constructional slots, the A slot allows more variation, whereas the X and the Y slots are progressively more constrained. Additionally, a limited set of lexical items repeatedly binds in strong collocational units, while the remaining constructional variants exhibit moderate or weak convergence scores. Taken together, such distributional patterns produce a proverbiality index (PI).

The proverbiality matrix traces uneven distribution, consistent with a probabilistic model. A very small set of combinations

score top rankings across several dimensions. A middle group of formulas shows high evaluativity, and moderate stability, generality and symbolicity, but scores low on traditionality, grounding and transferability. The long tail of occasional coinages ends with instantiations with the lowest scores on most dimensions. These non-proverbial illustrations prove that structural conformity with the syntactic scheme and a marked evaluativity are not sufficient to account for their acceptance as proverbs. In light of the corpus-based analysis, proverbiality emerges as a graded, multidimensional property. In other words, the proverbial status of a constructional variant is assessed through the different alignment of the seven dimensions that constitute the matrix.

The contribution of this paper is twofold. First, it articulates an empirical method for describing proverbiality by turning theory into practice, using corpus analysis tools. Second, the analysis focuses on proverbial language in use to validate long-standing theoretical assumptions in the rich field of paremiology. The findings ultimately support the view that communicative contexts can enhance or inhibit the markers of proverbiality. This approach connects proverb studies with corpus linguistics and construction grammar. Beyond the experiment envisaged in the present study, larger corpora could yield more robust statistical results. Additionally, similar constructions in other languages could be discussed for comparison, while more experimental work could test how speakers perceive and interpret the proverbial status of various language structures in speech, text and hypertext. Until further evidence suggests otherwise, the conclusion is that the probabilistic model of proverbiality fits the data.

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<https://doi.org/10.29162/pv.43.1.1131>
UDC 811.124'373.7:811.111'373.7:81'27=111
Original scientific paper
Received on 13 June 2025
Accepted for publication on 16 April 2026

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NATIONAL AND CULTURAL PECULIARITIES OF THE ZOONYM *DOG* IN LATIN AND ENGLISH PAROEMIAS

Abstract: The article presents a comparative analysis of the connotative meanings and national-cultural specifics of the zoonym dog in the linguocultures of the ancient Romans and the British. This allows tracing the conceptualization of the animal, as well as universal and distinct stereotypes shaped by the national-cultural worldview of different ethnic groups. The metaphorical interpretation of the lexeme is grounded both in the behavioral traits of the animal and the societal attitudes towards it. The zoomorphic cultural code conceptualizes human character traits, interpersonal relations, moral essence, intellect, appearance, environmental realities, etc. In the paroemiological space of Latin and English, the image of the dog carries ambivalent evaluative connotations. On one hand, the dog is portrayed as a loyal and experienced companion endowed with intelligence and devotion; on the other, the zoonym embodies the worst human qualities: aggression, cruelty, insatiability, indifference, ingratitude, insincerity, stubbornness, shortsightedness, laziness, etc. The analysis of the zoonym *dog* in paroemiological traditions enables the reconstruction of different peoples' perceptions of the animal, tracing its metaphorical reinterpretation, and identifying universal and culture-specific features of folk symbolism.

Keywords: zoonym, dog, linguistic worldview, symbol, linguoculture, proverbs and sayings

1. Introduction

The representation of nature, particularly the zoosphere, in paroemiological heritage dates back to the pre-Christian era when humans identified themselves with nature, attributing anthropomorphic traits – habits, behavioral patterns, emotional, and moral-ethical characteristics – to fauna. Over centuries, stable perceptions of animals as bearers of symbolic meanings formed in the ethnocultural consciousness of various peoples, fueling interest in the study of animal imagery in language as representations of cultural stereotypes, mental concepts, and evaluations. Thus, the study of paroemias with zoonyms serves as a valuable source for exploring the cognitive and pragmatic features of the linguistic worldview. Their analysis enables the tracing of the metaphorical reinterpretation of animal images in the linguistic consciousness of different peoples.

2. Literature review

One of the priority directions in modern linguistic research is the study of animal-world concepts in terms of their role in revealing the figurative-nominative nature of language. A number of contemporary linguists have explored zoonymic lexicon, particularly its symbolic potential in linguoculture, using classical and modern languages. Babič S.'s academic research examines the symbolism and cultural stereotypes associated with wild animals (the wolf, bear, and lynx) as reflected in Slovenian proverbs and idioms (Babič 2024). The peculiarities of zoomorphic metaphor through Latin paroemias are examined in the work of Petryshyn M. (Petryshyn 2015), while the structural and semantic features of Ancient Greek zoomorphic metaphors are analyzed in Lazer-Pankiv O.'s research (Lazer-Pankiv 2012). In Ukrainian linguistics, the study of zoonyms has been addressed in scholarly works by Golubovska I. (Golubovska 2003), Salata I. (Salata 2010), Uzhchenko D. (Uzhchenko 2000) and others. Within our research, the dissertation by Novikova O., which examined the figurative and axiological potential of the concepts *CAT* and *DOG* in the English phraseological worldview and literary discourse, is noteworthy (Novikova 2021). Recent years have seen growing interest in comparative studies of the nation-

al distinctiveness of linguistic worldviews. The analysis of the metaphorical objectification of the *DOG* concept in phraseological units and slang expressions enabled Suima I. and others to identify its key figurative features and most productive models in English (Suima et al. 2021). The study by Farghal M. and Haider A. focuses on the conceptual metaphor *human–animal* through English proverbs, sayings, and idioms with the zoonym *dog* (Farghal and Haider 2023). The study of the *cobaka*/Hund concept in the linguistic worldviews of Ukrainians and Germans falls within the scholarly interests of Holodnova Ye. (Holodnova 2011). Asimopoulou the P.'s research compares phraseological units with the semantic component 'cobaka' in Bulgarian, Greek, Russian, and Serbian (Asimopoulou the 2018). Liu J.'s work explores the metaphorical use of animal images (dogs, cats, tigers, lions) in English and Chinese proverbs (Liu 2013). The study by Kochman-Haładyj B. examines the metaphorical usage of the 'dog' concept in Polish and English linguocultures through paroemiological heritage (Kochman-Haładyj 2024). The study by Błajet and Błajet (2017) focuses on analyzing the image of the dog as a metaphor for human traits in Polish and Iranian-language aphorisms, highlighting both universal and culturally specific connotations of the zoonym shaped by the traditions of each people, which provides a basis for identifying the distinctive features of the dog's image in Latin and English paroemias (Błajet and Błajet 2017). The application of methodological frameworks proposed by Waśniewska (2018), Belkhir (2014), and Rashidi and Ghaedi (2013) facilitates an in-depth comparative analysis of the zoonyms *canis* and *dog*, elucidating their significance for ethnolinguistics and cultural interpretation. Despite the extensive body of comparative research, the image of the dog in the paroemiological heritage of classical and modern languages has yet to be examined as a standalone subject. Thus, the aim of the article is a comparative analysis of the national-cultural peculiarities and connotative meanings of the zoonym *dog* in the linguistic worldviews of the ancient Roman and English peoples. Focusing on the comparative analysis of the emotional-evaluative potential of the zoonym *dog* in Latin and English reveals both shared universals and nationally specific perceptions. This approach complements existing comparative studies of the dog's

image, holding significant value for ethnolinguistics and comparative paroemiology, and opens new avenues for comprehending the role of zoomorphic metaphors in shaping the linguistic worldviews of different peoples and for understanding the evolution of cultural stereotypes over millennia.

3. Materials and methods of research

3.1 Material and Data Sources

The research material comprises a selection of proverbs and sayings from lexicographic sources in Latin and English, including: *Latin Phraseology* (Osipov 2009), *From the Treasury of Ancient Wisdom* by Korzh N. (1994), *Dicionário de Expressões e Frases Latinas* by Henerik Kocher,¹ *The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms* by Judith Siefring (Siefring 2004), *Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs* by Speake, J. (Speake 2015), and *Animal Proverbs and Quotes Kingdom. Domestic Animals* by Lyazidi, R. (Lyazidi 2012). The total number of proverbs in the sample is 178, including both Latin and English proverbs. The Latin idioms with the zoonym *dog* comprise 68 proverbs, whereas the English sample consists of 110 proverbs. Units for analysis were selected based on the keywords *canis* (dog) in Latin and *dog* in English, as these lexemes constitute the primary semantically neutral designations for the concept of *dog*. Their high frequency in Latin and English paroemias, coupled with their representation of a wide range of connotations, underscores the relevance of this study to ethnolinguistics. Lexical units specifying gender, age, or breed were excluded from the analysis due to their low frequency and stylistic markedness. The corpus includes both traditional English proverbs, documented in authoritative lexicographic sources and characterized by a long history of usage, and modern paroemias. This dual approach enables tracing the evolution of the dog's image from classical folkloric expressions to contemporary interpretations.

Emphasis was placed on examples where the lexeme activates connotative meanings, reflecting perceptions of behavior,

¹ <https://www.scribd.com/document/629609914/Dicionario-de-Expressoes-e-Frases-Latinas>, retrieved on 31 May 2026.

emotional states, moral-ethical traits, or social roles through the prism of the animal world. This approach reveals nationally conditioned stereotypes, associations, and cultural concepts surrounding the image of the dog in linguistic worldviews. The choice of proverbs and sayings as primary research material is justified by their role, as noted by Holubovska I.,

in ‘mirroring universal human priorities while simultaneously capturing nationally conditioned value-based perceptions of the world and one’s existence within it. The study of proverbs and sayings allows delineating national logic (logical-conceptual categorisation of reality) and national evaluative frameworks (emotional-evaluative categorisation), as well as uncovering the hierarchy of values held by speakers of a particular language and culture’ (Holubovska 2004: 216).

3.2 *Research Methods*

The methodological framework integrates general scientific methods (analysis, synthesis, comparison) with specialized research methods. To isolate the research material, the method of continuous sampling was employed, which involved defining search keywords, excluding peripheral nominations, and compiling a corpus of paroemias containing the components *canis* and *dog* from lexicographic sources. An inductive approach enabled the systematization and description of the material, while a deductive method was applied for comparative analysis to identify common and distinct features in the interpretation of the dog in Latin and English paroemias. The cognitive-interpretative analysis revealed paroemias in which the zoonyms *canis* and *dog* actualize figurative meanings, as well as their positive and negative connotative nuances. This facilitated an examination of the dog’s role as a cultural symbol across different linguocultures. The comparative-contrastive method was used to determine shared and culture-specific connotations of the zoonym dog in the linguistic worldviews of ancient Romans and the English, revealing universal patterns and ethnically conditioned interpretations of the dog’s image in Latin and English proverbs. The descriptive method allowed for the classification and characterization of the analyzed paroemias and the summarization of research

findings. To validate the conclusions regarding the negative and positive connotations of the zoonym in different linguocultures, a quantitative analysis was conducted. This method traced the dominance of specific semantic features and outlined culturally specific interpretations of the dog's image in the linguistic consciousness of different peoples.

4. Theoretical background

Among the linguistic units that attract the attention of ethnolinguistics and linguocultural studies, proverbs and sayings most fully convey national and cultural semantics, as they directly reflect the surrounding reality. Paroemias (traditional wisdom sayings) emerge from the accumulation of folk experience, serve as manifestations of collective consciousness, and function as vehicles for expressing social worldviews. Following Paziak M., we contend that

“the term ‘paroemia’ is primarily used to designate the generic concept of the genre alongside the term ‘proverbs and sayings,’ while specific subcategories are denoted by terms such as ‘proverb,’ ‘saying,’ ‘wish,’ ‘greeting,’ ‘pun,’ ‘tall tale,’ ‘riddle,’ etc., though these terms are often conflated and used synonymously” (Paziak 1984: 3).

As Zaporozhets L. aptly observes, paroemias are

“stable, reproducible, culturally marked units that constitute an inseparable component of any linguistic worldview. They most vividly reflect the sociocultural experience amassed by generations of native speakers” (Zaporozhets 2002: 155–156).

Consequently, paroemic units offer fertile ground for uncovering the ethnocultural component of meaning, analyzing national peculiarities of culture, worldview, and mentality, and investigating the conceptualization and categorization of reality among representatives of diverse linguocultural communities.

The use of animal names in proverbs and sayings stems from ancient traditions when humans perceived themselves as integral to nature, personifying it and attributing human-like traits to fauna. The close bond between humans and nature, the significance

of animals in their lives, and observations of animal behavior fostered the active use of zoonyms for figurative descriptions of human physical and psychological traits, mentality, and lifestyle. At the core of understanding animal metaphors lies the Conceptual Metaphor Theory put forth by Lakoff G. and Johnson M. (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 5). According to this theory, metaphors are not merely linguistic embellishments, but fundamental cognitive mechanisms rooted in embodied experiences, i.e. abstract concepts are often understood through more concrete and tangible domains. Animal metaphors exemplify the metaphorical mapping process, wherein attributes of animals serve as source domains that facilitate the understanding of abstract concepts in target domains. As noted by Lakoff G. and Turner M.

Animals act instinctively, and different kinds of animals have different kinds of instinctive behaviour. We comprehend their behaviour in terms of human behaviour, and we use the language of human character traits to describe such behaviour. Cleverness, loyalty, courage, rudeness, dependability, and fickleness are human character traits, and when we attribute such character traits to animals we are comprehending the behaviour of those animals metaphorically in human terms (Lakoff and Turner 1989: 193–194).

According to Fauconnier G. and Turner M., animal metaphors systematically integrate zoological attributes with human experiential frameworks, exemplifying the cognitive plasticity inherent in linguistic cognition. Following their theoretical paradigm, we construe metaphor as fundamentally constituting “conceptual blending”, a process generating “the creation of new meaning”, (Fauconnier and Turner 2003: 39) – this capacity representing both a defining feature of human cognition and an evolutionary correlate of linguistic development, enabling the conceptual mapping between ontological domains. As Kyryliuk M. and Stavchuk N. aptly note,

In the process of societal development, many animals acquired cultic significance, and the words denoting them became imbued with unique associations and connotations, shaping national folklore, phraseology, and paroemiological repositories—the most stable layers of the lexico-phraseological level, thus possessing “cognitive memory”(Kyryliuk and Stavchuk 2018: 57).

The process of symbolic metaphorisation, according to Myzyn T.,

“is facilitated by the prevalence of the animal denoted by the zoonym, the frequency of encounters with it, and the accumulation of information about its habits and behaviour” (Myzyn 2022: 143).

Thus, stereotyping animal traits and assigning them to a certain type of person, as A. Grebenyuk notes, is a double, reverse metaphor, wherein

primary metaphorical projections assigned human psychophysical traits to fauna (canine loyalty, leporine timidity, etc.). These fixed features, which were supported by folklore as symbols, were then assigned to particular types of animal. The signs of these animals were used to denote a person based on the established stereotypes (Grebenyuk 2011: 132).

Zoomorphic metaphors thus simultaneously encompass both universal anthropocentric value systems and culture-specific conceptual configurations. While cross-linguistic parallels in metaphorical mappings attest to shared cognitive architectures and analogous environmental engagements, each linguistic system develops unique metaphorical pathways reflecting idiosyncratic historico-cultural trajectories. Thus, animal images have served for millennia as sources of human self-perception, acting as codes of a people’s mentality and indicators of their value systems.

5. Results of the Study

The dog is one of the earliest domesticated animals, having accompanied humans for thousands of years. It has played an important role in various spheres of human life, serving not only as a loyal friend and guardian but also assisting people during hunting, protecting them from enemies, and warning of danger. Human observation of the animal’s behavior and habits contributed to the development of symbolic meanings associated with the zoonym dog, the identification of a system of ethnically determined associations and evaluations, and played a significant role in shaping the conceptual and linguistic worldviews of particular nations. In this context, the image of the animal has verbalized

virtually the entire cultural code of humanity from ancient times to the present. Conceptions of the dog were formed not only on the basis of empirical observations of the animal over millennia, but also through the prism of national cultures. The image of the dog in the linguocultures of both ancient and modern peoples is ambivalent. On the one hand, the zoonym served as a symbol of loyalty, devotion, intelligence, and life experience; on the other hand, it was attributed with aggression, laziness, and gluttony.

In our research, we focus on paroemias in which the image of the dog metaphorically represents aspects of objective reality related to the characterization of the social or psychological specificity of the human individual. The zoonym under analysis occupies a prominent place in the linguistic worldviews of the ancient Romans and the British, since this representative of the animal world was closely connected with humans, and its behavioral traits served as the basis for metaphorically denoting certain human features of appearance, inclinations, behavioral patterns, character, emotional disposition, and moral qualities. The image of the dog is examined through the lens of both negative and positive connotations, enabling the tracing of the multifaceted nature of its symbolism and cultural variability within the Latin and English paroemiological heritage.

5.1 Pejorative connotations of the zoonym dog

As a result of the analysis of the paroemiological heritage of the Roman and English peoples, it was established that anthropomorphic associations related to the analyzed zoonym predominantly possess a pejorative connotation.

Barking, growling, howling and whining of dogs have been interpreted differently across the ethnocultures of various peoples. As a result of the animal's basic instincts and based on socio-domestic experience, the image of the dog became the cause of its predominantly negative perception and served to characterize the human being – namely, their behavior, emotions, physical condition, or to describe the situations in which the person acts. Dog barking is not only a means of self-defense or protection, but also a manifestation of verbal behavior, as acoustic signals (barking, growling, howling, whining) serve as the basis for metaphorical reinterpretation. These signals reflect various aspects

of communication – aggression, warning, emotional state, and social interaction – and are transformed into linguistic models describing human actions. Thus, animal sounds acquire symbolic significance in cultural interpretations.

This very feature became the basis for the metaphorical re-interpretation of such behavior. Accordingly, in the linguistic worldview of the Romans, the sounds produced by dog barking evoked associations with slander, lies, gossip, and boastfulness. In a number of Latin proverbs, deceitful people are equated with useless barking dogs:

- (1) *Luna latrantem canem non curat* (The moon does not care about a barking dog).
- (2) *Pro quo canes latrant* (That about which dogs bark).

As a result of the human – dog metaphorisation, the zoonym becomes associated in the linguistic consciousness of the people with the image of a liar. This trait is also recorded in English proverbs. In the British linguoculture, the image of a liar or gossip is represented by the lexeme *dog* in paroemias such as:

- (3) *A dog that will fetch a bone will carry a bone.*
- (4) *A gossip carries talk both ways.*

In the analyzed linguocultures, the behavior of a dog became symbolic of insidious and insincere people, especially when referring to those who flatter but harbor malicious intentions:

- (5) *Canis vestigia lingit, dum venena gerit in pectore* (The dog licks the footprints but carries poison in its heart),
- (6) *Canis blandus mordet* (A fawning dog bites).
- (7) *A fawning dog is worse than a barking one.*

The image of the dog in the everyday consciousness of the Romans and the English is associated with discord, the absence of mutual understanding, and disharmony between people. This feature is vividly illustrated by the following paroemias:

- (8) *Duo canes, os unum* (Two dogs, one bone).

- (9) *Canes mordentes non facile concordant* (Biting dogs do not easily agree).
- (10) *Dog eat dog*.
- (11) *Two dogs and a bone never agree*.
- (12) *They fight like cats and dogs*.

In Roman linguoculture, dog barking evoked associations with misunderstanding, rejection of the new, or the narrow-mindedness of certain individuals, since people, like dogs, often react negatively or suspiciously to that which they do not understand or have not encountered before:

- (13) *Canes omnibus ignotis allatrant* (Dogs bark at all whom they do not know).

The Latin proverb symbolizes an uneducated person incapable of appreciating high and refined art.

- (14) *Canis non curat num sint magna atria* (The dog does not care about the grandeur of the palace)

Similar connotations of the dog's image are found in the paroemiological heritage of the English people. For instance, in the English proverb the old dog is compared to a person who either lacks the desire or the capacity to accept new knowledge,

- (15) *You can't teach an old dog new tricks*.

In the paroemiological heritage of the ancient Romans and the English, the image of the dog also came to symbolize not only an unintelligent person but also a stubborn and short-sighted one who either cannot or does not wish to learn. In Roman linguoculture, the attempt to teach someone who is incapable of understanding elementary things is likened to teaching a dog to cook:

- (16) *Canem coquere doces* (You teach a dog to cook),

and unintelligent people who fail to learn from their own mistakes and repeat them again are compared to a dog that returns to its own vomit:

- (17) *Canis reversus ad vomitum suum* (The dog returns to its vomit).

In the linguistic consciousness of the English, such human traits as foolishness, narrow-mindedness and short-sightedness are verbalized through the prism of the analyzed zoonym in paroemia such as:

- (18) *A foolish dog barks at a flying bird,*
 (19) *The dog returns to its vomit,*
 (20) *A barking dog never learns.*

Latin paroemias represent a correlation between the image of the dog and the concepts of latent threat, aggression, and danger. When displaying aggression, a dog may attack, bite, or maul its victim – this serves as the basis for characterizing human cruelty, insidiousness, and aggressiveness. The metaphorical link between these human traits and the dog's behavior is reflected in the following proverbs:

- (21) *Canis rabiosa* (Mad dog);
 (22) *Cave canem* (Beware of the dog);
 (23) *Cave tibi a cane muto et aqua silente* (Beware of the silent dog and the still water);
 (24) *Prospectandum vetulo cane latrante* (Beware when the old dog barks);
 (25) *Hac urget lupus, hac canis* (On one side the wolf snarls, on the other the dog);
 (26) *Canem sopitum ne excita* (Do not wake the sleeping dog).

The actualization of these meanings is also observed in the linguoculture of the English people:

- (27) *Beware of the dog that does not bark;*

(28) *Let sleeping dogs lie.*

Thus, the perception of the dog as an evil, cruel, and subordinate creature contributed to the formation in English linguoculture of associations with human malevolence, fury, meanness, and betrayal:

(29) *A mad dog bites his own master;*

(30) *In every country, dogs bite.*

The image of the dog in the linguistic consciousness of the Roman and English peoples carries negative connotations associated with insincerity and unreliability. For example, in Roman linguoculture, the zoonym activates the connotation of a flattering and insincere person whose actions and words do not reflect genuine intentions or feelings:

(31) *Canis lingit manus, dum mordet cor* (The dog licks the hand, but bites the heart).

Moreover, the behavior of a dog that flatters and feigns submission often formed the basis for metaphorical reinterpretation and was associated in Roman consciousness with a person who outwardly appears obedient and docile, yet inwardly harbors malice and betrayal:

(32) *Canis vestigia lingit, dum venena gerit in pectore* (The dog licks the footprints, but carries poison in the heart).

In the linguistic worldview of the British, the zoonym may serve as a symbol of a flattering and malicious person:

(33) *Sly dog;*

(34) *Three things are not to be trusted: a cow's horn, a dog's tooth and a horse's hoof.*

In the linguistic consciousness of the Romans, the old dog was a symbol of conservatism and rigidity – that is, of a person's ina-

bility to change their beliefs, habits, views, or way of life, even when circumstances required it:

- (35) *Canis antiquus cateni assues fieri non potest* (An old dog cannot get used to a collar),
- (36) *Canis vetulus non assuescit loro* (An old dog does not get used to a leash).

In English linguoculture, the lexeme *dog* is metaphorically used to describe people – mainly of older age – who find it difficult to accept innovations or to keep up with the times:

- (37) *A dog that will fetch a bone will carry a bone;*
- (38) *You can't teach an old dog new tricks.*

The image of the dog in the paroemiological heritage of both peoples is also a symbol of cowardice. In folk consciousness, a person who is fearful and tries to conceal their fear behind loud words is often compared to a dog that barks loudly and excessively:

- (39) *Canis timidus vehementius latrat, quam mordet* (A timid dog barks more loudly than it bites);
- (40) *A cowardly cur barks more than it bites;*
- (41) *A barking dog never bites.*

Furthermore, in the linguistic consciousness of the English, the dog symbolizes people who run away in fear, even when there is no real threat:

- (42) *Every dog has his tail between his legs sometimes;*
- (43) *A running dog is a cowardly dog.*

The dog also became a symbol of people who behave confidently and aggressively only in familiar surroundings or environments, while outside of them they are weak and cowardly:

- (44) *Canis in casa sua latrat fortius* (A dog barks louder in its own house);

- (45) *Omnis canis in porta sua magnus est latrator* (Every dog is a loud barker at its own gate);
- (46) *In foribus propriis canis est audacior omnis* (At its own door, the dog is bolder than others);
- (47) *Canis domi ferocissimus* (The fiercest dog is at home);
- (48) *Every dog is a lion in his own yard*;
- (49) *A barking dog at home is silent abroad*.

In the mentioned proverbs, the dog symbolizes people who display strength or aggression only where they feel safe. In many Latin and English proverbs, the dog carries negative connotations, which are associated with its innate behavioral traits. In Latin, the semantics of a deceitful person are verbalized through paroemias such as:

- (50) *Canibus agnos obicere* (Throw lambs to the dogs);
- (51) *Canis canistri malus est custos* (A dog is a bad guardian of the basket).

In British linguoculture, the pejorative image of a deceitful person is also conveyed through the zoonym *dog* in proverbs such as:

- (52) *A dog that licks your hand today may bite it tomorrow*;
- (53) *A silent dog is more dangerous than a noisy one*;
- (54) *Beware of a silent dog and still water*;
- (55) *Beware of the dog that does not bark*;
- (56) *Every dog has a bit of wolf in him*.

Moreover, the dog symbolizes a situation where a hidden enemy poses a greater threat than one who openly declares their intentions:

- (57) *Canis, dum latrat, non mordet* (The dog, while barking, does not bite);
- (58) *Barking dogs seldom bite*;
- (59) *Sly dog*.

In the linguistic consciousness of the Romans, the dog often evoked associations with a greedy, gluttonous, and insatiable person:

- (60) *Canis a corio nunquam absterrebitur uncto* (A dog will never be driven away from the greasy rind);
- (61) *Canes socium in culina nullum amant* (Dogs do not like companions in the kitchen);
- (62) *Canis in praesepe* (A dog in the manger).

In the linguistic image of the world of the British, the analyzed zoonym also became a symbol of an envious and greedy person:

- (63) *A dog in the manger*;
- (64) *Greedy as a dog*;
- (65) *Give a dog a bone and he will want a steak*;
- (66) *Like a dog with two bones*.

In the linguistic culture of the Romans, the dog symbolizes simplicity, the ability to survive even in unfavorable conditions. For example, some Latin proverbs emphasize not only the animal's simplicity but also the humble life of certain people who can be satisfied with minimal goods:

- (67) *Aqua et panis est vita canis* (Bread and water is a dog's life),
- (68) *Canis esuriens libenter panis somniat* (The hungry dog gladly dreams of bread),
- (69) *Canis esuriens etiam stercus deglutit* (A hungry dog even swallows dung),
- (70) *Canis vivit sine mensa* (A dog lives without a table).

Latin proverbs represent the ability of people to adapt to modest living conditions, highlighting a person's indifference to luxury:

- (71) *Canis famelicus etiam dura mandit* (A hungry dog eats even hard things);
- (72) *Canis non curat num sint magna atria* (A dog does not care about the grandeur of the palace).

In the English linguistic culture, the image of the dog is used to characterize people who are indifferent to their living conditions, symbolizing a person's ability to adapt to any living conditions:

- (73) *A hungry dog will eat anything;*
- (74) *A dog does not mind what he eats;*
- (75) *A hungry dog will eat dirty puddings;*
- (76) *A dog sleeps anywhere;*
- (77) *Dog's life.*

In these examples, as a result of metaphorical reinterpretation, the unsatisfactory living conditions of the animal are equated with the miserable existence of people, their social or material disorganization, or vulnerability.

The image of the dog in the analyzed proverbs correlates with the concepts of ingratitude and selfishness, and serves to characterize people who do not appreciate kindness, do not justify the efforts spent on them, and respond to good treatment with evil. In the Latin proverb, the dog's behavior becomes the basis for a metaphorical reinterpretation, serving as a prototype for an ungrateful person who responds with evil to good:

- (78) *Canis saginatus et latrat et mordet* (A well-fed dog both barks and bites).

In the linguistic consciousness of the English, a dog's biting is not only an act of animal aggression but also an association with a person who betrays or harms those who helped them:

- (79) *Bite the hand that feeds you*

or a symbol of a person who is grateful only as long as they personally benefit from it:

- (80) *A dog will bite when you stop feeding him.*

In English paroemias, the dog also embodies human selfishness. Particularly vivid expressions include:

(81) *Every dog for himself;*

(82) *While the dog gnaws bone, companions would be none*

as a hint towards the selfish approach where everyone only thinks about their own gain. In both Latin and English proverbs, the dog can symbolize people who are indifferent to the problems of others, show no interest in anything, and remain indifferent to the events around them. Thus, in the Latin paroemia

(83) *Canis mortuus non mordet* (A dead dog does not bite)
the dog symbolises indifference, the loss of interest in purposeful activity, and in the proverb

(84) *Canis famelicus non curat amicos* (A hungry dog does not think about friends)

the image of the dog embodies the idea of selfishness and indifference of people who, in difficult situations, defend only their own interests. In English, the image of the dog reflects human indifference to material goods:

(85) *A dog does not care whether he is rich or poor*

or to people who remain indifferent to problems until they are personally affected by them:

(86) *A sleeping dog dreams no nightmares.*

The dog in the conceptual sphere of the Romans and the English serves as a symbol of human laziness, inactivity, and unwillingness to work. For example, in the linguistic consciousness of the Romans, a lazy person was compared to a sleeping dog:

(87) *Canis qui dormit non capit leporem* (A dog that sleeps does not catch a hare),

and an old dog that sleeps all day was compared to people who do nothing and are constantly lazy:

- (88) *Canis vetulus dormit totum diem* (An old dog sleeps all day).

In the paroemia

- (89) *Cave ne cadas in somnum canis* (Beware of falling into the dog's sleep)

there is a call not to be lazy and never lose vigilance. In the linguistic consciousness of the English, people who avoid work and seek only personal gain are compared to a lazy dog basking in the sun:

- (90) *A lazy dog lies in the sun,*

and in the paroemia

- (91) *A lazy dog does not hunt rabbits,*

it is pointed out that without effort neither the dog will catch prey, nor the person will achieve anything if they are lazy.

The image of the dog also reflects the idea of a cunning, crafty, and cautious person who knows how to avoid danger and uses deceptive means to achieve their goals. In Latin, the metaphor “dog = cunning person” is represented by paroemias such as:

- (92) *Canina impudentia cum vulpina astutia coniuncta* (The impudence of the dog is combined with the cunning of the fox),
 (93) *Canis fidelis in die, callidus in nocte* (The dog is faithful by day, cunning by night).

In the proverbs of the English, the dog also represents a cunning person who will never take risks but will act carefully. For example, the dog is compared to people who act wisely and unobtrusively, not revealing their intentions:

- (94) *A cunning dog barks least,*

- (95) *An old dog knows all the tricks,*
 (96) *Every dog has his own way of barking.*

The image of the dog in the linguistic consciousness of the Roman and English peoples represents the idea of ungrateful people who do not know how to appreciate good, selfishly live at the expense of others, use and subjugate them, and take all the blessings of life for granted. In the image of the dog in the analyzed paroemias, there is a representation of people who do not value good deeds, perceive them as something deserved, and may repay their benefactors with harm:

- (97) *Canis quem nutris, te mordet* (The dog you feed may bite you);
 (98) *Canem cibando facis audacem* (Feeding a dog makes it bold);
 (99) *Canis saginatus et latrat et mordet* (A well-fed dog both barks and bites);
 (100) *Bite the hand that feeds you;*
 (101) *You rear a dog and he will bite you;*
 (102) *A curst dog must be tied short.*

As a result of the comparison between humans and animals, the zoonym *dog* evokes the image of a slovenly person who neglects their appearance and does not care about the state of their home:

- (103) *Canis in stercore suo dormit* (The dog sleeps in its own dung).
 In the paroemia
 (104) *Canis sordidus non timet lutum* (A dirty dog is not afraid of the mud),

the dog is associated with a person who has become indifferent to cleanliness and neatness, and is not ashamed of their state. In English, the comparative expression

- (105) *As dirty as a dog.*

In English proverbs the zoonym *dog* takes on a pejorative tone and represents people who despise personal cleanliness, lead an irresponsible lifestyle, and exist in an environment that reflects their internal negligence and disorder:

- (106) *Dirty dogs get dirty dens;*
(107) *A muddy dog enjoys the rain.*

The image of the dog in the analyzed linguistic cultures may symbolize impudence, audacity, and shamelessness. In Latin proverbs, the lexeme *canis* is used to characterize impudent people who behave insolently and constantly demand more:

- (108) *Canis sine osse latrare non desinit* (A dog without a bone does not stop barking),
(109) *Canis satiates famescit adhuc* (A satiated dog is still hungry).

In the linguistic worldview of the English, the zoonym *dog* serves to characterize impudent people who, after receiving help, demand even more, becoming shameless and ungrateful:

- (110) *Give a dog an inch and he will take a mile;*
(111) *The more you feed a dog, the more he barks.*

The analyzed zoonym metaphorically verbalizes in proverbs the concept of poverty, demonstrating the social status of a person in society. In the Latin proverb the image and lifestyle of the dog become the basis for comparison with the impoverished condition of a person:

- (112) *Mendicus et canis de eadem scutella edunt* (A beggar and a dog eat from the same bowl).

In English linguistic culture, the images of the dog, the beggar, and the widow's cat embody the idea of poverty and the harsh life of a person:

- (113) *A beggar's dog and a widow's cat are always lean.*

Additionally, as a result of metaphorical transfer, the analyzed zoonym in the imagination of the Roman and English peoples serves not only to express a person's impoverished condition but also to assess the negative influence of their surroundings, highlighting the importance of choosing friends and environment:

(114) *Qui cum canibus concumbunt, cum pulicibus surgent*
(He who lies with dogs will rise with fleas);

(115) *If you lie down with dogs, you will get up with fleas.*

In the linguistic consciousness of the Romans, the dog was associated with uselessness, redundancy, or lack of value. In Latin proverbs, the animal symbolized things or people who had lost their usefulness and become unnecessary:

(116) *Canis inutilis abicitur* (An unnecessary dog is thrown out);

(117) *Canis sine dentibus nullius est usus* (A toothless dog is of no use);

(118) *Canem vetulum novi catulli depellunt* (Young puppies drive away the old dog).

In English, the dog also symbolizes something or someone who no longer has value, has become redundant, or does not bring any benefit:

(119) *An old dog is driven from the door;*

(120) *A dog without teeth is useless;*

(121) *A dog that has lost its master is a stray.*

Thus, in the studied linguistic cultures, the image of the dog reflects not only the idea of the futility of material wealth but also the harsh attitude of society towards people who have lost their usefulness.

In the linguistic traditions of the Roman and English peoples, proverbs with the analyzed zoonym, based on comparison with a chained dog, reflect the idea of captivity, restriction, and dependence:

- (122) *Canis in vinculis latrat frustra* (A dog on a chain barks in vain);
 (123) *A chained dog does not hunt.*

In certain English proverbs, the dog is portrayed as a conflict-prone creature, serving as the basis for the metaphorical use of the zoonym to denote social relations between people and symbolizing hostility and conflict:

- (124) *Fight like cats and dogs;*
 (125) *As mean as a junkyard dog;*
 (126) *Two dogs and a bone never agree.*

The results of quantitative analysis (Table 1) demonstrate the dominance of negative connotations associated with the image of the dog in both linguocultures (approximately 78% in Latin and 70% in English). This prevalence arises because the animal was primarily perceived as a bearer of aggressive instincts, which served as a basis for metaphorical reinterpretation and the projection of negative human traits.

Table 1. Results of quantitative analysis

Connotation	Latin		English	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
Deceit, gossip, insincerity	9	13%	12	11%
Conflict, lack of agreement	6	9%	6	5%
Ignorance, foolishness	7	10%	4	4%
Aggression, danger	9	13%	5	5%
Ingratitude, betrayal	8	12%	6	5%
Greed, gluttony	6	9%	4	4%
Poverty, destitution	7	10%	4	4%
Laziness, passivity	5	7%	2	2%
Dirt, untidiness, negligence	4	6%	3	3%
Impudence, shamelessness	3	4%	2	2%
Futility, uselessness	4	6%	2	2%
Dependence	2	3%	1	1%
Cowardice	4	6%	5	5%
Egoism, indifference	4	6%	4	%
Total	53	78%	77	70%

5.2 Positive connotations of the zoonym dog

Let us examine the positive connotations of the zoonym in the paroemiological heritage of the ancient Romans and the British. The image of the dog primarily embodies notions of loyalty, kindness, obedience, and selfless love. Dogs are always by one's side when support is needed, rejoice at their owner's return home, and daily bestow boundless love and joy upon humans. It is precisely kindness and loyalty, embodied in the image of the dog, that serve as universal shared values for humanity, regardless of historical epoch, nationality, religion, or culture. Most often, the image of the dog symbolizes loyalty and goodwill in English linguoculture. This is evidenced by a number of proverbs:

- (127) *A dog knows the hand that feeds it;*
- (128) *A dog never betrays his master;*
- (129) *A dog never forgets his home;*
- (130) *A dog never forgets who saved him;*
- (131) *A dog's loyalty lasts a lifetime;*
- (132) *A dog's loyalty is worth more than gold;*
- (133) *A dog's trust is the greatest treasure;*
- (134) *A dog's loyalty cannot be bought;*
- (135) *A faithful dog is worth a thousand friends;*
- (136) *A loyal dog never forgets his home;*
- (137) *Dogs never betray their friends;*
- (138) *A dog is a man's best friend.*

In English, the dog, owing to its loyalty, self-sacrifice, and selfless kindness, embodies the notion of an angelic essence – an invisible force that stands guard over goodness at every moment:

- (139) *A dog is proof that angels exist.*

In Roman linguoculture, the kindness and sincerity of the dog were also regarded as symbols of fidelity:

- (140) *Canis amici fidelissimi sunt* (Dogs are the most faithful friends);
- (141) *Fidelis canis numquam nocet* (A loyal dog never harms).

In certain proverbs, we observe the association between dog and friend, which represents the friendliness of dogs projected onto human qualities:

- (142) *Canis – amicus hominis* (A dog is a friend of man);
- (143) *The dog is man's best friend*;
- (145) *A dog's love heals a broken heart*;
- (146) *A dog's love is the greatest gift*;
- (147) *Dogs are love wrapped in fur*;
- (148) *Dogs bring warmth to the coldest hearts*;
- (149) *Dogs do not lie about love*;
- (150) *Dogs make bad day better*;
- (151) *No home is empty when you have a dog*.

The paroemia

- (152) *A dog's tongue heals many wounds*

reflects both the literal and figurative meanings of the lexeme. Primarily, the saying is linked to the folk belief that a dog's saliva has bactericidal properties and can heal wounds. Figuratively, the image of the dog embodies love, care, and devotion, which have a soothing and therapeutic effect on the human soul.

Among the positive connotations of the zoonym in the paroemiological heritage of the ancient Romans and the English, we distinguish not only loyalty and kindness but also wisdom and experience, rooted in such canine traits as attentiveness, vigilance, and caution. A striking example of the use of the zoonym *dog* to denote an experienced and knowledgeable person in Roman and English linguocultures are the proverbs:

- (153) *Canis sapiens non latrat in vanum* (A wise dog does not bark in vain);
- (154) *A smart dog knows when to bark and when to be silent*;
- (155) *Dogs speak with their eyes*.

Moreover, an important component of wisdom and experience is age, both in animals and humans. In the Latin proverbs the image of an old dog embodies the notion of an experienced person, for

with time come wisdom and understanding, allowing *homo sapiens* to avoid mistakes and not panic over trivialities:

- (156) *Canis vetus negligit furem* (An old dog does not fear a thief);
- (157) *Canis vetus os sapiat* (An old dog knows a good bone).

In the linguistic consciousness of the British, the image of an old dog is also associated with a wise and experienced person:

- (158) *An old dog does not bark without reason;*
- (159) *An old dog barks not in vain;*
- (160) *The old dog for the hard road;*
- (161) *When the old dog barks, take notice;*
- (162) *An old dog knows the best bone.*

In certain paroemias, the linguistic unit is used figuratively to verbalize solidarity, mutual support, or the unlikelihood of betrayal among like-minded individuals:

- (163) *Canis caninam non est* (A dog does not eat dog);
- (164) *Canis caninam non est mordere pellem* (A dog does not chew another dog's hide);
- (165) *Latrante uno latrat statim et alter canis* (When one dog barks, another immediately joins);
- (166) *Qui amat me, amat et canem meum* (Who loves me, loves my dog too);
- (167) *Dog does not eat dog;*
- (168) *Love me, love my dog.*

The dog, as an animal that carefully selects its owner, food, or resting place, has become a symbol of discernment in various linguocultures, reflecting both positive (wise choice) and negative (excessive pickiness) human traits:

- (169) *Canis satur ingrata esca est* (A sated dog finds food distasteful);
- (170) *A full-fed dog does not hunt.*

Despite a number of shared features of the zoonym in Roman and English cultures, paroemiological heritage highlights the national-cultural peculiarities in how each nation perceives the image of the dog. It is known that dogs, due to their physiological ability to rotate their ears in any direction, possess exceptionally acute hearing and can detect sounds imperceptible to humans. This trait has undergone metaphorical transfer, becoming a symbol of vigilance – a person distinguished by attentiveness, observational skills, and the ability to notice subtle details while remaining alert:

(171) *A dog's ears hear everything.*

In English linguistic consciousness, the image of the dog embodies not only loyalty and devotion but also honesty:

(172) *A dog's eyes never lie;*

(173) *An honest dog does not steal from his master.*

The animal's natural instincts to sense danger and human emotions have formed the basis for the metaphorical use of the zoonym as a symbol of a person with developed intuition:

(174) *Even a lost dog knows his way home.*

The proverb

(175) *A dog's nose knows*

emphasizes not only the dog's ability but also the human capacity to intuitively avoid mistakes, act cautiously, react swiftly to changes, and make sound decisions in complex life situations. English proverbs not only describe the animal's innate ability to discern human intentions and intuitively sense kind people, but also serve as symbols of individuals with heightened intuition:

(176) *Dogs always recognize a good heart;*

(177) *Dogs know a friend from a foe.*

Among the positive connotations of the dog's image in British paroemiological heritage, we distinguish the trait of perseverance, which underlies the metaphorical use of the zoonym to denote people who persistently move forward, striving to transform obstacles into means for achieving goals and success:

(178) *The dog that trots about finds a bone.*

Although the dog was domesticated in ancient times and played a significant role in human life as a guardian against predators, a shepherd, or a hunter, the paroemiological corpus of the analyzed languages contains far fewer proverbs with the *dog* component that carry a positive connotation. In our opinion, this can be explained by the perception of the dog as a wicked, cruel, and subordinate being, rooted in the understanding of the dog as a guard for whom these traits are beneficial. Consequently, the symbolic meanings of 'loyalty', 'devotion', and 'wisdom' appear much less frequently. Quantitative characteristics of proverbs and sayings with positive connotations of the dog's image in Latin and English are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Quantitative characteristics of proverbs and sayings with positive connotations of the dog's image in Latin and English

Connotation	Latin		English	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
Loyalty, friendship, love	5	7%	20	18%
Wisdom, experience	4	6%	6	5%
Solidarity, support	3	4%	2	2%
Vigilance, intuition	2	3%	4	4%
Persistence, endurance	1	2%	1	1%
Total	15	22%	33	30%

6. Conclusion

Human life, experience, and beliefs have long been closely intertwined with the animal world, where the dog holds a special place as one of the most devoted and benevolent domestic animals, and a faithful guardian of human dwellings. Proverbs containing the zoonym *dog* offer a unique reflection of centuries of human observation, capturing this animal's behavior, appear-

ance, and role in daily life. They attest to the emotional and value-driven attitude of humans towards 'our smaller brothers.' An in-depth analysis of proverbs with the lexeme *dog* allows for a better understanding of the nature of the of the human-animal bond, tracing the symbolism of the dog's image and identifying the spheres in which this symbolism operates. A comparison of paroemias featuring the *dog* component in Latin and English has revealed both universal traits of the canine image, shared across these linguocultures, and nationally specific connotations shaped by cultural-historical context and the native speakers' mentality. The figurative component of the zoonym *dog* in the linguistic cultures of the ancient Roman and English peoples has been examined through the analysis of a set of cognitive metaphors, defined here as stable conceptual models through which human experience is structured by means of animal imagery. Cognitive metaphors reflect the verbal behavior, emotional states, and social characteristics of human beings that are metaphorically projected onto the image of the dog. This approach affords a systematic account of how universal patterns of metaphorical thinking – such as “speech – animal sounds”, “outward submissiveness – concealed aggression and hostility”, “human traits – animal characteristics”, “resistance to novelty – human narrow-mindedness”, and “canine greed – human selfishness” – are realized within the paroemiological tradition while simultaneously acquiring culturally specific interpretations in Latin and English. The cognitive metaphors identified corroborate the foundational propositions of Lakoff and Johnson's conceptual metaphor theory, according to which metaphor functions not merely as a stylistic device but as a mechanism for the conceptualization of experience and an instrument for the description of human traits, behavior, and social relations. The dog serves as a marker of anthropocentric characteristics, reflecting the ambivalent human attitude towards the animal: from negative attributes – aggressiveness, cunning, and ingratitude — to positive ones, including loyalty, wisdom, and perseverance. Analysis of Latin and English paroemias establishes that in the linguistic consciousness of the ancient Romans and the English, negative connotations of the dog image are predominant – approximately 78% in Latin and 70% in English – having been formed on the basis of interpretations

of the animal's instincts and behavior. In both linguistic cultures, the zoonym functions as a symbol of aggressiveness, treachery, greed, insincerity, ingratitude, selfishness, sloth, stupidity, and moral and social degradation. At the same time, a tendency towards a positive psycho-emotional reappraisal of the dog image is discernible in British linguistic culture: approximately 30% of proverbs activate ameliorative connotations – friendship, devotion, and psychological comfort – attesting to an evolution in the perception of the dog as a human friend and companion, and reflecting a contemporary anthropocentric worldview. The divergences in the interpretation of the zoonym are conditioned by the distinctive mentality, worldview, cultural traditions, and historical heritage of the respective speech communities.

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<https://doi.org/10.29162/pv.43.1.785>
UDC 821.111(73).09:81'373.7:94(73)=111
Original scientific paper
Received on 9 June 2024
Accepted for publication on 22 March 2026

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“GRATITUDE IS THE CURSE OF THE REPUBLICS”: THE PROVERBS AND PROVERBIAL EXPRESSIONS OF WHARTON JACKSON GREEN

Abstract: This essay explores proverbial language use of Wharton Jackson Green (1831–1910), revealing how he used it in navigating the various roles he played as a soldier, civilian, and politician. Simultaneously, it illustrates the complexities of life during the Reconstruction (1865–1877) and Victorian eras (1837–1901), highlighting the extent to which Green’s family history is connected to National history. Drawing from Wolfgang Mieder’s scholarship on the political uses of proverbs, it demonstrates that even if aspects of Green’s writing reflect the racist ideology prevalent during Reconstruction, such as “the lost cause,” it is only by examining such instances carefully, that one may develop an understanding of the complex evolution of American culture. Green’s limited corpus of writings archived at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill includes his autobiography *Recollections and Reflections: An Auto of Half a Century and More* (1906), an editorial commemorating his father, Thomas Jefferson Green (1802–1863), written for the *North Carolina University Magazine* (1892), and several Senate speeches. These illustrate that Green had a range of uses for proverbial language including engaging in political discourse, conveying life lessons, and coping with the mental and emotional traumas associated with fighting in the Civil War (1861–1865).

Keywords: American Civil War, folklore, lost cause ideology, paremiology, proverbs

1. Introduction

Wharton Jackson Green (1831–1910) did not write much, although he wrote enough to illustrate that he was a walking masterclass in proverb usage. Furthermore, Green realized the importance of folklore. Green’s autobiography is filled with folktales and anecdotes, many of which include proverbs. In addition to exploring Green’s proverb use, this essay explores the extent to which Green’s writing may offer scholars a unique perspective on the American Civil War. Green’s writing proves he had a thorough understanding of the proverb, “history is told by the winning side” (Speake 2015: 185). Green’s work demonstrates the drawbacks of adhering to one-sided perspectives of American history. Important interactions between Union and Confederate officers are randomly scattered about in Green’s writings, revealing aspects of personal relationships which are usually omitted from books about the Civil War. Some may question acknowledging Green’s work, because Green was on what many consider, the “wrong side” of history, as a high-ranking Confederate officer and a Democrat during a time in American history when the Democratic Party was associated with pro-slavery far right wing conservatism, and this would not change until after the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 were signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson (1908–1973) following the assassination of the bill’s designer, President John F. Kennedy (1917–1963). The historic signings marked an ideological split from Johnson’s Conservative mentor Senator Richard B. Russell, Jr. (1897–1971). A brief history of the Civil War may be necessary to understand Green’s unique position in United States history.

2. The U.S. Civil War (1861–1865)

The United States Civil War is largely viewed as a war over the expansion of American chattel slavery. The term “chattel” implies that kidnapped African people, were regarded as material objects to be bought and sold, at least from a legal standpoint. African slaves landed in the first Virginia colony in 1619. Slavery proliferated as colonial territory developed and eventually expanded into a new Nation. By the time Abraham Lincoln

(1809–1865) (the 16th U.S. President) took office in 1860, the number of slaves had grown to nearly four million, representing a meager four percent of the global Trans-Atlantic slave trade. Lincoln became world famous for denouncing human bondage.

When Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation (1863), freed slaves in southern territories, over one hundred thousand newly freed men joined over three hundred thousand Irish immigrants—providing enough manpower to finally defeat the Confederacy. General Robert E. Lee (1807–1870) surrendered to Commanding Union General Ulysses S. Grant (1822–1885) at Appomattox Courthouse in Virginia on April 9th, 1865. More than six hundred thousand human beings died in the American Civil War. The years following the Civil War, known as the Reconstruction Era, were marked by a concerted effort in Congress to rebuild the war-torn South.

3. Folkloristics and paremiology

Folklore as an academic field encompasses studies of informal tradition. To say that Green's words, including his use of traditional language in the form of proverbs and proverbial expressions are unimportant to folklorists simply because he was a Confederate would be a mistake for two reasons. Firstly, proverbs (like all language systems) may be used for benevolent purposes or with malicious intent. Secondly, traditional language carries symbolic meanings that extend far beyond the people who utter the phrases. Surprisingly, Green's autobiography is largely devoid of vitriolic racist language, and Green seems to avoid overtly supporting the institution of slavery. Contrarily, Green praises Union officers, mentioning high-ranking officers who attended West Point with him—admiring them for possessing leadership qualities such as self-sacrifice and discipline. Green also mentions proverbs used by the individual as well.

Proverbs are “concise traditional statements of apparent truths with currency among the folk” (Mieder 2004: 4). Several studies by Mieder explore the multifaceted political uses of proverbs including: *The Politics of Proverbs: From Traditional Wisdom to Proverbial Stereotypes* (1997), “*Right Makes Might*”: *Proverbs and the American Worldview* (2019), *The Worldview*

of *Modern American Proverbs* (2020), and *Worth A Thousand Words: Cultural Literary, and Political Proverb Studies* (2025). Proverbial language has always been considered an invaluable component in political communication, in part, because proverbial statements can carry a multitude of meanings. Thus, the same proverbial statement can mean different things for different listeners. As Mieder contends: “...there is no doubt that the folkloric indirection of proverbs has always carried considerable humanistic value in effective, considerate, and ethical sociopolitical discourse” (Mieder 2025: 116). The “folkloric indirection” of proverbial language mentioned by Mieder will be of utmost importance in examining multidimensionality in some of Green’s political language; but first, it is significant to consider some of the proverbial language Green uses in describing a time in his life when he was just getting his proverbial feet wet in politics.

At West Point, Green became interested in politics and gained much-needed practice by competing as a member of the debate team, about which he shares an anecdote describing the rather awkward moment he began to recognize his own unique oratory skills. In the following passage, Green describes what it was like to stand at a podium speechless in front of an audience of four hundred fellow West Point cadets. Green references a telling proverb in the process:

Grasping at the traditional straw of the drowning man, there was a hurried colloquy held in another debating society whose hall was in the garret of an individual cranium. The question flashed with electric thrill: Why continue to recite your memorized parroty lesson word by word? You are reasonably master of the subject and know what you wish to say. Say it. And so I did, and made the hit of my life on the oracular line, as then felt, and ever since known (Green 1906: 105).

Alluding to the proverb: “A drowning man will clutch at a straw” (Speake 2008: 48), Green describes the sense of desperation he must have felt in the moment. It would be interesting to know the full extent to which proverbs were a part of Green’s triumphant West Point speech.

4. *Green's Family History*

Recollections includes a good deal of American history and North Carolina regional history. Green's autobiography serves several purposes. Firstly, it preserves his family history. He was a second-generation veteran and a third-generation congressman. Secondly, it highlights ways this history is interwoven with the development of the Nation. For instance, Green's father served in Congress for four different States, and drafted legislation establishing two flagship universities: the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and the University of California at Berkeley. Thomas Green was also a brigadier-general in command during the Texas Revolution (1835–1836) and, through legislative means, designated the Rio Grande River as the officially recognized border between Texas and Mexico—leading to the acquisitions of New Mexico, Arizona, California, and Nevada (Green 1892: 217).

Thirdly, Green's autobiography dispels stereotypes concerning the Civil War that had become part of the dominant narrative. Fourthly, it preserves a vast storehouse of proverbs and proverbial expressions. As an interesting sidenote, arguably one of the most well-known American expressions to date, was coined in reference to one of Green's daughters, Sarah (Sadie) Wharton Green Walters (1859–1943), who married wealthy Wilmington shipbuilder Pembroke Jones (1858–1919) in 1884 in Fayetteville, North Carolina. The lavish lifestyle they lived inspired the expression "keeping up with the Joneses" (Whiting 1989: 345; Smith 1996; Block 2007).

Wharton Green recalls a critical lesson he learned from his father. When this lesson was communicated, it was accompanied by a Latin expression. Thomas Green's favorite saying was: "the best directed bullet that ever left the mouth of a pistol was when Colonel Burr pulled the trigger on the heights of Weehawken" (Green 1892: 218; 1906: 31). Dueling with pistols was a common folk practice for much of the nineteenth century. When the government realized too many officers were losing their lives, it became outlawed. Thomas Green would employ this saying regarding the famous Hamilton-Burr duel (1804), to express party loyalty, and to instruct. Wharton reminisces:

Whilst Colonel Burr pushed his contempt of invidious public opinion to a fatal extreme, I would nevertheless have you, my son, imitate him to the extent of not attaching undue weight to the fulsome praise of overzealous friends or the covert dispraise of inimical mouthers. He, whose life motto is “mens sibi conscia recti,” will not be unduly elated or depressed by either (Green 1892: 218; 1906: 31–32).

The Latin expression “mens sibi conscia recti” meaning “a mind aware of what is right,” is a warning against falling victim to the same kind of egotism that led to the demises of Alexander Hamilton (1757–1804) and Hamilton’s eldest son, Philip Hamilton (1782–1801), who died at Weehawken defending his father’s honor in a duel three years prior to Hamilton senior’s death. Green reveals that this lesson was imparted as the elder Green presented his personal set of dueling pistols to Wharton as a gift. The lesson stayed with Wharton throughout his life. Wharton decided on several occasions against using the weapons and convinced several friends to do the same.

5. Build no monuments to commemorate civil strife

It has been commonplace since the founding of the Nation (1776) for American political figures to evoke Greco-Roman symbolism to position the United States as a kind of “New Roman Republic.” It is what the Founding Fathers imagined it would eventually become. This reframing often included the use of Latin phrases, expressions, and proverbs to induce a Greco-Roman ethos, which may be found in everything from artwork and speeches to the Nation’s founding documents. It is no surprise that Green had a penchant for quoting Latin proverbs; in fact, they seem to add an air of authority to his viewpoints. For instance, Green used didacticisms to illustrate his unique position on the war. Two proverbs that stand out the most are the proverb “De mortuis nil, nisi bonum,” “Of the dead nothing but good is to be said” (Green 1906: 8, 94; Bryan and Mieder 2016: 520), and the proverb “Build no monuments to commemorate civil strife” (Green 1906: 318). The first appears in the prologue. Green says:

In discussing this batch of “preux-chevaliers” and others of kindred soul but less resplendent lustre, as well as others still, who can

set up no claim o kinship with such immaculates as these, but with no mawkish observance of the classic adage— “De mortuis nil, nisi bonum.” If allusion is to be made to such as Nero, Caligula, Commodus, or Domitian, in an earlier age; or to Alva Jeffreys, or the Guises, in more recent times, chance position of the culprit will not restrain anathema or rather harsh criticism. Silence is sometimes culpable. “The rank is but the guinea’s stamp; a spade’s a spade, for all that.” Some have deemed me aforetime too plain of speech, in not calling that useful implement by a more euphemistic synonym. To such, the reply is that having used unvarnished old English up to the allotted span of man, it is now too late to acquire a modulated and more euphonic dialect in dealing with knaves, shams, and pretenders (Green 1906: 8).

There are several proverbs in this brief passage from the preface of *Recollections*. The first proverb, “De mortuis nil, nisi bonum” (Whiting 1989: 156; Bryan and Mieder 2016: 520) is Latin for “Of the dead nothing but good is to be said.” It is attributed to Chilon of Sparta. Green follows the proverb with a list of Roman emperors known for tyranny. Green exclaims: “If allusion is to be made to such as Nero, Caligula, Commodus, or Domitian, in an earlier age; or to Alva Jeffreys or the Guises, in more recent times, chance position of the culprit will not restrain anathema or rather harsh criticism” (8). Green uses the proverb to convince readers of the extent to which he can remain fair, accurate, and respectful to all the leaders and parties involved in the war. Green then uses two more proverbs to assure readers that there will be no holding back when denouncing tyrants or dictators. The proverb, “Silence is sometimes culpable,” insinuates that Green wants to avoid the mistake of not voicing his own deeply held convictions. The next proverb “The rank is but the guinea’s stamp,” is from the Scottish poet and lyricists Robert Burns (1759–1796). In the famous song “For A That” (1795) (Summerville 2024: 39) Burns describes how material objects such as gold are often valued more than personal character, and Green follows this with the proverbial expression “to call a spade a spade” (Bryan and Mieder 2016: 714; Mieder 2002). The expression was first used in reference to the garden utensil, but evolved through common usage to embody several different meanings, one of which is a racial slur against African Americans (Mieder

2014: 278), but in this instance, through the spade expression, Green is saying that he feels obligated to describe things accurately. The extent to which Green can "speak no ill of the dead" and still "call a spade a spade" is left entirely up to the reader's interpretation. The metaphors included in the last sentences of the preface reemphasize the notion that Green refuses to soften his tone to appease anyone. Green continues:

If there is any merit in my desultory writings, having been a scribbler off and on through life, it consist in thorough conviction and pointedness of expression. Those who object to that style might as well close the little volume. Rosewater and diluted catnip is repugnant to taste, and unsuited to my genius. The field is already overcrowded with that sort of men, measures, and policies, as they would a bolt from a catapult (Green 1906: 9).

Green employs the same proverb again when praising the character of Union General John M. Schofield (1888–1895), who also served as U.S. Secretary of War (1868–1869). Of Schofield, Green says he was: "A soldier in war, a citizen in peace, a gentleman always," which is a Victorian saying. Green also adds that Schofield "filled the bill" (Green 1906: 94), meaning that Schofield was one of the most efficient commanding officers. Green then stacks the same proverb and expression from the preface, saying: "I do not forget that I am stepping on new made graves, nor have I forgotten the point of the Latin apothegm—"De mortuis nil, etc" ["Speak no ill of the dead"] (Green 1906: 94). Perhaps to add more credence to the praise he bestows upon Schofield, Green repeats the lesson regarding historical accuracy from the preface, using nearly identical phrasing. Green asserts:

If so, let it be borne in mind that history has been equally oblivious in handling the post-mortem reputations of certain worthies with whom she had to deal, notably, Nero, Caligula, Commodus, and Domitian. She and her scribes have not been tender-footed or mealy-mouthed whenever it was necessary to call a spade a spade, or a tyrant a tyrant. When a people grow too squeamish for such good old English, pure and undefiled, they have grown to be too delicate and refined to be fit conservators of English liberty (Green 1906: 94).

The second proverb illustrating Green's perspective on the Civil War is: "Build no monuments to commemorate civil strife" (Green 1906: 318). Green employs this proverb while discussing some of the enlightening conversations he had with former West Point cadets who rose through the ranks to serve as generals—conversations which may have gone undocumented had Green not written his autobiography. The meaning behind the proverb requires contextualization. In the appendix of *Recollections*, Green includes a letter he wrote from his home, Tokay vineyard in Fayetteville, North Carolina, dated July 15, 1903, entitled: "Gettysburg Reminiscent—After a Hiatus of Forty Years." In this section, Green provides details of a tour of the famous Gettysburg battleground with several West Point alumni. Green begins the letter by explaining how difficult it is to remember specific events of the war, saying: "To make the tour, relying only on the vague recollection of a participant of forty years anterior, or the usual parrotty verbiage of a professional guide, is like threading the labyrinth without the ball of twine" (Green 1906: 314). Nevertheless, threading the proverbial labyrinth is exactly what Green does. Green describes meeting his former classmate Union General Oliver Otis Howard (1830–1909) whom he admired greatly. Howard was a major proponent of establishing institutions of higher education for African Americans following the Civil War. Howard University in Washington, D.C., and the Howard School (now Fayetteville State University) were named in his honor. Green says:

On the train from Baltimore, I met my old classmate, General O.O. Howard, whom I had seen but once since we were at the military academy together, half a century by gone. Notwithstanding the tremendous issue that had been involved in the meantime, and which shook the continent from centre to circumference, in which we saw duty from opposing standpoints and took sides accordingly, he to rise to high fame and distinction, whilst I came out where I went in, owing to two years imprisonment, he met me with all the cordiality, not to say impressment of uninterrupted friendship" (Green 1906: 314).

Green attributes their strong bond of friendship to the collegial environment at West Point. Green says: "It was illustration of an

oft asserted iteration, that the spirit of class Camaraderie (as the French term it) was stronger in that school than in any other institution organized of man before or since" (Green 1906: 314). Green asserts that at West Point, they resided in "Arcadian simplicity" and "brotherly love" until the Civil War was officially declared, then they "up and cut each other's throats" (Green 1906: 315). Green assures readers that any proverbial or literal throat cutting that happened ceased following the war. Green then depicts for readers a portion of the conversation he had that day with Howard. They are both concerned about the fates of others:

...how many of our fellows were killed on your side, Green? Nine out of twelve and all general officers, was the reply; and how was it on yours, Howard? Seven out of seventeen, was the answer. Sixteen out of an aggregate of twenty-nine surviving in 1861 was a no mean showing in a class that laid aside the academic shackles less than ten years anterior therto. Noble fellows, and duty's liegemen they were, one and all (Green 1906: 315).

Green, Howard, and several others visited important battleground sites where heavy casualties were incurred. It is at this point in the narrative that Green thinks about how imperative historical markers have been up to this point in the multiple day excursion. Green says:

During the drive, numerous statues and mementoes to departed valor were passed in transient review; some good, others indifferent, but mostly belonging to neither category, but all reminding, in reversal, of the old Roman "*lex non scripta*": "Build no monuments to commemorate civil strife, or to remind posterity of bloody intestine collision." A wise as well as valorous race was the outcrop of the Tiber she-wolf (Green 1906: 318).

Green's reference to the "Tiber she-wolf" of Roman mythology is another example of Green's proclivity for associating contemporary life with the virtues of the ancient world, which, in this instance, serves a two-fold purpose—it is a vehicle for classical tradition, and a way of summoning ideologies of the old South. Green and the other veterans also express disapproval of building statues as objects of commemoration, preferring iron plaques that detail specific events. Green observes:

On the way back to town remark was made on the large iron tablets, which denote the positions held by different Confederate commands at various stages. As indicators of position, I expressed my preference for these to the legion of bronze warriors who stood mute and unresponsive sentinels on every hand, and Howard said, so did he" (Green 1906: 320–21).

At another point, Green talks to Howard about another West Point alum who died in battle, and Green makes it clear that this particular Union officer is being celebrated for several reasons: (1) his sacrifice, (2) his distinguished career as a professor, and (3) for exemplifying an invaluable lesson encapsulated by an often-repeated proverb. Green asserts:

First-Lieutenant Joseph J. Reynolds was Assistant Professor of Philosophy, and a philosopher he was. He it was who enunciated the great dictum collateral with the great Dean's two blades of grass truism; "it costs less to feed two than one; I know, for I have tried them both" (Green 1906: 84).

Green identifies Reynolds as the person who coined the popular Victorian era proverb: "It costs less to feed two than one." Furthermore, Green's expression "two blades of grass truism" emphasizes that the proverb highlights the significance of sharing which often results in less cost. Green then provides readers with more details regarding Reynolds's death: "Gallant gentleman that he was, he died in front of our brigade at the deep railroad cut at Gettysburg, after inflicting a loss of some nine hundred on us. He died a Major-General, United States Army" (Green 1906: 84). Reynolds, remembered for his bravery, was instrumental in no fewer than six battles, and died on the first day of the three-day skirmish at Gettysburg which claimed over seven thousand lives. Major General J.F. Reynolds (1820–1863) was the highest-ranking officer on either side to perish. One interesting thing about this bit of metanarrative is that Green then quotes a saying from classical literature to highlight an oversight he made in getting Reynolds's initials wrong. Green writes: "As Byron says: 'Such is fame! Your name misspelt in a bulletin, or a bullet in your body. Long may the other live to prove his theory of economy in duality'" (Green 1906: 84). The saying: "Such is fame! Your name misspelt in a bulletin, or a bullet in

your body” is a reference to the work of English poet Lord Byron (George Gordon Byron) (1788–1824). It is from Canto Seven of the epic poem *Don Juan* (1824). What might be interpreted as a backhanded compliment on the part of Green for forgetting a friend’s initials may also be understood as a rather unique ode to an important fallen academician. Byron, arguably the most widely celebrated of the English poets of the Romantic movement died as he was leading a campaign against the Ottoman Empire during the Greek War for Independence at the age of thirty-six. Thus, by closing the statement with the Byron reference, Green is also celebrating the fact that Reynolds’s death was equally heroic as Byron’s famous act of self-sacrifice. This simultaneously highlights Green’s knowledge of classical literature and world history, and the underlying sentiment that the “right” side ultimately won the war. Perhaps, Green felt that some emotions were best left expressed through allusion by way of proverbial language due to the prevalence of political violence.

6. *Green’s public addresses*

In *Recollections*, Green includes a speech entitled: “Address on General Robert Ransom, Delivered Before the Ladies Memorial Association, May 10, 1899.” The subject of the address, General Robert Ransom, Jr. (1828–1892), like Green’s father, was also a Warren County, North Carolina native and a West Point alumnus. Public addresses such as these served as opportune moments for Green to frame himself as a “party man.” Many politicians sought to avoid being labelled a turncoat or traitor—the gravest of all political offenses. Likewise, Green wished to revitalize some of the grandeur the South lost because of the war. There are several instances of Green using the proverb, “the victorious cause pleased the gods, but the lost cause pleased Cato.” The proverb is from *Pharsalia* (c.61 – 65) or *Civil War*, written by the Roman poet, Lucan (39 – 65 AD). *Pharsalia* is an epic detailed account of the Roman civil war (83 – 81 BC) between Julius Ceasar (100 – 44 BC) and Pompey the Great (106 – 48 BC). Cato the Younger (95 – 46 BC) was a Stoic conservative who sought to preserve the Roman Republic. Cato valued freedom so highly, that he chose suicide over living under tyrannical rule. The proverb: “the vic-

torious cause pleased the gods, but the lost cause pleased Cato” may not have been a proverb when Lucan first penned the epic poem, but centuries later, the proverb is referenced in writings about civil wars around the world to rationalize the inevitability that some parties will remain dissatisfied with the outcome. As it relates to the U.S. Civil War, the lost cause proverb characterizes the largescale effort to reframe the conflict based on a kind of revisionist history—one in which slavery is severely downplayed or (most often) completely ignored. The “folkloric indirection” (Mieder 2025: 116) contained in the lost cause proverb makes it useful for eliciting a sense of United States national identity. Likewise, due to nineteenth-century historical negation, the proverb is also ideal for use in rhetoric promoting white supremacy, which is one use Mieder specifically warns against:

...[proverbs] normally fulfill a useful communicative role, but when employed in a manipulative or discriminatory fashion, these expressions and images can become aggressive and harmful tools strengthened by the claim of proverbial authority behind them. Proverbs in the political arena are thus speech patterns that should be understood with care and caution. While they are often nothing more than harmless metaphorical additions to otherwise tedious political rhetoric, they can take on serious stereotypical and manipulative roles. In the hands of demagogues, bigots, and racists, proverbs can be shaped into dangerous verbal weapons. Proverbs are best ambivalent bits of wisdom, and since they will remain a vital part of political rhetoric, they deserve to be watched carefully as both positive and negative elements of communication (Mieder 1997: 8).

As a Civil War veteran, employing the lost cause proverb in speeches more than likely brought Green some sense of redemption. Green states:

Genius coupled with gentleness, self-assertion with modest claim, loftiest ambition with humanity, flawless record with tempting opportunity, sublime faith with unflagging zeal, and every impulse subordinate to patriotic end, constituted fitness in the highest for command. Let it content us in defeat, my brothers, that the cause by them espoused will be gauged in history by their exalted standard. “Causa victrix placuit deis, sed victa Catoni” (Green 1906: 267).

Green also references the proverb in an address he gave before the United Daughters of the Confederacy (1905). However, Green takes a slightly different approach by referencing another well-known writer of his era who also used the famous Lucan proverb. The quote in Green’s speech is taken from Professor George Long, who is writing in praise of heroism and sacrifice. Green says:

Professor George Long, one of the most profound scholars of his day, having an intense admiration for the great and good Aurelius, whom he seemed to regard as the most perfect of men, compiled and published the thoughts of his ideal hero (Green 1906: 306).

Green continues to explain to his audience that Long’s book was soon pirated by a Northern publisher (Green 1906: 306). Green then tells the audience that an infuriated Long corrected the issue in authentic editions of his work with a new preface, which Green then quotes:

I have never dedicated a book to any man, and if I dedicated this, I should choose the man whose name seems to be most worthy to be joined to that of the Roman soldier and philosopher. I might dedicate the book to the successful general who is now President of the United States, with the hope that his integrity and justice will restore peace and happiness, so far as he can, to those unhappy States who have suffered so much from war and the unrelenting hostility of wicked men. But as the Roman poet says: “*Victrix causa deis placuit, sed victa Catoni*” (Green 1906: 306).

The fact that Green makes the conservative audience aware of the fact that the pirates are northern is a political move. The fact that he attributes the quote to a renowned scholar adds rhetorical strength to the speech. At another point in the narrative, Green again compares the United States to the ancient fallen Republic of Rome. Green says like Rome, the United States may fall if conditions do not improve drastically between the States, using a proverb to make his sentiment clear:

How can patriotism and love of country, without which free states are but as eggshells, survive for long such an abnormal condition of affairs? When it supervenes, a thousand Catos and Brutis cannot long postpone the inevitable fall. More appalling this than all of

the other dangers combined, colonization included, that can undermine free states by covert assault; the condition that faces us: “where wealth accumulates, and men decay,” with such unprecedented rapidity is the sure precursor of the impending downfall (Green 1906: 218–19).

Again, Green draws on ancient Greco-Roman imagery in referring to Cato and Brutus. The variation of the proverb “where wealth accumulates, men decay,” is from the poem “The Deserted Village” (1770) written by Anglo-Irish novelist, Oliver Goldsmith (1728–1774). Green also includes lines from the poem “What Constitutes a State” written by Sir William Jones (1746–1794). Green ends the Jones quote with Jones’s famous lines: “And crush the tyrant; while they rend the chain; These constitute a state” (Green 1906: 219). On the surface level, the proverb and accompanying poem seem to be a jab at Lincoln, who was accused of tyranny when he became the first and only president to suspend the writ of habeas corpus, which would forego an accused individual’s right to trial by jury. Lincoln is the only American president to have gone to such extremes to eradicate all traces of treason and insurrection including the brandishing of a Confederate flag, which would result in two years’ imprisonment. Upon closer examination, the Goldsmith proverb accompanied by the Jones quote may further display the extent to which Green may have been conflicted by his own sense of party loyalty. Sir William Jones was a British Oxford educated philologist and orientalist who expatriated to India to study Hindu and Sanskrit religious texts. Jones is credited as the first to discover relationships among European and Indo-Aryan languages. Such discoveries led Jones to establish the Asiatic Society of Bengal (1784). Quoting Jones indicates that Green may not have been completely on board with eugenics movement propaganda depicting people from the southern hemisphere as sub-human. Only a person familiar with Jones’s orientalist background would be able to make such a connection.

Green uses the Goldsmith proverb again when addressing young people in Fayetteville, North Carolina, who gathered to celebrate the ninety-fifth birthday of the President of the Southern Confederacy. The speech is entitled “The Life and Character of the Great Leader Described by One Who Knew Him Well”

(Green 1906: 288). The speech was later printed in the *Fayetteville Observer*. During the speech, Green praises the only president of the Confederate States (1861–1865), Jefferson Davis (1808–1889):

Like the old Greek, he did not know how to play the lute or dance the Pyrrhic (or the “german” either), but he knew how to make a small State great, for he was of a race that turned out men, “high-minded men,” and not mere physical and intellectual dwarfings, or moneyed mountebanks” (Green 1906: 289).

At this point, Green includes lines from the Goldsmith poem. Green exclaims: “Ill fares the land to hastening ills a prey, Where wealth accumulates and men decay” (289). The speaker of the poem describes a fictional hometown of Auburn, England, which has been deserted due to urban escape and emigration to America. Furthermore, the speaker is lamenting the loss of tradition and the old rustic way of living which was abandoned for extravagance. From a rhetorical standpoint, the Goldsmith reference in Green’s address prompts a direct comparison to the war-torn condition of the South following the Civil War, where Union brigades competed to be the first to rummage plantations for anything deemed of value; afterwards southern plantations were typically burned to the ground.

7. Green’s Congressional speeches

One of Green’s congressional speeches is entitled: “General Grant: Gratitude is the Curse of the Republics” delivered before Congress on Tuesday March 3, 1885. The speech is directed at the 18th President, Ulysses S. Grant (1822–1885) a fellow West Point alumnus who signed the bill that created the United States Department of Justice (DOJ). Grant was also known for extending many resources to help protect African Americans from racial and political violence during Reconstruction (1863–1877). There is no doubt that Green’s dedication is an expression of pride in the simple fact that the West Point brotherhood produced another high-ranking officer and president—one whom classmates affectionately nicknamed “Uncle Sam” because of his initials. In the speech, Green argues against the passage of a

bill that would greatly reduce the pension amount paid to veterans. Green's language insinuates that he anticipates resistance. The proverb "Gratitude is the Curse of the Republics" is a way of saying that a regime is incapable of adequately compensating those who serve, whether in the military or in public office. Throughout the speech, Green uses the ancient Roman Republic as an example. Green also mentions several U.S. presidents who died penniless. Civil War veterans who fought for the Confederacy received no recompense from the federal government, even though they could request meager pensions from their home states. At one point in the speech, Green seems to attack those who may attempt to hinder his efforts based solely on party loyalties, using a telling expression in the process:

Brave men bear no malice after a fair fight, an honest handshake, and a genuine make up. The opposite is equally certain. The skulker and the deserter, the bounty-jumper, and the contractor, the homeguard, the blackguard, and the demagogue—all of whom, like the warhorse in Holy Writ, snuff the battle from afar—are implacable in hate, even twenty years after guns are grounded and sabers sheathed. Every side in every struggle turns out these valiant mouthers and strutters; harmless as doves in war, but mischievous as serpents in peace, or as John Phoenix has it, "soldiers in peace, citizens in war" (Green 1885b: 3).

Green highlights an interesting dichotomy which exists in Congress. While Green, Grant, and other West Point alumni make sincere efforts to set aside their differences to work together, many of those who did not even serve during the war seem to be the most adamant about hindering the efforts of political opponents. Green's use of the expression "soldiers in peace, citizens in war" is a reference to *PhEnixiana: Sketches and Burlesques* (1856) written by George Horatio Derby (1823–1861) who used the pen names John Phoenix, and John P. Squibob. Derby, a veteran of the Mexican-American War (1846–1848), wrote a series of satirical letters filled with biting political satire. Derby's letters were compiled into the three-hundred-page anthology *PhEnixiana*. Derby is regarded as California's very first humorist. Several scholars have written about Derby's influence on Samuel Clemens (1835–1910) (Bellamy 1941; Caron 2010).

Clemens's pen name, Mark Twain is considered by some to be a homage to Derby. Likewise, Green used a pen name on at least one occasion. In a letter entitled: "West Point Then, West Point Now" (1901) included in the appendix of *Recollections*, under the pseudonym "Senex" (meaning wise old man), Green begins a satirical letter valorizing West Point with a wellerism—a special type of proverb invented by novelist and social critic Charles Dickens (1812–1870). Wellerisms attribute amusing characteristics or unusual actions to specific characters to make a point. Speaking as Senex, Green writes: "Brutality is a synonym for fun. So says the savage whilst gloating over the agonies of his victim" (Green 1906: 284). In the *Gratitude* speech, Green sets up a variation of the famous expression from Derby: "soldiers in peace, citizens in war" with two expressions of his own. Green exclaims: "harmless as doves in war," and "mischievous as serpents in peace" (Green 1885b: 3). Green refers to those who may wish to weaken the bill with riders (or amendments) reducing veterans' compensation. Green continues:

A Democratic House with singular unanimity accorded it. A Republican Senate thought proper to kill it with a rider. Now, sir these old veterans who had given us a foothold on the Pacific and extended our sway from ocean to ocean, worn down with years, and tottering on the brink of the grave are not entitled to the poor pittance asked for, upon what principle of equity or propriety can younger soldiers in later wars expect a recognition of their service in the manner suggested in this bill? Judged from the successful standpoint, no man can overrate the magnitude of the work he accomplished (Green 1885b: 6).

In the above passage, Green refers to the Mexican-American war (which both his father and Derby served in) which ultimately led to U.S. westward expansion. If they receive little or no compensation, what can the Nation's future war veterans expect? To emphasize the point further, Green employs the gratitude proverb:

But, I repeat, let us not for his own sake as well as ours insult him with a pecuniary recompense. Ay, let us not measure his merit by the metallic standard. Merit so measured is apt to dwindle in public esteem; to grow dim instead of brighter with advancing years. Tis an old saying: "Republics are ungrateful;" but all men who have

lived or died, non has less right to complain of the ingratitude of republics than he (Green 1885b: 6).

After alluding to the proverb by asserting “Republics are ungrateful,” (Green 1885b: 6) Green uses the proverb to question whether opponents would agree on the matter if they were of the same political affiliation. Green ponders:

Perhaps had my lot been cast on this side of the Potomac instead of the other I might add that few have illustrated in their own person the force of the antithetical aphorism, “Gratitude is the danger, the curse of republics” (Green 1885b: 6).

In another attempt to weaken the partisanship guiding his opponents’ decision-making, Green declares:

Better the Ostra of Athens or the Tarpeia of Rome to curb the undue and dangerous popularity of a favorite than the gratitude which would prompt a free state to establish a pernicious precedent in his behalf (Green 1885b: 6).

Ostracism or excommunication was a common penalty for political crimes in the city of Athens while Tarpeia is the steep cliff which was used for political executions in Rome. Green feels that for some, both antiquated methods of punishment would be preferable to adopting measures proposed by adversaries. Green uses President James Madison (1751–1836) as an example of a president who died with no wealth to speak of and no annual pension from the government. The Former President’s Act granting pensions and secret service protection would not be signed into law until 1958. Green then conveys an anecdote about an unnamed veteran who continually turned down offers for compensation. Green argues:

It has been proposed by the highest recommendatory source to put him on the pension-list, but he declined with ungracious if not over-zeal. Zealous friends started to raise another large fund for his benefit; but he declined again. A wealthy friend offers to tear up a hundred and fifty-thousand-dollar mortgage in his behalf, but again the proposition is vetoed. Even his enemies were forced to cry, “Bravo!” It is for him to say whether his enemies shall say, with show: “The previous baits were inadequate; a shark is never caught with a sardine hook” (Green 1885b: 8).

Green uses the proverb "a shark is never caught with a sardine hook" to illustrate that the offers were to be viewed as bribes, which could not replace the sizable pensions veterans deserve. Green closes the speech with a proverb-like statement: "I for one do not propose to stifle my conscience to prove my loyalty" (Green 1885b: 8). Green employs a variation of the proverb "Gratitude is the curse of the republics" in another Congressional speech entitled "Repeal of Certain Internal Taxes: Interstate Commerce" (1885). Throughout the speech Green argues in favor of reducing tariffs on fruits and tobacco, in part, to promote free trade. Green makes it clear to his audience that to reduce taxes is to also reduce corruption. Green first uses a proverb coined by former president of the Republic of Texas, Mirabeau B. Lamar (1798–1859): "Truly, exclaimed old Mirabeau, 'from the capitol to the Tarpeian is but a step'" (Green 1885a: 5). Mirabeau's proverb "from the capitol to the Tarpeian is but a step" is used to convey how easily corrupt leaders might fall out of favor with citizens—with over taxing and dishonesty being the two fastest pathways to the Tarpeian cliff. Later, Green returns to the gratitude proverb: "Aye Mr. Speaker, greed next to gratitude is the bane of the republics" (Green 1885a: 5). Green includes the word "greed" for added emphasis. Green had a penchant for referencing proverbs and revising them for the purpose of making his own arguments. Green's inventive rhetorical strategy might be termed most simply as *proverb revision*. Later, in the same speech, Green utilizes proverb revision again, announcing the rhetorical strategy to his audience:

Some five score years and ten ago, Mr. Speaker, a trite but euphonic aphorism was born in this good land of ours to justify the taking of arms against recognized authority; or, to make it plain, to extenuate rebellion" (Green 1885a: 8).

Green sounds as if he might be talking about the Civil War, but he is alluding to the Revolutionary War (1775–1783), setting the stage for listeners in dramatic fashion:

Popularized by passion, it flew from mouth to mouth with the rapidity of tongued flame on the grass blades of the prairie. It was heard in the shop and in the field, from the pulpit and the rostrum, in the marts of commerce and in the school, and in the highways

and the byways, until at length it became the slogan of a mighty revolution, surpassing in beneficent results all the struggles of recorded time. The cry went up, "Taxation without representation is tyranny" (Green 1885a: 8).

The proverb "No taxation without representation" (Mieder 2021: 44, 184) was coined by the Massachusetts congressman James Otis, Jr. (1725–1783). Otis wrote a series of pamphlets against England's unfair taxation of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. While Otis may be credited with the proverb, the concept, in and of itself, may be traced to the Magna Carta (1215), a document drafted to protect British citizens from tyranny. Green then declares a revision:

The times, Mr. Speaker, call for a paraphrase of that now universally admitted truism, and here it is: "Taxation without occasion or necessity is no less tyranny, and the party which imposes it no less a tyrant and a robber" (Green 1885a: 8).

As a historical reference, the original proverb creates some common ground between the speaker and the audience, and the announced revision allows the speaker to highlight reasons why the proverb is applicable. Overall, Green demonstrates that there is some skill involved in using old aphorisms to make new statements.

In "Contested—Election Case—Hurd vs. Romeis" (1886) Green comes to the aid of fellow Democrat Frank H. Hurd (1840–1896), who lost his congressional seat by a small margin of votes. Subsequently, Republican Jacob Romeis (1835–1904) was declared the winner. It is difficult to say what Green's Senate speech did to sway public opinion, but Green's argument was filled with proverbial language. Near the beginning of the speech, Green references the Golden Rule (Bryan and Mieder 2016: 322): "In spite of bathos and the golden rule, poor frail humanity is naturally prone to incline to the side of such as are of a kindred line of thought" (Green 1886: 2). Building more upon the notion of preexisting party loyalties, Green employs scattered references from the Bible, Greek philosophy, and classical literature:

In this view of this, Mr. Speaker, we are constrained to admit that with some at least party ties are not bound with lilliputian threads, or party claim the figment of a disordered fancy. Ay, next to the ties which hold men together in the crisis of battle none are made of stronger chord. For one I lay no self-righteous claim to be unfettered by them, and what is more I do not wish to be as long as it is patent and apparent that they hold my political foes together with the tenacity of hooks of steel. I have always been afraid, Mr. Speaker, of being better than my neighbor; for next to the devil I hate, loathe, and detest a tyrant, and next to him their twin brother, the ill-begotten offspring of Hypocrite and Pharisee. God forbid that I should out-Herod Herod or out Pharisee the Pharisees (Green 1886: 2).

Green’s statement “To out Herod Herod or to out Pharisee the Pharisees” (Bryan and Mieder 2016: 382) is a well-known reference which warns against keeping up false appearances. Later in the speech, Green employs a proverb in Latin to convince opponents that it may be wise to listen, despite party loyalties. Green exclaims:

“Fast est ab hoste doceri” is an excellent rule in statecraft or party tactics. But mine be the teaching which in party strife or civil broil inculcates imitation of example instead of precept coming from the other side (Green 1886: 2).

The proverb in Latin translates “It is right to be taught even by an enemy,” and Green employs it to convince Congress that his argument is valid. Green then attempts to convince his audience that the election was rigged:

Ay, Mr. Speaker, I am not ashamed to proclaim myself a party man, or, if you prefer, a partisan, to the point that self-contempt would be my legitimate portion did party foes praise, pity, or otherwise cajole me. And so, Mr. Speaker, I approach this question with a degree of bias confest, which some others feel, but fain would smother or conceal; and yet I trust I approach it dispassionately and with as honest purpose as any on this floor to be guided by facts and the rules of evidence. I approach it with a full conviction, sustained by the facts of the case, that the contestant is entitled to the seat he is claiming. But were I hampered with a doubt, Heaven forefend that

I should stretch my conscience to give the benefit of that doubt to the other side (Green 1886: 2–3).

Green then uses a quote which he attributes to Ambassador of France to the United Kingdom, Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord (1754–1838). Green contends:

But magnanimity is another thing after the requirements of justice have been answered. Prate not to me of party magnanimity. In man's dueling with his fellow-man, it is beautiful, it is sublime. In party concessions to opposing faction, it is folly—it is worse than folly, it is a blunder; and that, quoth Tallerrand, is worse than a crime. That party whose convictions are worth a pinch of salt should, where issue is joined and principles involved, "a hair divide betwixt the south and southwest side" before conceding the breadth of a hair (Green 1886: 3).

Green describes the nature of partisanship with a concept that has been expounded upon by several philosophers including Plato (427–348 BC), Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), and Edmund Burke (1729–1797). Each philosopher offered their own unique perspective on what it means to be beautiful and what it means to be sublime. Green equates the philosophical dichotomy with the political dichotomy which exist between the Republicans and Democrats. In reduced form, the quote attributed to Talleyrand becomes a proverb-like statement: "party concessions to opposing faction is worse than crime" (Green 1886: 3), and therefore, any political party whose agenda is worth a proverbial "pinch of salt" should avoid conceding the width of a single hair. Setting the stage, Green follows his assessment with another proverbial statement: "Justice is justice, and should be done though the heavens fall" (Green 1886: 2–3). "Justice is justice, and should be done though the heavens fall" is a variation of the well-known legal proverb: "Let justice be done though the heavens fall." Green follows the legal proverb with a brief anecdote containing yet another proverb-like phrase:

He was a wise Kindergarten teacher who, walking in the garden with the young king, one day, was asked by his majesty whether he should retain in confidential trust the adherents of his unfriendly predecessor. Replying, not in words, he began to strike off with

his cane the heads of the highest poppies. Leave not your enemies about you, and especially those of a larger growth, was the lesson inculcated. The lesson to-day is worthy of illustration, chimeras and cobwebs notwithstanding (Green 1886: 3).

The statement: “Leave not your enemies about you” issues a warning and implies that justice may simply be too far out of reach for Hurd at this point. However, Green closes his speech with another proverb. Green exclaims:

Of a verity, ward politics in virtuous Ohio towns, like Toledo, for example, are not controlled by filthy shekels and the judicious manipulation of ballots by a blatant pot-house politician. But of course, if such things be, it is for the good of the wage-worker, who is not aware that he would otherwise vote against his true interest! But sir, if such things be, I humbly submit that the law which applies to South Carolina and Louisiana under Republican potency shall none the less apply to New England, or Pennsylvania, or Ohio elections under the ruling of a Democratic House. Let us have done with all such confusion of terms which import one thing in one locality and an entirely different thing in another. Let Republican irregularities be measured by their own bushel. Then, Mr. Speaker, when the vote is taken there will be one more tenant on this side of the House and a corresponding vacancy across the main aisle (Green 1886: 4).

Based on the language, Green seems to imply that the election was thrown because of inconsistent polling procedures across several different states. Moreover, Green attributes these irregularities solely to the Republican Party. John Griffin Carlisle (1834–1910), the House Speaker whom Green addresses is a fellow Democrat. The final proverbial expression Green includes for good measure further demonstrates party loyalty. Green pleads to Congress: Let the Republican’s “irregularities” (or errors) be measured by the Republican’s own “bushels” (or ethical standards) (Green 1886: 4).

8. Conclusion

A proverb in Latin appearing in a family crest on the cover of *Recollections* reads: “Generosus nasitur non fit” or “A gentleman

is born, not made.” This proverb is similar to other expressions regarding the notion of gentility running throughout the fabric of the text. It is an ideal connected to the notion of Medieval chivalry, revived in America during the Victorian era. It gave rise to sayings like: “a gentleman and a soldier,” and “soldiers in war, citizens in peace, and a gentleman always.” Collectively the sayings illustrate conflicting ideals which Civil War veterans may have struggled with. Green includes several anecdotes to illustrate that each person had their own perception of what it meant to be a “gentleman” and what it meant to be a “soldier” and when it was most appropriate to fashion oneself as either. In Green’s narrative accounts of the two years spent at the prisoner of war camp on Johnson’s Island in Ohio, he emphasizes the fact that, depending on who was in command, he and fellow prisoners could expect to be “treated like gentlemen,” or they could expect to be “treated like dogs” (Bryan and Mieder 2016: 217). Green expresses gratitude to Union officers who treated them as gentlemen despite the multitude of horrific encounters experienced on the battlefield. Green’s proverb, “A gentleman is born, not made” and others like it encapsulate the notion of what it meant to be human and may have helped soldiers retain a sense of humanity in times of conflict. Furthermore, it suggests that Green survived the war with his sense of humanity intact, and it is clearly one quality that he wanted to be remembered for.

Green’s purpose in using proverbial language encompasses a very broad spectrum. Green aimed for irrefutable oratorical eloquence when he strategically reframed proverbs on the Senate floor, with hopes that the collective force of proverbial wisdom could circumvent partisanship. At other times, Green’s objective was didactic, especially when he used proverbs to illuminate some moralizing instruction. Lastly, Green used proverbs to commemorate fallen comrades—illustrating that for him proverb use was a form of moral anchoring, as much as it was a primary component of political rhetoric. If some of Green’s proverbial statements may be read as posthumous proverbial olive branches, extended in atonement for political differences, Green’s skillful use of proverbial language gives readers a much more complex view of the Civil War era and contributes some much-needed humanizing elements which are often missing from history textbooks.

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Index of Proverbs and Proverbial Expressions *(In the order in which they appear)*

1. History is told by the winning side
2. A drowning man will clutch at a straw
3. Keeping up with the Joneses
4. Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty
5. The best directed bullet that ever left the mouth of a pistol was when Colonel Burr pulled the trigger on the heights of Weehawken
6. Mens sibi conscia recti (A mind aware of what is right)
7. To be a matter of bread and butter
8. De mortuis nil, nisi bonum (Of the dead nothing but good is to be said)
9. Build no monuments to commemorate civil strife
10. To thread the labyrinth without the ball of twine

11. To call a spade a spade
12. Silence is culpable
13. The rank is but the Guinea's Stamp
14. To be a soldier in war, a citizen in peace, and a gentleman always
15. To fill the bill
16. To step on one's grave
17. To cut one's throat
18. Two blades of grass truism
19. It cost less to feed two than one
20. Such is fame! Your name misspelt in a bulletin, or on a bullet in your body.
21. Causa victrix placuit deis, sed victa Catoni (the victorious cause pleased the gods, but the lost cause pleased Cato)
22. Where wealth accumulates, men decay
23. To play politics
24. Gratitude is the Curse of the Republics
25. To be soldiers in peace, and citizens in war
26. Brutality is a synonym for fun. So says the savage whilst gloating over the agonies of his victim
27. To be harmless as doves
28. To be as mischievous as serpents
29. A shark is never caught with a sardine hook
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31. No taxation without representation
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34. To out Pharisee the Pharisees
35. Fast est ab hoste doceri (It is right to be taught even by an enemy)
36. To be worth a pinch of salt
37. Justice is justice
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40. Generosus nascitur non fit (A gentleman is born, not made)
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42. To be soldiers in war, citizens in peace, and a gentleman always

- 43. To be a soldier in peace and a citizen in war
- 44. To be treated like a gentleman
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<https://doi.org/10.29162/pv.43.1.1189>

UDC 398.9(497.4):391=111

Original scientific paper

Received on 31 January 2026

Accepted for publication on 10 April 2026

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REPRESENTATIONS OF TEXTILE CULTURE IN SLOVENIAN PROVERBS

Abstract: Textiles are not merely economic goods but also carriers of social, cultural, and symbolic meanings. Focusing on the Slovenian cultural context, this article examines how textile production and related practices are reflected in proverbs and other short folklore forms. Drawing on a semantic analysis of Slovenian paremiological material, the analysis identifies elements of the traditional textile economy that are expressed in language and explores the figurative meanings they acquire within folklore discourse. It shows that thread, yarn, flax, wool, and textile-related crafts and professions serve as vehicles for transmitting knowledge, values, and experience, as well as for articulating concepts of work, community, and social order. The article thus demonstrates how the material aspects of textile production are intertwined with social and symbolic dimensions in folklore genres, revealing their role in shaping and communicating shared meanings and values within the Slovenian tradition.

Keywords: Slovenian folklore, textile production, proverbs, phrasemes, textile crafts, material culture

1. Introduction

Textile and clothing production have been inseparably intertwined with everyday life and economic activity, particularly in past societies. In pre-industrial periods, textile production constituted one of the key economic activities and a fundamental component of daily life. The textile trade played a central role

in the economy over long periods and in many cultures. Textiles were among the most valuable commodities traded along ancient trade routes such as the Silk Road and the demand for luxury textiles, such as silk, but also cotton, wool, and linen, drove commerce and cultural exchange between distant regions, facilitating economic growth and cultural diffusion (Beckert 2014, Bogan-sky 2013). Prior to the industrial innovations of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the production of fibers, yarn, and cloth was embedded in local communities, where knowledge, skills, and tools were transmitted from generation to generation. Textile making was thus quite literally woven into communal life—into work, knowledge, and everyday practices—traces of which can still be recognized today in proverbs and phrasemes. Precisely because of this deep entanglement with economic structures and everyday experience, textiles also became a powerful medium for the communication of meanings, values, and collective knowledge.

Words and textiles are inextricably linked; in English this connection is even clearer, as the word *text* actually derives from the Latin *texere*, which means to weave (Harper 2026). Words and symbols have been written on or in textiles for centuries. Silk was chosen as a medium for written documents in China in antique times; in medieval Europe people learned Bible stories from huge tapestries hung in churches and other public and private spaces; and from at least the 17th century women stitched verses about morality, virtue and family piety on their needlework samplers (Gordon 2013: 216–217). Over a period of about 150 years, from the French Revolution to 1930, an original form of folk art was created and developed in the countries of Central Europe: the production of various types of wall or table embroidered napkins that decorated domestic spaces. The images on these works of art were complemented by proverbs that expressed the moral values of the family and society of that time (Villani 2016).

However, the communicative capacity of textiles extends far beyond their use as literal writing surfaces. Through materials, techniques, patterns, and modes of use, textiles have long functioned as carriers of social meanings, values, and norms, rendering them readable as a system of signs within specific cultural

contexts. As such, textiles reflect the cultural, economic, and technological conditions of a given period and community (cf. Gordon 2013, Miller 2016: 29), while simultaneously conveying information about individuals by expressing taste, personality, social status, religious affiliation, occupation, age, and gender (Barnard 2005). It is clear that textiles are not merely essential materials for clothing and household use; their production and use can also be read as a form of language through which societies articulate social organization, value systems and also economic interdependence (Šrimpf Vendramin 2025).

While research on textiles has largely focused on their material and cultural dimensions, considerably less attention has been devoted to their symbolic aspects and to the ways in which these are manifested in immaterial forms. Yet an understanding of textile culture in all its layers—not only its material, but also its symbolic dimensions, as reflected, for instance, in language—offers deeper insights into social structures, including modes of social organization, shared values, and responses to economic and environmental change.

As both a material and a meaningful, symbolic dimension of human experience, textiles—and clothing in particular—possess pronounced economic as well as cultural significance. Their role is reflected not only in material culture but also in a rich linguistic and narrative tradition, including fairy tales, narratives, proverbs, and phrasemes, in which elements of textile culture have been preserved. These genres do not merely mirror aspects of the material world and textile production; rather, they employ textile imagery to articulate social norms, collective wisdom, gender relations, and conceptions of work, time, and fate (Mieder 2004: 4).

Slovenian phrasemes such as *presti niti človekove usode* [spinning the threads of man's destiny] (SSKJ² 2014) or *držáti (vsé) niti v (svôjih) rôkah* [to hold the threads in one's hands] (Keber 2025), as well as proverbs like “*Vsaka preja pride v statve* [Every yarn comes to the loom]”,¹ are not merely linguistic figures, but reflections of concrete experiences and aspects of

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all proverbs cited in this article are drawn from the Collection of Slovenian Proverbs 1.1, kept at the Institute of Slovenian Ethnology, which is presented in more detail later in the article.

past everyday life. Through them, one can discern how textile work and production were embedded in daily practices, along with the knowledge, experiences, values, and symbolic meanings associated with the making of textiles and clothing and with other facets of textile culture (Mieder 2004: 4).

This article examines the presence and functions of textile culture within Slovenian proverbial and phraseological material with the aim of identifying which elements of traditional textile production have found expression in language. The analysis primarily focuses on phrasemes and proverbs, while riddles, as a genre closely related to proverbs, are included as supplementary illustrative material. In a semantic context the analysis is concentrated on textile-related materials such as thread, yarn, flax, wool, and silk, as well as on tools (e.g. spinning wheel, loom, needle) and occupations (e.g. seamstress, tailor, weaver), and considers how these elements are represented and employed in proverbs, phrasemes, and other short folklore forms. Special attention is given to the ways in which expressions connected to textile production reflect the everyday experiences of past generations, their technological practices, and social organization, as well as shared symbolic and collective representations. The article further explores how originally stereotyped meanings associated with textile imagery persist or are reinterpreted in the context of broader social changes. By means of a semantic and symbolic analysis of textile and clothing related proverbs, the study demonstrates that textile symbolism in Slovenian folklore expressions functions not merely as a linguistic or aesthetic motif, but also as a reflection of concrete economic and social realities, particularly in relation to work, skills, and everyday economic life.

While the present study focuses on proverbs and phrasemes, textile elements can also be traced in other folkloric genres and everyday practices such as the gesture of lifting a hat as a form of greeting or in different rituals where textile were used as part of wedding or death rituals and even as part of the healing ritual with incantations (e.g. Kuret 1989; Dolenc 1999). These examples suggest that textile culture is embedded more broadly in cultural practice, although the following analysis concentrates on its expression in short folkloric forms.

2. Proverbs and phrasemes as a reflection of textile culture

The embeddedness of textiles in everyday life has been extensive both in the past and in the present—not only as a physical practice of production, but also as a cultural code reflected in language and in symbolic imagery, particularly in proverbs. Ethnolinguistic research has shown that proverbs can be understood as reflections of collective memory which, despite their apparent simplicity, often encode complex forms of knowledge, social structures, and shared representations. At the same time, by reducing the unfamiliar to the familiar, they provide interpretative frameworks through which complex situations can be made comprehensible. The meanings conveyed by proverbs may remain stable and recognizable over long periods, or they may gradually blur, transform, and be reinterpreted in response to changing social conditions (cf. Babič 2020: 125-127; Jakop 2022: 130).

As such, proverbs and phraseological units function as important carriers of cultural content and connotation. As forms of everyday speech that draw their content from lived experience, folklore genres, such as proverbs, not only preserve echoes of the material world, but also convey beliefs, values, and broader worldviews of the communities in which they are created, transmitted, and used (Kropej 1995; Bobkina 2004; Babič 2015). Among short folklore genres, sayings and proverbs are particularly prominent in this regard, as they encapsulate and transmit socially shared values and beliefs. They may express cultural meanings explicitly or implicitly, and these meanings can shift over time. Within paremiology and phraseology, such units are therefore often regarded as forms of cultural heritage, serving as repositories of social memory and indicators of a society's conceptual world. Through them, it is possible to trace changing social circumstances, norms, and values, as well as broader processes that shape and transform society (Jakop 2022: 130; Babič 2020: 125-127).

Although textiles and clothing constituted a central part of everyday life in the past and appear frequently across a wide range of folklore genres, systematic research on textile culture as reflected specifically in proverbs and phraseological material remains relatively limited. Existing studies from the broader field

of folklore studies tend to address individual aspects of textile symbolism or focus on particular cultural contexts rather than offering broader paremiological analyses. Researchers have been examining, for example, clothing and proverbs within specific religious or cultural communities, such as Russian Old Believers (Bobkina 2024), as well as the symbolic meanings of thread and spinning in European folklore (Mencej 2010) and the functions of textile and sartorial artefacts in Russian folktales (Ivleva 2009). Other contributions approach textile symbolism through literary, ethnographic, or historical perspectives, including studies on color symbolism in the folk literature of the Caucasus (Hunt and Chenciner 2006), the role of clothing as a symbolic and magical object in Slavic ritual contexts (Sedakova 2016), or comparative analyses of women's work and household roles as reflected in Biblical proverbs (Lang 2004). While these studies demonstrate the cultural and symbolic importance of textiles, clothing, and textile practices, they rarely focus on proverbs as a primary source for analyzing textile-related knowledge, values, and everyday practices.

Against this background, the study of clothing and textile culture-and its echoes in language, particularly in folklore and phrasemes-offers insights not only into the economic, social, political, and cultural conditions of specific historical periods, but also into the symbolic meanings and beliefs associated with them. Building on previous research into everyday life and its linguistic reflections in proverbs (Smith 2012; Babič and Voolaid 2023; Babič 2018; Šrampf Vendramin 2024a, 2025), this article examines the textile elements that appear in Slovenian proverbs, considering them both as components of past everyday practices and as echoes of craft-based and manufacturing activities that once formed an integral part of daily life.

The particular value of proverbs reflecting textile culture lies in their capacity to combine references to concrete work practices, materials, tools, and occupations. In doing so, they reveal not only aspects of the material world associated with textile production, but also non-material dimensions such as the gendered division of labor, the seasonality of tasks, and the collective memory of handicraft skills, processes, and knowledge. At the same time, proverbs preserve metaphorical and symbolic meanings

that have become conventionalized over time, granting certain expressions broader figurative significance (e.g. dress – man, thread – life). In this way, proverbs constitute a space in which the material and the symbolic intersect, offering insight into the interplay between the physical and the immaterial dimensions that shaped proverbial expression in the past and continue to resonate in the present.

3. Methodology

Methodologically, the article draws on an ethnolinguistic and semantic analysis of Slovenian proverbs and related short folklore forms. It brings together linguistic material with ethnological and historical data on textile production, use, and everyday practices, reading proverbial expressions in relation to the material, social, and economic contexts from which they emerged. By linking metaphorical language and conceptual structures to concrete forms of textile work, the study approaches proverbs as sites where practical knowledge, symbolic meanings, and collective experience intersect within textile culture.

The article is based on a collection of Slovenian proverbs 1.1 kept at the Institute of Slovenian Ethnology (ISN), ZRC SAZU, which was digitized in 2023. The collection comprises 37,390 units and is fully accessible through the CLARIN.SI repository.² To date, approximately 800 units have been identified in the collection that relate in various ways to textile and clothing culture. An initial analysis of the collection was conducted with the aim of determining the extent to which Slovenian proverbs reflect textile culture and the forms this reflection takes—ranging from textile production and the use of materials to clothing practices and their symbolic meanings. The first phase of the analysis

² The collection began to take shape through the work of folklorist Milko Matičev at the founding of the institute in 1951. Systematic organization and digitization, however, started later, with projects led by Marija Stanonik from 1997 onwards. The collection of proverbs and paremiological units was compiled through the transcription of proverbs from printed sources such as books, journals, and calendars, through collecting initiatives in various magazines, fieldwork, personal notes, and by reviewing older materials preserved in the ISN archive. As a result, the dating of the material—especially for older items—is not always reliable; nevertheless, it can be stated that the recorded units were documented or in use between 1578 and 2010.

involved keyword-based searches for terms related to clothing, such as *obleka* [clothing], *čevlji* [shoe], and *srajca* [shirt], which occur in well-known Slovenian proverbs also included in the paremiological optimum by Meterc (cf. Meterc 2016, 2017). In the second phase, a more systematic and semantically focused examination was carried out, targeting terms associated with production processes and tools (e.g. sewing, spinning, spinning wheel, distaff), occupations (e.g. tailor, seamstress, weaver), raw materials and textiles (e.g. flax, wool, silk, velvet), as well as garments and parts of clothing (e.g. coat, skirt, gloves, stockings, pocket). This semantic analysis and the resulting selection of paremiological units form the empirical basis of the present article.

In most of the proverbs identified in the collection, the lexical material consists primarily of general terms related to textile culture, clothing, and textile production. The semantic analysis reveals a notable absence of highly specific terminology referring to particular garments, fabrics, or materials (e.g. *bombaž* [cotton], *irh* [chamois leather]), although such terms are confirmed in other ethnographic and historical research on the subject. This may indicate that these expressions were either not in widespread use, were regionally or temporally limited, or were referred to by alternative naming conventions. A similar pattern can be observed with regard to certain items of clothing (e.g. *bluza* [blouse], *ruta* [(head)scarf], *avba* [type of traditional bonnet]), which are likewise absent from the collection, possibly due to their later emergence, dialectal variation, or limited integration into proverbial discourse.

Although many proverbs are recorded in standardized language, dialectal elements are also present, particularly in older and regionally marked variants, reflecting the oral origins and local embeddedness of the paremiological material.

- (1) *Mojškra (šivilja) Klara ponoči šiva, podnevi para.* [Klara the seamstress sews at night and unpicks by day.]
- (2) *Če se lepe ženske ne drži za firtuh (predpasnik) mož, primejo pa drugi zanj.* [If a beautiful woman's husband does not hold on to her apron, others will.]

- (3) *Žida (svila) in žamet pogasita ogenj na ognišu.* [Silk and velvet put out the fire on the fireplace.]

4. Textile production in proverbs and short folklore forms

Proverbs do not express only general truths about life and moral teachings, as noted in the definition of the proverb by the renowned paremiologist Wolfgang Mieder (2004: 4); they also constitute a valuable linguistic archive of knowledge about everyday work, handicraft and craft practices, and the economic logic of past communities (Jakop and Babič 2025). This is particularly true of textile production, which for centuries represented one of the fundamental domains of the subsistence economy. Many forms of textile practice—from the processing of flax and wool to spinning, weaving, and sewing—have found their reflection in proverbs, which preserve knowledge about materials, tools, skills, social roles, and values.

For centuries, textiles constituted one of the key fields of handicraft, craft, and later industrial activity. Tailors, seamstresses, weavers, dyers, and other textile artisans shaped the everyday life of communities through their work, as they provided essential goods in the form of fabrics and clothing. Their knowledge and the memory of their labor were transmitted from generation to generation and preserved not only in material culture and the objects they produced, but also in language—in proverbs, phrasemes, and other linguistic forms—which testify to how deeply textile work was interwoven with the everyday life of past communities.

This section presents a semantic analysis of Slovenian proverbs and other short folklore forms that refer to textile production. The analysis reveals several recurrent semantic clusters that structure the proverbial material and reflect different aspects of textile culture. These include references to textile artisans and occupations, materials and fibers, tools and production processes, as well as garments and clothing practices. Together, these semantic groupings provide a framework for examining how textile-related knowledge, practices, and symbolic meanings are encoded in proverbs.

4.1 Textile artisans

The economic importance of clothing production in the past is indicated by the fact that tailoring guilds were among the earliest professional associations in the territory of present-day Slovenia and are mentioned as an occupational group as early as 1281 (Bogataj 2004: 258). It is therefore not surprising that references to this economic activity also appear in short folklore genres.

Insights into the social function of tailors in the past are suggested by riddles such as

- (a) Kdo naredi gospoda? – Krojač. [Who makes a gentleman? - The tailor] (Babič 2021: 73).

But as well as by proverbs such as:

- (4) *Krojač naredi gospoda.* [The tailor makes a gentleman.]
 (5) *Krojač naredi človeka.* [The tailor makes the man.]
 (6) *Krojači so naredili že precej velikih gospodov.* [Tailors have already made quite a few great gentlemen.]

These proverbs testify not only to the importance of tailoring as a craft, but also to the significance of outward appearance shaped by clothing, and to the role of the tailor as the figure who materializes social status.³ In this sense, tailoring is presented as a practice through which social distinctions are made visible and recognizable. In several parts of Europe, especially during the period of guild organization, tailors accordingly enjoyed a relatively high social standing (Crowston 2008). However, historical sources relating to the territory of present-day Slovenia suggest a more ambivalent social position. At least in the nineteenth century, tailoring appears to have been a physically demanding occupation that did not necessarily guarantee economic security or elevated social status (Baš 1987: 75-81). On the contrary, evidence from other studies shows that tailors were often

³ This idea is also reflected in newer and still widely used variants such as *Obleka naredi človeka* ('Clothes make the man') (found also in Meterc 2023), which shift the focus from the artisan to the garment itself while preserving the same underlying meaning.

targets of ridicule, stereotyped as clumsy, physically weak, timid, chronically late, or associated with the perceived “feminine” nature of their work, which did not conform to dominant ideals of masculinity (Baš 1987: 81, Globočnik 2005: 351-352). In the nineteenth century, when some textile artisans operated outside the framework of peasant households as independent craftsmen, they were often perceived as marginal figures and, at times, as socially inferior. Such attitudes found expression in both linguistic and visual satire, most notably in painted beehive panels (*panjske končnice*), where tailors frequently appear as objects of caricature (Globočnik 2005).

This ambivalent social position, situated between economic necessity and social devaluation, is also articulated in proverbial discourse. Although the services of textile artisans were indispensable, their own appearance often remained modest, especially among those who worked in the countryside. The collection thus contains proverbs that can be interpreted figuratively as well as literally.

- (7) *Krojač nosi strgano obleko* (‘The tailor wears torn clothes’)

This proverb conveys the idea that those who produce essential goods for others do not necessarily benefit from their own work. A similar pattern is also found in the more widely used contemporary proverb *Kovačeva kobila je zmeraj bosa* (‘The blacksmith’s mare is always barefoot’) (also found in Meterc 2023), which conveys a comparable meaning through a different artisanal motif.

References to seamstresses also appear in the proverb collection, for example:

- (8) *Pri šivilji ni svile kupovati*. [One should not buy silk from a seamstress.]
 (9) *Od mojškre židanje draga*. [Silk from a seamstress is expensive.]

Seamstresses and female tailors were generally held in even lower esteem than their male counterparts. Their craft was also

subject to much stricter regulation (Crowston 2008). In the nineteenth century within the Habsburg Monarchy, where the Slovenian area also belonged in the past, women were permitted to sew, yet they were not allowed to operate independent workshops. The only form of independent activity available to them was millinery, that is, the production of women's headwear and ornamental accessories (Baš 1987: 76). Over time, attitudes towards seamstresses did change, and some achieved considerable recognition and esteem especially in cities such as Ljubljana (Tomažič 1983: 25–29). Nevertheless, it appears that they were also able to charge relatively high prices for their services, a fact alluded to with a mildly ironic or critical tone in the proverbs cited above.

Proverbs reveal not only the attitude towards certain textile artisans, but also the practical aspects of their work. Textile work followed natural cycles and was closely tied to the availability of raw materials (such as wool, flax, and hemp), weather conditions, and the rhythm of agricultural labor. A proverb referring to weavers illustrates this seasonal organization of work particularly clearly.

- (10) *Ko kukavica zapoje, je tkavec ob delo svoje* ('When the cuckoo sings, the weaver is out of work')

Weaving and spinning were primarily winter activities. With the arrival of spring—symbolically marked by the cuckoo's song—textile production came to a halt, as spring and summer were devoted to sowing, harvesting, and preparing raw materials. The proverb thus encodes the seasonal rhythm of textile labor and its dependence on agricultural cycles.

Clothing production likewise followed seasonal patterns, shaped both by the availability of materials and by the needs of the community. At least from the nineteenth century until the Second World War, the tailoring year unfolded in cycles determined by seasonal demand. Rural tailors and seamstresses followed a comparable work rhythm, with most of their activity concentrated in the autumn and winter months. During this period, they worked either in their own homes or travelled to the households of peasant clients to work, staying for several days

or even weeks to repair or produce garments. In return, they received board, lodging, and payment for their labor. In summer, when agricultural work took precedence, they were often left without work (Baš 1987: 75–78; Makarovič 2007: 43–44). This seasonal logic of clothing making is therefore reflected in the proverb:

- (11) *Ko na gradu ustreli, žnidar s stola pade!* ('When a shot is fired at the castle, the tailor falls from his chair')
(Tomažič 1983: 19)

In this case, the proverb refers to actual ceremonial gunshots fired from Ljubljana Castle, which traditionally took place ten days after Pentecost, on the Feast of the Holy Spirit, as part of a cathedral procession. These shots marked the arrival of summer and signaled a period of reduced demand for tailoring work, symbolically indicating the temporary pause in the tailor's activity (Tomažič 1983: 19).⁴ Beyond the temporal organization of work, proverbs also provide insight into the economic relationships that structured textile labor.

- (12) *Čigar prejo prela, tega kruh jela* [She eats the bread of the one whose yarn she spins]

These proverbs may be interpreted in two ways: either as reflections of mutual assistance within village communities, where women helped one another and were compensated with food and drink, or as references to the putting-out system, which persisted in rural Slovenia until the first half of the nineteenth century. In this system, a contractor supplied the raw material—yarn or thread—while the artisan processed it at home, either by spinning or weaving, and received payment or a share of the produce in return (Šorn 1978). In both cases, the proverb emphasizes the connection between work and subsistence, revealing how textile

⁴ During the winter months, the work was limited and done by the master craftsman alone or with an assistant. Orders increased in March and April, especially before Easter, and then gradually decreased until Pentecost. Summer orders for heavier, winter garments were rare and only increased again at the end of August and September, when tailors began to prepare the winter wardrobe. (Tomažič 1983:19–20).

labor was embedded in broader systems of exchange and economic relations.

4.2 *Raw materials: flax and wool*

Among the most frequent motifs in proverbs related to textile production are the raw materials from which yarns and fabrics were made. Wool and flax are mentioned particularly often, reflecting their status as the fundamental textile materials in the territory of present-day Slovenia. Archaeological and ethnographic research confirms their long-standing importance (cf. Makarovič 2007, Gleba and Mannering 2012, Grömer 2016). In proverbs, these materials point not only to the raw-material basis of textile production, but also to the seasonal rhythms of work and the knowledge required for their processing.

Flax occupies a particularly prominent place in Slovenian proverbs related to textile production, where it appears not only as a raw material but also as a marker of time, labor, and economic value.⁵ The proverb

- (13) *Lan je lan, z njim je posla leto in dan.* (Flax is flax—working with it takes a year and a day.)

encapsulates the defining feature of flax production: its long, continuous, and demanding processing cycle. This concise formulation refers to the entire sequence of tasks, from sowing in spring to the finished textile a year later, and conveys experiential knowledge of flax as a material that requires patience, persistence, and sustained effort. At the same time, the proverb functions metaphorically, expressing a broader life principle—that good results depend on time, care, and long-term commitment.

⁵ The prominence of flax in proverbial material corresponds to its long-standing economic and cultural importance. Archaeological remains from the prehistoric pile-dwelling settlement at Ljubljansko barje, dated to around 3400 BCE, attest to the very early presence of flax as a cultivated plant in the region (Tolar and Velušček 2009). In later periods, flax remained a crucial raw material, particularly in areas where domestic textile production formed part of a subsistence economy. In certain regions of Slovenian ethnic territory, such as the Škofja Loka area or between the Gail Valley and Villach in present-day Austria, it even constituted a key economic resource from the mid-seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth century (Kobe Erzenšek 1986).

Flax cultivation and processing were strictly subordinated to seasonal rhythms. Sowing, pulling, drying, and breaking had to follow a precise sequence dictated by weather and natural conditions, and knowledge of this annual cycle was essential for producing high-quality fiber. Calendar proverbs and agricultural sayings therefore functioned as practical guides that helped communities coordinate their work in time:

- (14) *O sv. Jerneju lan sejat, o sv. Jakobu ajda, o sv. Ani repa, potem mora biti nedelja.* [On St. Bartholomew's Day sow flax, on St. James's buckwheat, on St. Anne's turnips—then it must be Sunday.]

Weather-related proverbs further emphasize the dependence of flax quality on environmental conditions:

- (15) *Jasen in sončen svečnice dan ženam obeta dobro za lan.* [A clear and sunny Candlemas Day promises women good flax.]
 (16) *Suho vreme, lan še pri tleh, če ga ne plevaš, ti bo le v zasmeh.* [Dry weather, when the flax is still low to the ground—if you do not weed it, it will only bring you mockery.]

Other sayings stress the importance of timely harvesting and processing:

- (17) *Lan raste še devet dni, ko odcvete.* [Flax continues to grow for nine days after it has finished flowering.]

Such proverbs are not primarily metaphorical; rather, they function as temporal planners—a form of agricultural calendar through which past communities organized everyday life. By observing recurring natural patterns, people interpreted signs that helped them anticipate weather conditions and the success of the harvest, both of which directly affected communal well-being. This reflects an understanding of time as cyclical and repetitive, structured by annually recurring rhythms and signs (Babič 2015: 63–70, 2016).

Beyond its role in production, flax also appears in proverbs as a marker of economic security and wealth. This is clearly expressed in the saying:

- (18) *Najlepši zakladi so za gospodinjo, če ima s platnom napolnjeno skrinjo.* [A housewife's finest treasures are a chest filled with linen.]

Here, linen cloth is presented as a form of stored value. A full chest of linen symbolized security and played an important role in life-cycle rituals: it constituted part of a bride's dowry, served as burial cloth, and frequently appeared in inheritance inventories (Destovnik 1996, Smrdel 1998: 93, Makarovič 2007: 391). In this sense, flax emerges not only as an agricultural and textile resource, but also as a symbol of perseverance, order, cyclical time, and prosperity, linking natural rhythms with labour that generates both material and symbolic wealth.

Although flax was present very early, wool became established as a material for clothing somewhat later.⁶ Nevertheless, the prominence of wool in the proverbial material indicates how deeply this raw material was embedded in rural everyday life. Wool was a key by-product of animal husbandry and in some Slovenian regions sheep farming remained the most important economic activity until the Second World War. Wool thus shaped many aspects of daily life, including the production of socks, gloves, rugs, and bags (Balkovec 1986: 104-105, Matkovič 2012: 9).

Proverbs frequently prioritize wool over other goods, emphasizing its durability and long-term value:

- (19) *Dobra ovca da malo mleka, pa veliko volne.* [A good sheep gives little milk but much wool.]

⁶ Archaeological evidence from neighbouring Alpine regions suggests that wool production developed around 2000 BCE, during the Bronze Age, alongside the intentional breeding of sheep. Sheep farming and wool subsequently played a central role in the Alpine economy, part of which is also mayor part of Slovenian territory, providing one of the most important sources of textile fibres. The basic techniques of wool processing developed at that time have remained essentially unchanged to the present day (Šrumpf Vendramin 2024b: 33-35).

- (20) *Bolje dati volno, nego živo ovco.* [It is better to give wool than a living sheep.]
 (21) *Kdor dobi ovco, naj dobi tudi volno z njo.* [Whoever receives a sheep should also receive its wool.]

These sayings present wool as a renewable resource and a symbol of prudence and sustainable benefit, contrasting enduring value with short-term gain.

Beyond its material significance, wool often acquires metaphorical meanings. In many proverbs it stands for the expected result of effort, but also for disappointment when expectations are not fulfilled:

- (22) *Veliko krika, pa malo volne.* [Much noise, but little wool.]
 (23) *Kockar pride, da bi dobil volno, a odhaja ostrižen.* [The gambler comes hoping to get wool, but leaves shorn.]
 (24) *Kdor za tujo volno hodi, sam ostrižen domov pride.* [Whoever goes after another's wool returns home shorn.]

Across the proverbial material, wool appears not only as a tangible raw material but also as a measure of value, effort, and outcome. Whether considered in terms of abundance, loss, or moral judgement, wool consistently functions as an index of quality and result. In this sense, proverbs referring to wool form a bridge to a broader proverbial principle: that the quality of the final product—material or social—depends fundamentally on the quality of its origin.

The importance of good-quality raw material is repeatedly emphasized. Proverbs carry the idea that a good final product depends on a good starting point - an insight rooted in the everyday experience of textile workers, yet generalized into broader life wisdom.

- (25) *Kakršna preja, tako bo platno.* [As the yarn is, so will the cloth be.]
 (26) *Kakovo runo, takova ovca.* [As the fleece is, so is the sheep.]

Such expressions reflect the lived reality of craft communities, where the connection between nature and production was directly experienced. Good wool implied a healthy animal and high-quality yarn, both of which signaled security and survival. These proverbs therefore articulate both technical knowledge and a broader social understanding that the quality of the whole depends on care for its origin, both materially and symbolically.

Taken together, proverbs referring to flax and wool reveal how deeply textile raw materials were embedded in everyday experience and economic reasoning, articulating practical knowledge about production, seasonality, and material quality.

4.3 Textile processes and tools

The cultivation of flax or the shearing of sheep alone did not result in a finished textile product; what was essential was the long and multi-stage processing of raw materials. From a flax stalk or a sheep's fleece to woven cloth, textile production involved an entire chain of operations that required knowledge, time, and specialized tools. The demanding and often arduous nature of this work is captured in the riddle:

- (b) *Mali lepo narejeni, pa se žena pri njem muči - Kolovrat.*
 [Small and beautifully made, yet a woman struggling at it. - Spinning wheel.] (Babič 2021: 69)

This riddle contains an implicit commentary on women's textile work. Although the spinning wheel is presented as a finely crafted object, it is also associated with prolonged physical effort and bodily exhaustion. Such riddles draw attention to the often-overlooked yet crucial role of women in household economies and textile production. Tools such as the spinning wheel were therefore not merely technical implements but also carried cultural and symbolic meanings related to gendered divisions of labor and power relations within the community—meanings that are otherwise documented in historical and ethnographic sources. The gendered nature of textile labor is also expressed in the proverb:

- (27) *Kakor mati prede, tako hči tke.* [As the mother spins, so the daughter weaves.]

This saying symbolically links textile work with the intergenerational transmission of knowledge, family values, and women's social roles. For women, textile work functioned not only as economic activity but also as a form of socialization and preparation for adulthood. Through spinning, weaving, and embroidery, girls learned gendered roles and actively participated in shaping their future life paths, particularly through the preparation of their dowry (Auslander 2015, Gordon 2013, Parker 1984, Novak 1964).

Tools such as looms, spinning wheels, distaffs, and spindles thus formed an indispensable part of women's textile culture, especially during the winter months. In many regions, winter spinning gatherings served not only productive but also important social functions (cf. Novak 1964, Gordon 2013: 123). At the same time, spinning was subject to regulation. In certain periods of the calendar and life cycle, spinning was strictly prohibited, as it was considered an activity of strong symbolic potency. In many European traditions, spinning was understood as a bridge between the world of the living and the otherworld. Consequently, during liminal periods-particularly the Christmas - New Year season and Carnival, when contact with supernatural beings was believed to be possible-spinning was avoided. In the Slovenian cultural context, the observance of these prohibitions was overseen by female supernatural beings such as Pehtra Baba, Zlata Baba, Torka, or Kvatrnica, who fulfilled both protective and punitive functions. Violations of these prohibitions were believed to have serious consequences, including deformities in humans and animals, illness, misfortune in household and agricultural work, adverse weather conditions, or even unwanted contact with the dead (Kropej 2008; Mencej 2013: 63–90). Although such prohibitions are not directly reflected in proverbs, proverbial material related to spinning nevertheless emphasizes the seasonal nature of this activity:

- (28) *Kadar se začne post, vrzi preslico v gozd.* [When Lent begins, throw the distaff into the forest.]

- (29) *Ko se dan podaljšuje, se kodelja po malem zmanjšuje.*
[As the days grow longer, the flax tow gradually diminishes.]

These sayings associate spinning with the winter period, when other agricultural tasks were suspended and time was available for processing yarn and preparing textile fibers.

Between raw material and finished textile, thread occupies a central position. It is the immediate product of fibre processing and, at the same time, one of the oldest and most productive metaphors in proverbial language. On a symbolic level, thread represents a fundamental element of textile production while also functioning as a widely shared metaphor associated with work, life, and human existence. Its symbolism is deeply embedded not only in proverbs but also in other folklore genres, where thread frequently serves as a carrier of meaning, order, connection, and continuity. This connection can already be observed in ancient mythology, where the three goddesses known as the Moirai presided over human fate: Clotho spun the thread of life, Lachesis measured it, and Atropos cut it. A similar function is performed in Slovenian mythological tradition by the beings called *sojenice*, who determine an individual's fate at birth (Mencej 2010; Krojež 2008). In Slovenian folklore, thread often appears as a symbol of transience, particularly as a link between birth and death and between the worlds of the living and the dead.

While this explicit “thread of life” symbolism is not present in the Institute of Slovenian Ethnology proverb collection, several proverbs connect thread with health and recovery:

- (30) *Bolezen gre v človeka z vozom, iz človeka po niti.* [Illness enters a person by the cart, but leaves by the thread.]
 (31) *Bolezen po vrvi, zdravje po niti.* [Illness comes by rope, health by thread.]
 (32) *Zdravje curkom doli, po niti gori.* [Health flows downward in a stream, but rises upward by a thread.]

In these expressions, illness is associated with rope—strength, force, suddenness—while recovery is linked to thread, symbolizing slowness, fragility, and gradual healing. Thread thus be-

comes a metaphor for the delicate and patient process of restoring balance, highlighting the vulnerability of the human body and the value of perseverance.

Proverbs mentioning thread also articulate principles of household economy and everyday management, expressing the experiential logic that accumulation is slow and demanding, whereas loss can be sudden:

- (33) *Premoženje gre curkom dol, po niti pa gor.* [Wealth goes down in a stream, but rises by a thread.]
- (34) *Imetje se po niti nabira, po vrvi zapravi.* [Property is accumulated by a thread, but squandered by a rope.]
- (35) *Dolg pride po vrvi, odhaja po niti.* [Debt comes by rope and goes away by thread.]

The next riddle highlights the paradoxical nature of thread and yarn: physically light and fragile, yet symbolically powerful and effective, far exceeding their material properties.

- (c) *Jaz vem za tako stvar, ki je sto konjev ne odvleče na breg, jaz sam pa jo odnesem - Klobka.* [I know of something that a hundred horses cannot pull uphill, yet I can carry it myself - A ball of yarn.] (Babič 2021: 69)

Today, thread retains its symbolic value primarily in language, where it appears in common phraseological expressions. Among the most frequently used are *imeti vse niti v rokah* [to have all the threads in one's hands] and the red thread. The former denotes control and influence, often exercised behind the scenes, while the latter refers to a central theme or guiding idea that runs through a whole—such as a text or an argument (Keber 2025).

If thread represents the individual life course, weaving is the act that transforms these threads into a whole—a life story or even a cosmic order. In many mythological traditions, weaving functions as a cosmic act: through weaving, the world is created, the order of nature is structured, and the rhythm of time is determined (Scheid, Svenbro and Volk 2001, McLeod, Molly 2022). In some cultures, weaving symbolizes the very fabric of the universe. For example, in Hindu mythology, the god Vishnu

is regarded as the weaver of creation, who weaves cosmic order from threads (Pattanaik 2012). Similarly, in Greek philosophical thought, the symbolism of weaving is expressed through the concept of *logos*, understood as the binding thread of reality, the meaning that “spins” order out of chaos (Scheid, Svenbro and Volk 2001). This idea is also expressed in the proverb:

(36) *Križ so statve, na katerih se tke človek.* [The cross is the loom on which a person is woven.]

Here, weaving is not merely manual labor, but a symbolic process through which the human being is formed.

Taken together, proverbs and riddles referring to textile processes and tools show that spinning and weaving were perceived not only as demanding forms of manual labour, but also as activities endowed with strong symbolic significance. Through tools, seasonal rhythms, and metaphors of thread and weaving, these expressions articulate ideas about gender roles, the organization of work, the fragility of life, and the gradual formation of human destiny, thus linking everyday textile practices with broader cultural and cosmological frameworks.

4.4. *Clothing*

Slovenian proverbs do not refer only to various aspects of textile production, but also to clothing as its final product. Garments that appear in proverbs often carry metaphorical meanings, articulating a broader field of connotations related to appearance, status, values, and interpersonal relations is articulated. The topic of clothing in Slovenian proverbs has been discussed in greater detail elsewhere (Šrampf Vendramin 2024a); the present section, therefore, provides only a brief summary of key findings relevant to the broader analysis of textile culture.

In everyday life, clothing plays an important social role: it shapes interpersonal relations, social situations, and professional environments. It creates first impressions, evokes respect, and contributes to perceptions of personal orderliness, self-image, and sometimes even moral worth (cf. Hutson and Rodriguez 2016, Simmel 2000, Barnard 2005). This dimension is encapsulated in the well-known proverb:

- (37) *Obleka (ne) naredi človeka* [Clothes (do not) make the man].⁷

The Latin formulation *vestis virum facit* ('clothes make the man') was already recorded by the Dutch humanist and philosopher Erasmus of Rotterdam in his *Adagia* in 1520, pointing to the long-standing association between clothing and social identity (Atkins 2017). It is not surprising that among clothing-related terms, *obleka* (clothing, garment, dress) is by far the most frequently mentioned item in Slovenian proverbs, functioning as a general designation for clothing or attire, including formal dress (Meterc 2023). This tension between outward appearance and inner moral qualities is articulated particularly clearly in a number of proverbs:

- (38) *Kdor nima v srcu lepote, ga tudi lepa obleka ne polepša.*
[He who has no beauty in his heart is not made beautiful even by fine clothing.]
- (39) *En madež pokvari tudi najlepšo obleko.* [One stain spoils even the finest garment.]

Rather than reflecting isolated personal observations, such proverbs articulate broader social expectations and systems of value. They operate through moral contrasts, juxtaposing the social importance of outward appearance with the primacy of inner qualities and personal integrity.

At the same time, proverbial discourse makes clear that outward appearance itself was subject to strong normative regulation. The value placed on cleanliness and propriety of dress was traditionally high in Western culture, as reflected in proverbs such as:

⁷ The coexistence of the partially antonymous proverbs *Obleka naredi človeka* and *Obleka ne naredi človeka* further illustrates the flexibility of proverbial discourse, where contrasting evaluations can coexist and be activated depending on context. As has been noted in studies of antonymous Slovenian proverbs, such pairs may differ not only in meaning but also in their degree of recognition and usage among speakers (Meterc 2013).

- (40) *Obrabljena obleka ima malo ugleda.* [Worn-out dress has little prestige.]
 (41) *Lepe obleke ne more vsak nositi, čeden pa mora vsak biti.* [Not everyone can wear a nice suit, but everyone should be neat.]

These sayings express a social norm according to which individuals were expected to present themselves in an orderly and respectable manner. Neglect, dirtiness, or inappropriateness were regarded as socially undesirable and as deviations from accepted standards of respectability. Clean clothing has formed an integral part of personal hygiene at least since the Renaissance, when changing clothes was considered equivalent to washing the body (Remec 2015: 245-248).

Alongside these normative expectations, proverbs also reflect the practical realities of clothing use in everyday life. Proverbs further indicate that garments were commonly altered, repurposed, and worn until they were completely worn out.

- (42) *Še iz vsake praznične obleke je nastala vsakdanja.* [Yet every festive dress has become a casual one.]
 (43) *Lepa obleka kratko traja.* [A beautiful dress is short-lived.]

These two proverbs recall the widespread practice whereby better, festive garments were eventually downgraded for everyday or work use. At the same time, they point to the limited lifespan of clothing—whether due to physical wear or changes in fashion—and to the necessity of continual maintenance, repair, and renewal of one's wardrobe.

In proverbs, clothing is not merely a material object; it also reflects gender stereotypes and social roles, as noted by paremiological research (cf. Babič 2018). Trousers (*hlače*), for example, frequently appear as a symbol of male authority or control within family relations:

- (44) *Kjer žena hlače nosi, si mož kruha prosi.* [Where the wife wears trousers, the husband asks for bread.]

- (45) *Gorje možu, ki mu je žena slekla hlače.* [Woe to the man whose wife has taken off his trousers.]

By contrast, items such as the skirt or apron function as symbols of femininity and maternal roles:

- (46) *Mati mora imeti velik predpasnik, da pokrije vse napake svojega otroka.* [A mother must have a large apron to cover all her child's faults.]

Taken together, these expressions show that clothing in proverbs reflects not only the material world, but also social and family structures, value systems, and power relations, as well as a broader economy of appearance. At the same time, they point to the diachronic variability of proverbial material, in which motifs, formulations, and degrees of usage change over time, while underlying patterns of meaning remain relatively stable.

5. Conclusion

This study examines Slovenian proverbs and other short folklore forms as a source for understanding textile culture not only as a material and economic practice, but also as a symbolic and conceptual system embedded in everyday language. The focus on paremiological material has shown that proverbs form a particularly rich linguistic archive of knowledge about textile production, the organization of labor, and the social meanings attached to materials, tools, and clothing—insights that in many respects align with findings from ethnographic research.

Proverbs do not simply record textile practices as technical or historical facts. Rather, they condense concrete experiences of textile work into shared statements of knowledge, value, and moral judgement. Seasonal rhythms of labor, assessments of material quality, gendered divisions of work, and economic relations between producers and clients are all articulated in proverbial form, where practical instruction, social commentary, and symbolic meaning overlap.

In the proverbial material, references to raw materials, tools, work processes, artisans, and clothing recur with notable con-

sistency. Through these motifs, proverbs express broader understandings of time, work, and social order, in which material resources are closely linked to ideas of responsibility, stability, and social position.

Particularly telling is the way in which textile elements move from concrete reference to metaphorical use. Thread, yarn, and weaving illustrate this shift most clearly. While firmly grounded in production processes, they acquire symbolic meanings connected with life, health, fate, patience, and continuity.

Proverbs referring to clothing similarly show how garments function both as material objects and as markers of identity, morality, and power relations. The ambivalence expressed in sayings about clothing—between outward appearance and inner worth, respectability and deception—points to the normative role of proverbs in social evaluation. In this sense, textile-related proverbs do not merely reflect past realities, but actively participated in shaping social expectations and behavior.

By combining ethnolinguistic and semantic analysis with ethnological and historical knowledge of textile production and use, the study demonstrates the analytical potential of paremiological material for the study of material culture. Proverbs and related short folklore forms prove to be a productive meeting point between language and lived experience, where concrete practices of work are transformed into metaphorical expressions and conceptual patterns. This approach makes it possible to trace how everyday textile activities were not only performed, but also interpreted, evaluated, and remembered within the linguistic tradition.

Overall, the analysis confirms that textiles appear not only as products of labor, but as a conceptual domain through which communities articulated their understanding of work, gender relations, economic practices, and moral order. Proverbs thus function as a linguistic fabric in which material practices, symbolic meanings, and collective experience are interwoven. Approaching textile culture through paremiological material therefore offers valuable insight into the ways in which everyday work was transformed into shared knowledge and enduring cultural meaning.

Acknowledgement

The research for this paper was supported by the Slovenian Research Agency through project Language, culture and values: economic images of everyday life in folklore forms (J6-50197) and Ethnological, Anthropological and Folklore Studies Research on Everyday Life (research core funding, ARRS P6-0088).

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<https://doi.org/10.29162/pv.43.1.1152>

UDC 811.111'373.7:81'27:316.472.4=111

Original scientific paper

Received on 13 November 2025

Accepted for publication on 15 April 2026

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PROVERBS, SYMBOLIC CAPITAL, AND SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE: A BOURDIEUSIAN SURVEY OF PAREMIOLOGY

Abstract: This article applies the fundamentals of Pierre Bourdieu's Field Theory to the analysis of the use of proverbs in communication. According to the French sociologist, human interactions are determined by the symbolic capital held by participants in these interactions. Regarding proverbs, their anonymity and folkloric nature adds to their symbolic capital, motivating their use as a communication device believed to grant the speaker an argumentative advantage. This paper, in addition to repositioning proverbs within the Bourdieusian dichotomy of *doxa* and *habitus*, analyzes how certain proverbial uses may result in what Bourdieu termed "symbolic violence." To prove this, and after noticing a relatively frequent use of proverbs by Elon Musk on his Twitter/X account, a search for proverbial uses that could be considered aggressive was conducted to demonstrate how such proverbial references may exemplify Bourdieu's concept of 'symbolic violence.'

Keywords: Bourdieu, *doxa*, Elon Musk, *habitus*, paremiology, symbolic violence

0. Preamble

Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002) is one of the most influential intellectuals of the 20th century. The French sociologist left an indelible mark across a number of disciplines, such as those involving education and communication theories, among others. His com-

plex sociological model, known as Field Theory, helps us understand interpersonal dynamics based on the Bourdieusian concept of 'capital', as well as other ideas that are central to his model and which will be discussed below. This framework was developed by Bourdieu during his stay in Algeria, where he originally arrived during the Franco-Algerian war to serve one year of his military service, but remained for several years as a lecturer and researcher on the ethnography of the Kabyle people, a Berber ethnic group. It was in relation to the study of these people that Bourdieu apparently first noticed the importance of proverbs as a communication device and part of their cultural heritage (Bourdieu 1977), although he never undertook a thorough examination of their relevance for social and communicative interactions. Despite this, Bourdieu's theories have proved to be suitable for analyzing how proverbs are used in communication, revealing a specific, spurious use of proverbs that may be explained through Bourdieu's concept of 'symbolic violence', particularly in the context of socio-political debate.

Although the use of proverbs to defend political ideas is a topic that has motivated numerous publications as of late, most notably in this journal, both top-down (see Konstantinova 2020; Tserpes 2021), as well as bottom-up (see Konstantinova 2019; Busau 2021), this paper aims to analyze the use of proverbs within the context of socio-political debate in connection with some of the central concepts in Bourdieu's model of social interaction, most notably in relation to the concept of 'symbolic violence,' under the assumption that this approach provides the foundation for an insightful analysis of how and for what purpose proverbs may be used under certain circumstances. For this reason, and in order to provide a better understanding of Bourdieu's Field Theory and its relation to the use of proverbs, some central concepts in Bourdieu's model, such as 'capital,' *'habitus,'* and *'doxa'* will be surveyed. Before that, and to delimit the scope of the present study, a working definition of 'proverb' will be presented, elaborating on some of the most widely accepted attempts by various authoritative proverb scholars. Using Bourdieu's theory as the framework, this study intends to document how the use of proverbs may lead to symbolic violence, particularly in the case of relevant figures who, to continue using Bourdieu's terminology,

enjoy a high level of symbolic capital and use their privileged position to promote their ideas with the help of the dogmatic character of proverbs. To this end, Elon Musk's Twitter/X account was surveyed for his use of proverbs in the months leading up to the composition of this paper, and several cases were found that illustrate the use of proverbs as symbolic violence. However, the purpose is not to present an exhaustive survey of Elon Musk's tweets for his use of proverbs resulting in symbolic violence; rather, some of his tweets are used here to illustrate an "aggressive" use of paremiology that, despite having been noted (see Russell, 1999), has not yet been related to Bourdieu's framework. Moreover, the choice of Musk for this purpose is not arbitrary but lies in his cultural and social influence as one of the most vocal spokespeople for conservative ideas globally and as the individual with the largest following on Twitter/X (Gupta 2024).

1. Scope of study

This study was motivated by recognizing the suitability of Pierre Bourdieu's postulates for analyzing how and why proverbs are used in communication. Proverbs are multi-word communicative devices that encapsulate the traditional wisdom, beliefs, and customs of a people. Among the different phraseological categories, the proverb is arguably the most difficult type of phraseologism to define; nonetheless, a working definition must be provided to establish the limits of this study.

Paremiology has developed greatly since the second half of the 20th century and is of considerable interest to a variety of fields of knowledge. The reason for this is the multifaceted nature of proverbs, in which linguistic, cultural, folkloristic, or psychological aspects intertwine. It is due to this complexity that a unanimously accepted definition of proverb has not been agreed upon yet. A. Taylor (1890–1973), one of the parents of modern Paremiology, went as far as stating that an

incommunicable quality tells us this sentence is proverbial and that one is not. Hence no definition will enable us to identify positively a sentence as proverbial Those who do not speak a language can never recognize all its proverbs, and similarly much that is truly

proverbial escapes us in Elizabethan and older English. Let us be content with recognizing that a proverb is a saying current among the folk (Taylor 1931: 3).

However, in order to avoid leaving it at the reader's discretion to decide whether a certain element qualifies as a proverb, scholars have composed numerous definitions which, despite agreeing on the basics, differ with regard to some of the features that should be considered when determining whether a given phraseologism may indeed be considered a proverb. After carefully reviewing the explanations provided by some of the most authoritative and highly regarded scholars in the subject, it can be affirmed that a proverb

- 1) is of relative brevity (Mieder 1996: 597, 2004: 3)
- 2) is often of unknown origin (Corpas Pastor 1996: 148)
- 3) has a fixed memorizable structure (Mieder 2004: 3)
- 4) has syntactic and textual independence (Corpas Pastor 1996: 148; Honeck 1997: 11-12)
- 5) is used for its dogmatism (Dobrovol'skij and Piirainen 2005: 51)
- 6) fulfills a certain communicative function (Mieder 2005: 209)
- 7) often shows an aesthetical inclination (Villers 2022)
- 8) is generally used figuratively (Honeck 1997: 84; Dobrovol'skij and Piirainen 2005: 52)

Although these are the most frequently cited defining features considered in the various definition attempts analyzed, the heterogeneity of the proverbial stock of any language includes items that may not fulfill all these requisites, a clear example of which is the lack of rhetorical devices in many proverbs, as mentioned in 7). This complexity often leads to the misclassification of different types of phrasemes as proverbs, which, in turn, hinders the production of a widely accepted definition. Hence, for the sake of exemplification, when we refer to proverbs in the present paper, we mean items such as "Strike while the iron is hot" (Wilson 1970: 781), which meets most of the characteristics listed above. On the other hand, phrases such as "to kick the bucket" (Ayto 2010: 194) or "like a bull in a china shop" (Ayto 2010:

48), despite showing an undeniable degree of “proverbiality” as alluded to by Taylor in the quote above, lack one of the unambiguous defining features of proverbs that distinguishes them from other phraseological categories: their textual independence; that is, proverbs, contrary to other types of phraseologisms are considered to be complete sentences. The reason for this is that, to use either of the two examples mentioned, the speaker needs to add other elements to compose a grammatically correct sentence with a complete meaning; accordingly, S. Fiedler (2007: 39–40, 43–44) identifies “to kick the bucket” and “like a bull in a china shop” as a ‘phraseological nomination’ and a ‘stereotyped comparison’ respectively.

Apart from the formal aspects of proverbs that help us conduct a coherent analysis, there is an element that becomes apparent in their connection to the Bourdieusian model: their traditionality as the result of being elements of folklore handed down from generation to generation (Dundes 2007). This causes many proverbs to “embody conservative values and perspectives and encourage respect for authority” (Louis 2000: 178), which plays a key role in the perceived dogmatic character of proverbs. Likewise, the datedness of proverbs and their peremptoriness are vital to understanding how proverbs exemplify Bourdieu’s Field Theory, especially in relation to how symbolic capital affects social interactions. As the French author explained,

Utterances receive their value (and their sense) only in their relation to a market, characterized by a particular law of price formation. The value of the utterance depends on the relation of power that is concretely established between the speakers’ linguistic competences, understood both as their capacity for production and as their capacity for appropriation and appreciation (Bourdieu 1991: 67).

In the case of proverbs, this occurrence presents some peculiarities because, contrary to quotations, which can be readily attributed to respected authors with, presumably, a significant amount of symbolic capital supporting their claim, proverbs derive their perceived sense of legitimacy from their unknown origin as manifestations of popular wisdom. Thus, the anonymous nature of proverbs confers on the speakers the argumentation to

defend their point of view, aligning it with a framework of debate regarded as legitimate and beneficial to society. As will be explained below, this is highly relevant for understanding the connections between proverb-use and Bourdieu's conceptualization of how interpersonal exchanges are governed by various regulating factors, especially in the case of linguistic interactions.

2. Overview of Bourdieusian concepts and Field Theory

Given the complexity of the model proposed by Bourdieu, some elements of his taxonomy may require explanation to demonstrate their suitability for analyzing how proverbs are used by speakers in communication, particularly with regard to their function as symbolic violence, which is the main focus of the present article. These concepts are:

- Capital
- Symbolic violence
- *Doxa*
- *Habitus*
- Field

A problem that one might encounter when approaching Bourdieu's works is the fact that the French author rarely provides clear, straightforward definitions of the concepts he uses, which are fundamental for a proper understanding of the social model he proposed, known as Field Theory. For this reason, it is often more accessible to rely on third-party analyses of Bourdieu's works, whose verbose and convoluted style makes him a rather inaccessible author for readers who are neophytes in sociological matters in general and Bourdieu's publications in particular. First, it must be considered that Bourdieu conceptualizes human interactions in terms of commercial exchanges. Consequently, an individual's actions, or in the case of our analysis, his or her words, are assigned a certain value according to his or her 'capital'.

To most readers, 'capital' relates to an economic context. However, in Field Theory, the concept of 'capital' is broader, as "Bourdieu's purpose is to extend the sense of the term 'cap-

ital' by employing it in a wider system of exchanges whereby assets of different kinds are transformed and exchanged within complex networks or circuits within and across different fields" (Moore 2008: 99). Therefore, in addition to economic capital, Bourdieu also identifies symbolic capital, *i.e.*, an individual's prestige as perceived by others; cultural capital, *i.e.*, an individual's acquired knowledge and skills; or social capital, *i.e.*, an individual's relationships and connections. These concepts may be used to explain why proverbs are used and how a speaker employs them in different situations. In Bourdieu's system, human interactions are determined by an individual's "cultural and social resources" (Crossley 2008: 88) and these interactions are motivated by the "accumulation and exchange [of cultural and social resources] as humans struggle to maintain and enhance their position in the social order" (Swartz 2013: 55). More relevant to the purpose of the present article, proverbs may be used to affirm one's stance on a subject in connection with the symbolic and cultural capital attributed to proverbs, which in some cases produces what Bourdieu labeled as 'symbolic violence,' that is, the way in which "contemporary social hierarchies and social inequality, as well as the suffering that they cause, are produced and maintained less by physical force than by forms of symbolic domination" (Schubert, 2008: 179). Accordingly, violence may not only be physical, but also symbolic and to produce it, proverbs prove an invaluable device, as will be shown. As D. L. Swartz (2013: 89) explains,

[Symbolic violence] is experienced as a taken-for-granted, natural, inevitable state of affairs, especially on the part of the dominated. The language of symbolic violence is intended to capture this effect of symbolic power. [...] Bourdieu offers the following definition: 'Symbolic violence is "a gentle violence, imperceptible and invisible even to its victims, exerted for the most part through the purely symbolic channels of communication (Swartz, p. 83) and cognition (more precisely, misrecognition), recognition, or even feeling' (Swartz 2013: 89).

Consequently, our interpretation of symbolic violence in relation to proverbs is a consciously fallacious employment of proverbs for self-justification based on the premise that the beliefs they

contain are indisputable. Even though society has advanced in many respects, particularly regarding some backward social ideas expressed in proverbs such as the justification for the mistreatment of women, the speaker employs them to rebut the arguments of the other party. Hence, since Bourdieu considers language an “instrument of action and power” (Bourdieu 1991: 37), it may be used as a tool of domination that can only be applied unidirectionally by the dominant class towards the dominated, whose power “[derives] not only from possession of material resources but also from possession of cultural and social resources” (Crossley 2008: 86). Furthermore, not only does the dominating class enjoy its position of prominence thanks to the acquiescence of the dominated, but it also contributes to perpetuating the set of beliefs that constitute the *doxa*, according to which, those roles are assigned. Therefore, the conservativeness of proverbs favors the maintenance of the *status quo* in which the dominant class, or in this case the dominant point of view, remains unchallenged.

As hinted above, central to Bourdieu’s system are the concepts of ‘*doxa*’ and ‘*habitus*’, terms that also seem readily applicable to an analysis of the use of proverbs. In the Bourdieusian system, ‘*doxa*’ is “a set of fundamental beliefs which does not even need to be asserted in the form of an explicit, self-conscious dogma” (Bourdieu 2000: 16). Incidentally, in the case of proverbs, they are often used as the verbalization of those “fundamental beliefs” to which Bourdieu refers. Conversely, *habitus* “focuses on our ways of acting, feeling, thinking and being. It captures how we carry within us our history, how we bring this history into our present circumstances, and how we then make choices to act in certain ways and not others” (Maton 2008: 51). Therefore, these two concepts, rather than being mutually exclusive, are complementary and can be interpreted in relation to the distinction between canonical uses of proverbs, *i.e.*, the standard wording and meaning attributed to a given proverb, and proverbial modification, which is consciously undertaken to fulfill a communicative need encountered by a speaker. In parallel, we can also find proverb variation, which is involuntary and results from the folkloric nature of proverbs as they are being transmitted by word of mouth. Consequently, although Bourdieu “located proverbs and sayings as unmediated signs of the *habitus*” on the

grounds that “[most] proverbs in his text are unattributed or attributed to a generic speaker” (Goodman 2003: 784), this leaves out the more institutionalized character of proverbs, rendering Bourdieu’s assessment insufficient to capture the complexity of proverbs due to its inability to account for an individual’s agency in the use of proverbs when that individual may be introducing his or her own experience into the equation.

From our point of view, proverbs may be regarded as *doxa* or *habitus* depending on how they are used. Hence, when proverbs are used in their canonical form which is widely received, and which is preserved in authoritative works such as proverb dictionaries, their use seems to be more appropriately considered as belonging to the sphere of *doxa*. However, proverbs can also be modified, either by adding, removing, or substituting some of their components, or by deliberately twisting their accepted meaning (Fiedler 2008: 90–91). In such cases, the speakers would be alluding to a widely accepted statement to support their opinion by introducing some form of manipulation or interpretation of the proverb, thus relating to the concept of *habitus*. This is supported by proverb scholarship on the capacity of proverbs to undergo various types of modification (see Mieder and Litovkina 1999; Mieder 2004: 28; Litovkina 2015), which transcends the notion of proverbs as fossilized uses of language and allows for a more profound understanding of how proverbs function in communication within Bourdieu’s Field Theory. If, as P. Bourdieu and L. Wacquant (1992: 145) claim, “every linguistic exchange contains the potentiality of an act of power”, utterances containing proverbs are representative of this, as speakers use them to reaffirm their own righteousness.

Lastly, there is another Bourdieusian concept relevant to the scope of our study and helpful for understanding the complexities of Bourdieu’s theory, apart from the fact that it is used to name it: the concept of ‘field’, which

[denotes] arenas of production, circulation, appropriation and exchange of goods, services, knowledge, or status, and the competitive positions held by actors in their struggle to accumulate, exchange, and monopolize these different kinds of capital. Fields may be thought of as structured spaces that organize around specific types of capital or combinations of capital. There are power

arenas as well as power resources in Bourdieu's political sociology (Swartz 2013: 57).

In relation to our analysis, the examples presented can be located within the field of social media, currently one of the most powerful means of communication, particularly in the case of profiles belonging to such influential individuals such as E. Musk. The current relevance of social media is such that, even from a non-Bourdiesian perspective, it is an unquestionable "arena of production of goods" as it provides a variety of lucrative opportunities to users willing to explore them. However, this does not imply that proverbs can only produce symbolic violence in this particular field; it has been included here because it is one of the most common settings for interpersonal communication today and one that, contrary to other contexts, allows for the interaction between individuals with radically different levels of symbolic, cultural, and social capital. Therefore, in the following pages, some proverbial uses by E. Musk in his tweets will be discussed as representative of symbolic violence within the field of sociopolitical debate on social media.

3. Elon Musk's proverbial references as symbolic violence

Within the scope of Critical Discourse Analysis and in order to provide some practical examples of what is presented here as a symbolically violent use of proverbs, various tweets posted by Elon Musk between the last quarter of 2023 and 2024 will be analyzed. Elon Musk, who purchased the microblogging platform Twitter in 2022 for \$44 billion (Conger and Hirsch 2022), is an avid Twitter user, now X, whose popularity on the platform skyrocketed after its buyout. Musk is widely regarded as a successful businessperson and is the CEO of three enormously influential companies: Tesla, SpaceX, and now, Twitter/X. To his cohort of followers, he is little short of an idol and a role model, and his tweets have a tremendous impact, amassing hundreds of thousands of interactions, with Musk's account having the largest number of followers on X. For these reasons, Elon Musk seemed a perfect fit for our analysis, especially given his use of proverbs that aligns with our interpretation of proverbs as symbolic violence, as stated above.

Apart from his entrepreneurial endeavors, Musk is also known on Twitter as an outspoken pundit with a “true conservative bent” (Peters 2022). Considering Musk’s straightforwardness and willingness to share his point of view on current affairs, together with his conservative stance on social issues, and his large following¹ and consequent impact on public opinion, he seemed the ideal subject for analysis of proverbial references in his discourse. After a survey of his X posts in late 2023 and 2024, various instances of proverbial use were found; of these, the examples discussed below appear to be clear examples of the potential use of proverbs as symbolic violence.

The first example found concerns Musk’s resolve to make Twitter/X a profitable platform. For this purpose, X has introduced a series of changes since Musk’s takeover that, in his opinion, should enhance the platform’s economic viability. Many of these changes have faced opposition from the community, such as the proposal to remove the block functionality, which allowed users to prevent interactions with other users exhibiting abusive or offensive behavior. In this regard, despite Musk’s claims that “‘it makes no sense’ to have both ‘mute’ and ‘block’, the Community Notes feature on X noted that the blocking function ‘is a basic safety feature that allows basic protection for victims of abuse and stalking’” (Tinoco 2023). In this context, on September 6th, 2023, Musk posted the following:



Figure 1: Elon Musk’s tweet posted on September 6, 2023.

Source: <https://x.com/elonmusk/status/1699231052089147772?s=20>

¹ As of the composition of this article, Elon Musk’s official Twitter profile (<https://x.com/elonmusk>) has over 238 million followers.

In his tweet, Musk is evidently alluding to the well-known proverb “he who lives by the sword dies by the sword” (Speake 2008: 190), as a means of supporting his view on the aforementioned topic of ridding Twitter of the “block” function. Moreover, not only does Musk resort to a popular, recognizable proverb to justify his position on the proposed changes to the platform, but he also makes a proverbial reference that includes language that is explicitly violent, as the dichotomy ‘live’ versus ‘die’ implies confrontation and a side coming about as victorious over its opposing, fatally defeated side, especially when identified as an allusion to the proverb in question. Furthermore, reading between the lines, an interpretation of Musk’s words could be the implication that users who rely on the block function have no place on his site. This may be taken by some users as a direct attack considering that they were there before Musk purchased the platform, and it relates to Musk’s crusade against political correctness and in favor of his peculiar understanding of freedom of speech.

In addition to his vehement defense of the measures he intended to take, Musk is prone to sharing his thoughts about current social issues, topics that seem well-suited to his use of symbolic violence. This symbolic violence is most evident when Musk uses proverbs in his tweets to support his stance on a certain topic given his privileged position on the platform, his perceived conservativeness, and the natural tendency of proverbs to preserve the traditional, broadly accepted *status quo*, often under the trite argument that the defended position represents “common sense,” a concept that is “in large measure determined by who exercises power and domination in a society or a social institution” (Fairclough 2015: 113).

An example of Musk’s opposition to what has become consensual to the majority of society concerns the phenomenon of fake news and the concept of post-truth. In this context, social media has been placed at the center of the debate for enabling people to spread falsehoods, often for political purposes. One of the best-known examples of this was the Cambridge Analytica affair, which received significant attention for the role that Facebook played in swaying the 2016 US presidential election towards the Republican candidate, D. Trump (Ward 2018). Yet,

Twitter has also received some criticism for its alleged conservative bias despite Musk being a “self-proclaimed ‘free-speech absolutist’” (Ecarma 2023). Nevertheless, Musk’s self-definition reveals some contradictions regarding the concepts of freedom of speech and the democratization of access to information. On the one hand, there is the looming threat that X will become a subscription site, which would prevent many current users from accessing it and would likely make other users disinterested. On the other hand, Elon Musk has unwaveringly voiced the reservations that certain conservative pundits have sown into the public debate, questioning the reliability of such a powerfully democratizing resource as Wikipedia.

Apart from being frowned upon by academia, not without reason, some conservative media outlets have appointed Wikipedia as their sworn enemy. This is often done under the pretext of inaccuracy and lack of rigor since, seemingly, anyone may log into the platform and edit any entry of their choice, along with the platform’s alleged leftist bias (Lott 2021), a claim that is documented as far back as 2007 (Johnson 2007), when Wikipedia was still in its infancy. However, the former argument chooses to overlook the quality control system that Wikipedia entries undergo. Whereas it is true that loopholes are found by mischievous editors, malicious changes are promptly reversed by the community of volunteer editors. This alleged inappropriateness of Wikipedia as a reliable source is based on a principle of authority, according to which traditional reference works issued by authoritative publishers are sanctioned as the only incontrovertible sources of knowledge. This is an unsound position that may also be explained with the help of Bourdieu’s postulates inasmuch as Wikipedia’s alleged unreliability is linked to the lack of symbolic capital held by anonymous editors compared to the symbolic capital of a renowned publisher. Even more distressingly, this view neglects an undeniable truth: Wikipedia’s ability to grant universal, free access to human knowledge in many world languages.

Considering all of this, and bearing in mind Musk’s sociopolitical stance, it is no surprise that, while advocating “free speech” for \$9 a month, he would resort to deriding a cooperative resource like Wikipedia. In the post below, shared by Musk

himself, he is quoted using an expansion to the proverb “history is written by the victors” (Mieder 2021: 105) to ridicule the labor of Wikipedia editors. As can be clearly seen, by referring to a proverbial piece of wisdom, Musk uses the paremia to mockingly question the reliability of Wikipedia as an objective resource:



Figure 2: Elon Musk’s tweet posted on September 19, 2023.

Source: <https://x.com/KanekoaTheGreat/status/1703911656156430785?s=20>

With such a statement, Musk is evidently undermining Wikipedia’s credibility by expressing his distrust of one of the most visited reference websites around the world. Furthermore, part of Musk’s criticism might stem from the fact that Wikipedia operates on a collaborative system, which is diametrically opposed to the model implemented by him in his own company, and which depends on Musk making every decision and personally overseeing every aspect involved in the management of X.

Related to this same topic is the rise of AI as a source of information, which does not seem to bother Musk as much as the use of Wikipedia, possibly because X has since implemented its own AI model, Grok. This is despite scientific evidence proving the negative impact of AI on people's cognitive development (see Jose et al. 2025), on the one hand, and on the environment (see Alnafrah 2025), on the other, neither of which seem to concern Musk in the slightest, though, as shown by the fact that, in response to someone who expressed his concerns about the use of AI, he responded as shown below:



Figure 3: Elon Musk's tweet posted on March 9, 2024.

Source: <https://x.com/elonmusk/status/1766575787388416005?s=20>

Little explanation seems necessary to justify the use of the proverbial sentence “always look on the bright side of life” (Mieder, Kingsbury, and Harder 1992: 539) as an example of symbolic violence when it is used to justify the demise, whether literal or figurative, of humanity by means of a tool from which Musk himself profits as it is now an integral part of X. Moreover, the fact that it is accompanied by the musical note emoji, which one cannot help but understand as a reference to the famous final scene in *Monty Python's Life of Brian* (Jones 1979) rather than a conscious reference to a proverb, only adds insult to injury, increasing the aggressiveness of his post and demonstrating an absolute lack of empathy for an issue with enormous social and environmental repercussions.

Another explicitly symbolically violent use of proverbs by Elon Musk took place on June 28, 2024, when he again modified a rather popular proverbial sentence, i.e., “truth is the first casualty of war” (Mieder 2021: 185), expanding it to include “the war that is politics.” Here, apart from the obvious hostile references to ‘casualty’ and ‘war’, which are explicitly violent in themselves, Musk quotes Bill Ackman’s tweet criticizing former President Joe Biden and the Democratic Party. In this tweet, Musk exploits his position to present himself as the supposed defender of truth, something that, as has been shown, is questionable. Also, he chooses to omit the fact that he participated actively in the 2024 presidential campaign that would lead to Donald Trump’s reelection. Therefore, not only is the tweet cynical but, by avoiding presenting himself as an actor in the context he is explicitly criticizing, Musk evades any kind of responsibility in a process in which he was involved. Moreover, there is an even greater degree of cynicism in the fact that, despite his acknowledgment of the evils of politics, the fact that he still decided to campaign for Trump shows that he was willing to participate in what he regarded as reprehensible. Thus, the ambivalence of using a proverb and taking advantage of its argumentative power to condemn something in which he decided to participate is precisely the type of use of proverbial wisdom analyzed in this paper, and may be interpreted as an example of symbolic violence, which is further supported by his aggressive choice of words.



Figure 4: Elon Musk’s tweet posted on June 28, 2024.

Source: <https://x.com/elonmusk/status/1806697085107851307?s=20>

Even more illuminating and representative of Elon Musk's standpoint and his paremiological minimum is his repeated use of the proverb "might makes right" (Wilson 1970: 530) as well as his own reformulation as an antiproverb in the form of "weak makes right." On April 26, 2024, Musk tweeted both versions within one minute, leading to an apparent contradiction. A few months later, on August 9 and October 11 of the same year, he used his antiproverb in response to someone else's tweet, as reproduced below. These instances show once again how Musk repeatedly resorts to proverbial wisdom to express his political standpoint, here in relation to the Israel-Palestine conflict. In the first of these tweets, Musk takes a jab at "wokeism" in the context of this conflict, as progressives tend to side with Palestine, which would relate to "the oppressed" in his tweet. Furthermore, by labeling Palestine and its sympathizers as the "weak" and oversimplifying the conflict as a struggle between a strong and a weak side, Musk attempts to undermine Palestinian resistance by questioning whether the fact that they are considered "the oppressed" makes them automatically the rightful side and whether the oppressors must be considered "the bad guys," hinting at the fact that such oppression might be justified.

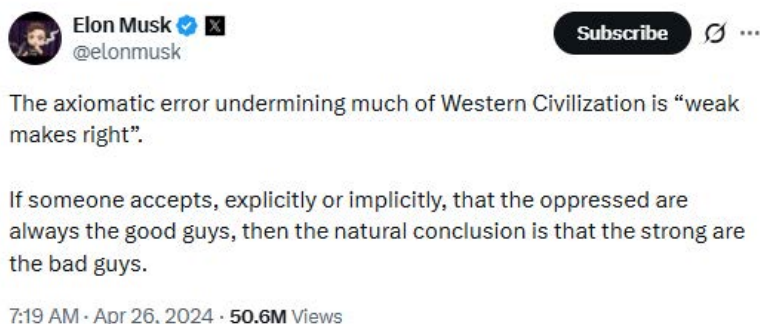


Figure 5. Elon Musk's tweet posted on April 26, 2024.

Source: <https://x.com/elonmusk/status/1783727565989134488?s=20>

It is evident that Musk chooses to overlook the complexity of the conflict and the fact that the oppressors are not seen as "the bad guys" by many only because they are stronger, but because they

have repeatedly initiated the attacks. Moreover, this opinion, despite being coherent with Musk's own position of privilege as an anti-woke opinion-maker, may lead some to understand this tweet as a contradictory statement, both in relation to his previous comment about how history is written in his criticism of Wikipedia, as well as to his second reference to his own anti-proverb, reproduced below. From a strictly paremiological point of view, though, it must be noted that despite the somewhat witty modification to the existing proverb, its canonical form relies on the internal rhyme between 'might' and 'right' to reinforce its argumentative effect, something that is lost in Musk's antiproverb. However, again in comparison to the previous tweet about Wikipedia, this is not the only apparent incongruity which Musk has ever displayed. Remarkably, just one minute after posting this tweet, Musk posted another one, this time reproducing the proverb in its canonical form, which, on a superficial level, might have been perceived as a contradiction by many:

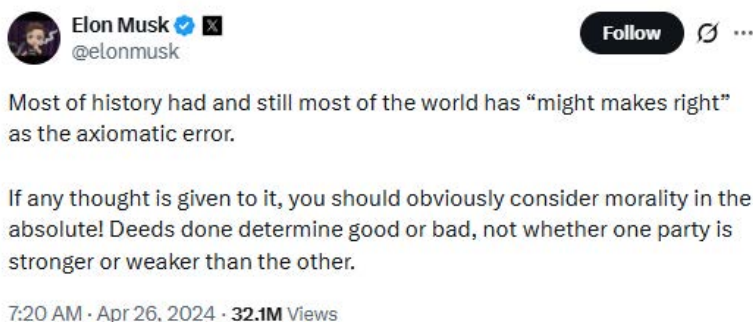


Figure 6. Elon Musk's tweet posted on April 26, 2024.

Source: <https://x.com/elonmusk/status/1783727843203268632?s=20>

If one makes an effort to understand what Musk meant, though, in his attempt to explain his stance on morality, he seems to be advocating individual accountability for one's actions, regardless of whether one is on the weaker or stronger side. That is, no one is inherently good or bad simply for being the stronger or weaker side respectively. Moreover, it is also remarkable that the previous tweet, which comes across as more symbolically

violent as it directly criticizes those siding with “the oppressed,” which many would simply consider part of human nature, has had a much greater impact than the second tweet, in which Musk explains his true intentions in a more grounded fashion with 50.6 million views and 32.1 million views respectively. This is relevant because it is difficult not to believe that this is by design, particularly considering that Musk owns the platform, which promotes engagement for profit (Williams 2024). Consequently, whereas in the first tweet Musk adopts a bolder position by criticizing his opponents on the grounds of power, something that aligns with Bourdieu’s Field Theory, his more moderate explanation may be seen as a sign of weakness and, therefore, detrimental to his public image as a polemicist. Yet, this did not stop him from resorting to the same formulation repeatedly to criticize those with different opinions. On August 19, 2024, Tesla advocate and conservative influencer Alexandra Merz criticized what she saw as the seemingly incoherent set of principles of the woke movement, bringing together abortion, LGBTQ+ rights and the Palestine conflict. The adherence to these apparently unrelated concepts is insightfully explained by such an influential figure as G. Lakoff (2014), who argues that people support seemingly unconnected issues like gender identity, global warming, or gun control according to the way in which they conceive society and politics as representing the “nurturing parent” or “strict father” models, the former explaining people with progressive ideas and the latter, those people with conservative ones.

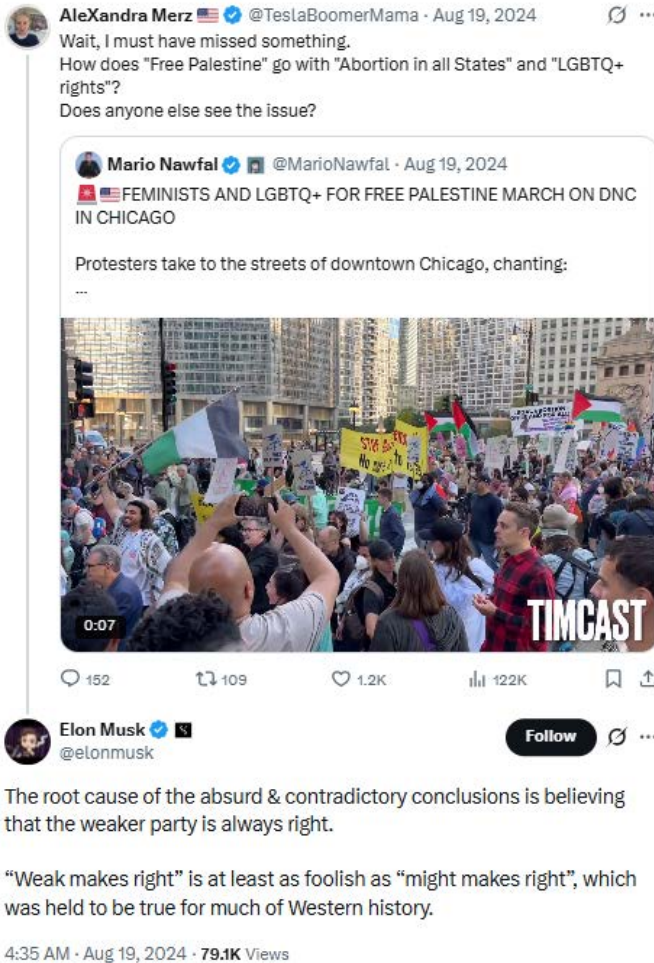


Figure 7. Elon Musk's tweet posted on August 19, 2024.

Source: <https://x.com/elonmusk/status/1825360944802795768?s=20>

Although to Musk and Mertz these beliefs may be unconnected, Lakoff does an excellent job explaining why they are not. In his response, Musk alludes again to the false dichotomy between "weak makes right" and "might makes right" to defend a third way in which everyone is responsible for their actions,

regardless of their affiliation. However, before stating this, he used judgmental adjectives such as “absurd” or “contradictory” to define those who defend women’s right to choose, gay rights, and the freedom of Palestine, while, at the same time, surreptitiously describing them as “weak” leading to what may be considered as another example of his use of proverbial references incurring symbolic violence. It should not go unnoticed that, in this tweet, Musk adds another element that may be associated with proverbs, as is the case of the phrase “the root [...] of,” which is found in the well-known proverbs “money is the root of all evil” (Speake, 2008: 214) or “idleness is the root of all evil” (Wilson, 1970: 396).

But this is not the last time Musk employed his antiproverb. Whereas so far there seems to have been an evolution in the way he assessed his own version of the proverb in relation to the original, in a tweet posted in October 2024, Musk reached his final conclusion. If barely half a year earlier he had described “weak makes right” as wrong, and a month prior to the tweet under scrutiny, “[w]eak makes right” [was] at least as foolish as ‘might makes right,’” by October 11, 2024, “weak makes right” was now “potentially a more dangerous philosophy than ‘might makes right,’” finalizing the evolution of his self-created anti-proverb, as shown below in his response to like-minded venture investor Shaun Maguire’s criticism of wokeism, once again in relation to the Palestinian conflict and concluding with the tautology “right is right,” which one may wonder whether it was meant as “conservativeness makes correctness:”



Figure 8. Elon Musk's tweet posted on October 11, 2024.

Source: <https://x.com/elonmusk/status/1844524931083882771?s=20>

Here, it is worth noting that, as is widely accepted, proverbs are context-dependent, which explains the existence of seemingly contradictory proverbs such as “many hands make light work” (Wilson, 1970: 509) and “too many cooks spoil the broth” (Wilson, 1970: 831) or “absence makes the heart grow fonder” (Speake, 2008: 1) and “out of sight, out of mind” (Wilson, 1970: 602), to name just a few examples. Nevertheless, it is less common for the same speaker to change their understanding of a proverbial sentence so markedly within a matter of months. Yet, this also demonstrates how proverbs, or pretended proverbs for that matter, may be used to support one's opinion in the context of political discussion.

There is one final example that deserves mention, despite not being a proper proverb because it lacks the condition of being a complete sentence. Nonetheless, the phrase in question has some proverbial undertones to it and may come across as violent according to Bourdieu's Field Theory in the context in which it was applied. In a September 2023 tweet, Musk used the phrase "a wolf in sheep's clothing" (Wilson 1970: 907) in connection with the passing of Bill AB 957 in California, a piece of legislation that was controversial because, according to it, "parents affirming their child's chosen gender would be an extra piece of information used in making a decision about parental custody" (Haubner 2023). Such were the circumstances surrounding the following tweet by Musk:



Figure 9. Elon Musk's tweet posted on September 19, 2023.

Source: <https://x.com/elonmusk/status/1700297475628871719?s=20>

It is no news that society, at least in most of the Western hemisphere, is moving towards greater inclusion for collectives that have traditionally suffered discrimination. One such collective

includes transgender people, whose ability to reassess their official gender identity is becoming accepted in an increasing number of countries. This position, which often depends on one's perspective on socio-political matters depending on Lakoff's model of the "nurturing parent" or "strict father" mentioned above, is often criticized by the advocates of the so-called family values, among whom Musk is included, although not without contradictions. Proof of this contradictory approach is the fact that he has 11 children by three different women (Hamilton 2023). Moreover, the fact that one of Musk's children is transgender and has cut ties with her father after transitioning in 2022 (Lewis 2022) may also have contributed at a subconscious level to reaffirming Musk's stance and his opinionatedness on a topic that may be mistakenly believed to be alien to him. Given the circumstances, Musk's statement appears as utterly aggressive, since he makes a free interpretation of the legal text to justify his opposition to the very premise of the legal piece in question. What is more, given his family history, it seems a blatant act of negligence, as he does not hesitate to share some views that will ostracize many people, given his potential reach, but most notably, his own daughter. This suggests that the defense of family values, at least in the case under scrutiny, is often merely a façade behind which the conservative agenda is being promoted by one of the most influential people in the world.

4. Conclusions

The first and most evident conclusion that can be drawn from the analysis is the suitability of P. Bourdieu's Field Theory for examining how proverbs are used in communication, particularly when they are twisted to defend one's political stance. According to the French sociologist, people's interactions are determined by an individual's capital in relation to the framework established by the *doxa*, and how this is negotiated by the individual with regard to his or her *habitus*.

Additionally, despite Bourdieu's own identification of proverbs as belonging to the sphere of the *habitus*, this seems to be inaccurate. As has been argued here, proverbs may belong to both spheres depending on how they are used. Thus, canonical

uses of proverbs, in which the speakers do not introduce their own perception of the context surrounding a given act of communication, seem to be more adequately considered as *doxa*, as they seek to establish certain beliefs and opinions as the only acceptable or desirable ones for society. In such cases, an individual reproduces a fossilized, anonymous sentence that has been sanctioned as valid by some immaterial authority with the acquiescence of society, often promoting conservative ideas and values that do not uphold the principles of the majority of society. Conversely, there are cases in which an individual adapts an existing proverb for their use in a context that differs from the usual one to which it is applied, in which case the speaker is making an adaptation based on his or her own individual perception. In this instance, according to Bourdieu's postulates about his Field Theory, proverbs may be said to move away from the sphere of the *doxa* and into the sphere of the *habitus*.

In both cases, speakers allude to proverbs, whether in their canonical form or as modifications, for their dogmatism, as they are perceived as unquestionable truths. What this does is endow one's speech with the apparent argumentative advantage that these discursive devices grant their user. Moreover, in the case of canonical uses, the effect may be immediate, depending on the receiver's paremiological competence, or "paremiological capital" in Bourdieusian terms. For modified proverbs, this competence becomes even more relevant as a receiver's failure to identify a proverbial modification would render the speaker's intentions ineffective.

Finally, some cases have been identified in which the use of proverbs may incur what Bourdieu labeled as "symbolic violence." This becomes apparent when a speaker possesses a substantial amount of symbolic capital, and especially in the case of proverbs that have been modified to distort their original intention to support the speaker's claims. In this article, we have analyzed a series of tweets by Elon Musk as illustrative examples of this use of proverbs as symbolic violence. However, it must also be acknowledged that, on the one hand, this is not necessarily an occurrence exclusive to conservative-minded individuals, although the inherent conservativeness of proverbs favors their use by speakers with a similar worldview and, on the other hand,

other analyses of the discourse of similarly outspoken public figures with comparable levels of symbolic and social capital, as well as the responses by other users garnered, would contribute to providing a more complete understanding of the phenomenon examined here. In short, by using proverbs and proverbial wisdom in such a manner, the speaker undermines another individual's point of view on the grounds of a supposedly widely accepted social consensus regarding a topic, which often relies on the dated nature of proverbs and the outlook they proclaim. For all the reasons expounded, Bourdieusian Field Theory provides a particularly suitable framework for the analysis of how proverbs are used in communication and for what purpose. Even more fascinating is the fact that Bourdieu's teachings allow us to identify a specific use of proverbs that relates to his concept of symbolic violence, which may often go unnoticed.

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<https://doi.org/10.29162/pv.43.1.1174>

UDC 398.9(495):398.01=111

Original scientific paper

Received on 13 January 2026

Accepted for publication on 24 March 2026

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TOWARDS AN EMIC DEFINITION OF THE PROVERB IN GREEK FOLKLORE: METAPROVERBS, STUDENT DEFINITIONS, AND POPULAR PERSPECTIVES

Abstract: This article uses Greek metaproverbs—proverbs about proverbs—as an emic tool for defining the proverb, and then combines it with six student definitions and twenty-six popular (non-specialist) definitions gathered through fieldwork. Drawing a focused set from the Digital Repository of Proverbs (Hellenic Folklore Research Centre, Academy of Athens), the study close-reads eight metaproverbs to articulate the core properties they ascribe to the genre. It then places this emic picture alongside contemporary voices: those of emerging folklorists and informants with no folkloristic background. The comparison shows strong convergence on condensed communal speech used in situ to frame action, with divergence in the rhetoric of authority and in how form is foregrounded. The paper proposes a concise emic definition of the Greek proverb, consistent across the three corpora and argues that proverbial authority is realized primarily in use.

Keywords: proverbs, metaproverbs, oral literary criticism, emic definition, genre theory

1. Introduction

The present article examines metaproverbs—proverbs that speak about proverbs—from an emic perspective¹ within the context of Greek folklore, focusing particularly on how the proverb genre is defined, since these texts offer concise statements about what a proverb is and its purpose. The definition derives inductively from a small corpus of Greek metaproverbs that explicitly comment on various aspects of the genre, such as origin etc.

Drawn primarily from the concepts of *metafolklore* and *oral literary criticism* introduced by Alan Dundes (1966), the concept of genre is examined under the prism of a “folk theory” derived from the folk. In what follows, the data are presented, in particular the metaproverbs, which are coded according to the features they emphasize, allowing a definition from the metaproverbs to be derived. Subsequently, a comparison of this definition follows with six contemporary definitions elicited from postgraduate students of Folklore, and twenty-six definitions from informants with no folkloristic or philological background, so that the convergences and divergences in how the genre is conceptualized today by modern informants is understood.

The article does not aim to propose a universal definition of the proverb; rather, it seeks to articulate an emic definition of the proverb as it emerges within Greek folk culture from metaproverbs and contemporary informants. Framed in this way, the article addresses the following research questions: Can a coherent emic definition be inductively derived from metaproverbs? How closely does this definition align with contemporary informant definitions? What are the similarities and differences? What would a definition of the genre look like that would consider all the above?

¹ The terms *etic* and *emic* belong to anthropological theory. In this article, they denote analytical perspectives rather than fixed participant categories. Accordingly, specialists are not treated as automatically “etic,” nor non-specialists as automatically “emic”; the comparison concerns differently positioned forms of insider discourse, placed in dialogue with scholarly paremiology.

2. Theoretical background and methodology

2.1. From 'types' to emic views

The classification of folklore genres, and the subsequent sub-classification within each genre, constitutes one of the most fundamental tasks in folkloristics. The folklore genre is now regarded as an “entity with a defined set of relations among language, symbols, and reality” (Ben-Amos, 1976: xxxi). On this premise, for a genre to be established and then analyzed, one must examine its linguistic constitution in direct conjunction with the ways and circumstances in which genres are realized. This fact also constitutes the greatest difficulty for folklorists regarding the classification of genres, since in many cases there is a risk that these two factors will be ignored, chiefly because genres are usually conceived as artificial categories that function as analytical tools (Frog, Koski, Savolainen, 2016: 17). Thus, etic classifications often ignore emic meanings, which, however, are essential to consider in classification and interpretation. This was the case in folklore studies for a long period of time, since folklorists focused on so-called “types” in their efforts to classify various folkloric texts.

Essentially, the term “type” came to mean “genre”, which gradually replaced the former term (Frog, Koski, Savolainen 2016: 18). Yet the shift in terminology was accompanied by a shift in scholarly interest from the meanings of texts to the very bearers of folk culture, as emphasis was placed on the notion of variation, which relates to groups, networks, and the like (Frog 2013, cited by Frog, Koski, Savolainen 2016: 24). This shift in scholarly interest brought the concept of *context* to the fore. Folklorists thus began to be concerned not only with collecting texts but also with collecting contexts. Even so, this too appears insufficient, for “one cannot always guess the meaning from context. For this reason, folklorists must actively seek to elicit the meaning of folklore from the folk” (Dundes 1966: 507). This innovative view, proposed by Alan Dundes as “oral literary criticism”, is of particular significance, for it essentially refuses to separate items of folklore from the tradition-bearers and, in effect, proposes a new way of studying folklore².

² For an approach of this kind in proverbs from the Balkans, see Tserpes (2018) and Tserpes (2024).

One of the sources suggested by Dundes for oral literary criticism is *metafolklore*, which is also the subject of the present study. Dundes notes characteristically:

There are a limited number of folkloristic commentaries on folklore. As there is a term 'metalanguage' to refer to linguistic statements about language, so we may suggest 'metafolklore' to refer to folkloristic statements about folklore. Examples of metafolklore of the 'folklore of folklore' would be proverbs about proverbs, jokes about jokes cycles, folksongs about folksongs and the like (Dundes 1966: 509).

This passage brings us to the core of our topic: a genre referring to itself (however this does not mean that metafolklore is only intragenre, since one genre may also refer to another). As we have seen, Dundes himself cites as an example, proverbs that refer to proverbs; therefore, these are metaproverbs.

Numerous studies have addressed this issue, which has pre-occupied research since as early as 1938. Selwyn Gurney Champion, in his work *Racial Proverbs. A Selection of the World's Proverbs Arranged Linguistically*, in which he gathers 12,000 proverbs from 190 countries, includes 124 texts in the chapter "Proverbs and Sayings about the Proverb" (Champion 1938: 3–9), which essentially constitute definitions of the proverb, while Wolfgang Mieder, in his *Encyclopedia of World Proverbs. A Treasury of Wit and Wisdom Through the Ages*, likewise provides proverbs about proverbs. Specifically, he lists 23 texts under the lemma "proverb" (Mieder 1986: 392).

Beyond the paremiographical level, however, the issue of metaproverbs has concerned many scholars who have written studies of a paremiological nature. Péter Barta distinguishes metaproverbs related to the truth of proverbs, their folk character, and the dialectics of the genre (Barta 1985: 170–171), while Ojoade undertakes an intercultural comparison within the African context (Ojoade 1977: 20–23). In the context of individual languages, the studies on Spanish metaproverbs are of interest, where further sub-typologies are proposed: specifically, these concern the nature of proverbs, their origin, dissemination, use/misuse, verisimilitude or fallibility, and the doctrine they express in the form of teaching (Jaime Gómez and Jaime Lorén 1995),

while Rafael Nicolás López refers to *proselytizing metaproverbiality*, a case in which the proverbial texts plead for (i.e., attest to) their own value and *framing metaproverbiality*, where the very word “proverb” appears in order to demarcate a segment of the proverbial text within the whole (López 1996). There is also reference to metaproverbs in the realm of Indian proverbs (Lourdu 1984). Finally, many studies examine metaproverbial discourse within literature (indicatively: Adeeko 1991; Fournié 1999; Joly 1984; Joly 1996; Lindfors 1968; Shelton 1969).

Metaproverbs are directly related to the issue of defining the genre. The question of defining the proverb has strongly engaged researchers.³ Archer Taylor, on this matter, states:

The definition of a proverb is too difficult to repay the undertaking; and should we fortunately combine in a single definition all the essential elements and give each the proper emphasis, we should not even then have a touchstone. An incommunicable quality tells us this sentence is proverbial and that one is not. Hence no definition will enable us to identify positively a sentence as proverbial. (Taylor 1931: 3).

What, then, is this incommunicable quality? To answer this question and address the problem of definition, it was proposed that specialists turn to the “folk” themselves. After all, Taylor’s reference to the famous incommunicable quality acknowledges the folk’s capacity to identify whether something is a proverb or not. Such attempts have indeed been made, the most notable being that of Wolfgang Mieder (Mieder 1985). In a study he conducted, he asked 55 individuals to write a definition of the proverb. Examining these definitions, Mieder finds that, for the respondents, proverbs express human wisdom in a sentence (Mieder 1985: 117), while he formulated the following 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 memorable form and which is handed down from generation to generation” (Mieder 2004: 3).

³ Researchers from various fields have been addressed the definition of the proverb. The literature is extensive. However, there is still no generally accepted definition. This issue, dating back to 1931 and Archer Taylor’s view quoted above, remains a vexed question. For a recent view on the matter, see Villers (2024).

Of course, Mieder's research once again highlights the issues of genre and its various approaches. Moreover, his study refers to American folk culture. This is evident in Mieder's empirical research itself, since the respondents do not regard proverbs as universal; only two of the 55 respondents characterized proverbs as such (universals) (Mieder 1985: 118), in the sense that they are not universally valid. Their form may suggest this, but it does not hold everywhere and always.

A similar attempt, though of a different kind, was made by Başgöz (1990; 2006). Başgöz considers metaproverbs themselves to be folk definitions of the proverb. Relying on the texts provided by Champion and adding ten Turkish metaproverbs and five from the Luganda language, he compiles a corpus of 143 folk definitions of the proverb in the form of metaproverbs from 44 cultural areas (Başgöz 1990: 8). In his intercultural and interlingual approach, Başgöz identifies the following typology of definitions: 1) by means of content, 2) in relation to speech and discourse, 3) by means of origin, 4) by means of transmission and diffusion in time and space, 5) by means of prestige and power, 6) by means of form, and 7) by means of function (Başgöz 1990: 8–10).

The above approaches relate to the broader issue of classifying folklore genres and to the well-known distinction between etic and emic perspectives. In general terms, etic perspectives involve analytical classifications formulated from outside a tradition (typically in scholarly contexts), whereas emic perspectives foreground local categories and classifications articulated within the tradition itself. The debate over how these two perspectives should be combined was once extensive, the most well-known divergence being between Lauri Honko and Dan Ben-Amos. Honko disagrees with earlier views on archetypal genres and attempts to construct a system of narrative genres based on a complex series of criteria. Hence the issue of distinguishing between real and ideal genres arises. Honko places genres along the axes of synchrony and diachrony, with the synchronic perspective giving a sense of permanence and the diachronic a sense of continual evolution. Honko thus attempts to combine etic and emic approaches (Honko 2005: 4–25). Dan Ben-Amos, on the other hand, is a strong supporter of the emic approach to genres, essentially accusing Honko

of attempting to create a kind of normative–legislative scientific paradigm governed by universal laws. For Ben-Amos, folklore genres are socially recognizable and culturally determined, while any attempt to create universal genres constitutes a conceptual arbitrariness. All universal laws can only be hypothetical, since one can always find a group (ethnos) whose folk culture does not fall within any of the known categorizations (Ben-Amos 1992: 14–21 and 20–26, cited by Hakamies 2016: 300).

In essence, Dan Ben-Amos argues that taxonomic schemes of universal validity cannot exist precisely because they do not take into account the classificatory schemes of the tradition-bearers themselves; or, even when they do, they attempt to combine them with those of other groups and societies, effectively ignoring that “... the genres of folk culture and literature are social cognitive categories, emerging within local social practices” (Kaplanoglou 2022: 124). Consequently, they bear specific and unique features which, in turn, align with the usefulness of the genre (Datsi 2024: 200).

In any case, the issue is vast and cannot be fully analyzed at present. It is certain, however, that there must be a common understanding among scholars as to what each genre is and represents, so that intercultural comparisons are possible without disregarding emic conceptualizations. After all, genres today are not understood as universal; rather, they provide a frame of reference for approaching and comparing traditions (Frog 2016: 76). For this reason, each genre as an analytical category primarily describes “a pattern of equivalence rather than identity” (Frog 2016: 78). However, it is extremely useful always to bear in mind the conceptualizations of the folk.

2.2. *Data and methods*

Taking all the above into consideration, we will attempt to identify Greek metaproverbs and distinguish the basic features attributed to the genre by these texts. To locate the material, we used the Digital Repository of Proverbs of the Hellenic Folklore Research Centre of the Academy of Athens. Specifically, we searched the repository using as keyword the term “παροιμία”⁴

⁴ A brief terminological clarification is necessary. The repository search was conduct-

("proverb"). This search yielded eight texts, seven of which are classified under the lemma "*παροιμία*" and one under the lemma "*λαός*" ("people"), which appeared in the search because it includes the word "*παροιμία*". Thus, the corpus includes only texts in which the word *παροιμία* (proverb) is mentioned. However, texts were excluded which, although they include the word "*παροιμία*", do not refer to the genre as such, nor do they serve as folk definitions of the proverb, since the term is used more as a framing device. The archival material is used as evidence of attested metaproverbial formulations, not as a measure of present-day frequency or circulation. Their relevance here lies in the fact that they are documented reflexive statements about proverbs within the Greek folkloric archive.

Subsequently, we undertake an analysis of these texts to clarify which features are deemed significant for proverbial discourse. In parallel, following Başgöz—who treats metaproverbs as folk definitions of the genre, a stance also attributable to the fact that we lack information about the circumstances of use of these particular proverbs (Başgöz 1990: 8)—we will treat these texts as such, seeking to extract from them a definition of the proverb that encompasses all the characteristic traits ascribed to proverbs by the individual texts.

Finally, drawing on definitions of the proverb that we have collected from the tradition-bearers themselves, in particular postgraduate students of Folkloristics and informants with no folkloristic or philological background, we will compare the definition that emerges from the metaproverbs with these texts, to determine whether the same properties are attributed to the proverb as a genre and to what extent. The definitions from the students were provided by them during a lecture about proverb. To complement the "disciplinary folk" definitions provided by postgraduate folklore students, we conducted a small pilot survey of 26 non-specialist informants. Each informant was asked a single open question in Greek - "*Τι είναι για σένα/εσάς παροιμία;*

ed using the Greek term *παροιμία*, and the present study is concerned with that Greek folk category. For readability, *παροιμία* is translated as "proverb"; however, we acknowledge that in some English-language paremiological usage, the term "paremia" may function as a broader umbrella category. The claims made here therefore concern the Greek category *παροιμία* and its emic construal.

Πώς θα την όριζες/ορίζατε με δικά σου/σας λόγια;” (“What is a proverb for you? How would you define it in your own words?”), in informal settings (family, friends, gym, neighborhood). Responses were recorded verbatim, anonymized, and accompanied by minimal demographics (age group, gender, occupation, level of education).

It is important to clarify that, in this article, the term “definition” is used in an emic and metadiscursive sense, not in the strict logical sense of necessary and sufficient conditions. The aim is to reconstruct a culturally articulated, prototypical understanding of the proverb—how speakers describe, recognize, and authorize it in discourse and use. The present study therefore does not attempt to resolve the full boundary problem between proverbs and all other sayings. Instead, it identifies recurrent features and functions foregrounded when the proverb is reflexively conceptualized in Greek metaproverbs and in contemporary folk definitions. Thus, the features discussed here are treated as recurrent and variably foregrounded, not as obligatory criteria that must be present in every case. This is more of an attempt to understand how the genre is perceived (Arora 1984). This approach is consistent with genre research in Folkloristics more broadly, where emic genre concepts often operate through family resemblances, situational recognition, and use-oriented expectations rather than through rigid taxonomic boundaries.

3. The folkloric material: Greek metaproverbs

Given that even today there is no universally accepted definition of the proverb at a global level—that is, an etic definition—we will attempt to derive a definition of the proverb within the context of Greek folk culture. Of course, we do acknowledge that although proverb scholarship has not produced a universally accepted definition, several criteria recur with broad consensus (e.g. brevity, traditionality, contextual use). The contribution of the present study is not to replace such criteria, but to examine how they are emically articulated and differently weighted across Greek metaproverbs, student definitions, and popular definitions.

In Greek, the term used for proverb is *παροιμία* (paroimía). It is an Ancient Greek compound derived from the preposition

pará and the noun *oîmos* (“road”), and thus initially denotes something said in a collateral or oblique manner (Christides 2023: 11). Of course, etic-type definitions of the proverb have been proposed since antiquity.⁵ However, since our aim is an emic approach to the issue, we will attempt, as noted above, to derive a definition of the proverb both from proverbs that refer to proverbs and by comparing these texts with definitions of the proverb given by the tradition-bearers themselves.

As noted above, the search for proverbial texts (metaproverbs) was conducted in the Digital Repository of Proverbs of the Hellenic Folklore Research Centre of the Academy of Athens, using the keyword *παροιμία* (“proverb”) as the principal search term. The texts we identified are as follows:⁶

- (1) *Παροιμία λαού, σοφία Θεού*⁷ (A people’s proverb is God’s wisdom). The proverb indicates that folk wisdom is almost equated with divine wisdom. Consequently, folk wisdom is sacralized and enveloped in absolute trust.
- (2) *Η κάθε παροιμία είναι λόγος ανεκτίμητος*⁸ (Each proverb is an invaluable saying). The value of the proverb cannot be quantified. This metaproverb underscores the rhetorical dimension of proverbial discourse.
- (3) *Είναι κάθε παροιμία εθνική φιλοσοφία*⁹ (Every proverb is a national philosophy). Proverbs are the philosophy/wisdom of the folk—their collective thought. Thus, proverbs appear as a form of folk epistemology.

⁵ For an analytical presentation of the concept of the proverb at the level of definition, both within Greek paremiology and in international literature, see Doulaveras (2010: 17–29).

⁶ The texts are presented in the order in which they appear in the digital repository. After the Greek text, its literal translation into English is provided in parentheses, followed by the commentary. For each proverb are provided in a footnote the number of the manuscript, the page on which the proverb is found, the place of registration, the collector and the year in which the collection was compiled. Sometimes not all this information is available. The initials F.A. stand for Folklore Archive, the previous name of the Hellenic Folklore Research Centre, which was founded in 1918. The new name of the Research Centre was established in 1966.

⁷ F.A. Manuscript 340, p. 74, Kyzikos (Asia Minor), Ph. Philippides.

⁸ F.A. Manuscript 798, Ionian islands, G. Kavvadias, 1876.

⁹ F.A. Manuscript 2285, p. 98, Epirus – Ionian islands, G. Kavvadias, 1880.

- (4) *Κάθε παροιμία έχει τον τόπο της*¹⁰ (Every proverb has its place). This text refers to the fact that proverbs may be locally determined. Metaphorically viewed, it may also mean that each proverb has an appropriate occasion in which it may be used.
- (5) *Ούλες οι παροιμίες αληθινές είναι*¹¹ (All proverbs are true). Proverbs are accepted as axiomatic truths, a fact that highlights traditional thought's trust in the wisdom of the community.
- (6) *Α δεν ήταν (έτσι), δεν τα λέγανε οι παροιμίες*¹² (If it weren't so, the proverbs wouldn't say it). Proverbs describe how the world is, not how we would like it to be. They function as proof of authority. If something is "proverbial," it means it holds true. So, if it weren't true, it wouldn't be a proverb.
- (7) *Α δεν εσυνεβαίνανε, δεν τσ'έβγαναν τση παροιμίες*¹³ (If it didn't happen, it wouldn't have become a proverb). Proverbs arise from real events; they are the distillation of experience. Their causal origin is emphasized, since a proverb is considered the product of collective experience.
- (8) *Οι παροιμίες είναι ούλαις λόγια φρόνιμα*¹⁴ (Proverbs are all sensible words). The proverb is presented as a vehicle of prudence, temperance, and morality; thus, its pedagogical character is also brought to the fore.

From the above texts, we observe that a continuum is formed, beginning with the origin of the genre and ending with its limits of use, with intermediate milestones, those of authority and function.

The origin of the proverb is attributed to the folk, the people. This fact highlights the collective nature of the genre and especially the collective experience, something that is acknowledged as the "philosophy of the folk" (*Every proverb is national philosophy*). This gives proverbial speech an epistemological and phil-

¹⁰ F.A. Manuscript 701, p. 19, Epirus, Ch. Christovasilis.

¹¹ F.A. Manuscript 482, p. 92, Gortynia, T. Kandiloros, 1909.

¹² F.A. Manuscript 798, p. 9, Ionian islands, G. Kavvadias, 1876.

¹³ F.A. Manuscript 798, p. 9, Ionian islands, G. Kavvadias, 1876.

¹⁴ F.A. Manuscript 798, Ionian islands, G. Kavvadias, 1876.

osophical dimension since proverbs are not considered only as practical rules of everyday life, but also as means of understanding the world. This understanding of the world arises from the empirical basis from which proverbs derive (*If it didn't happen it wouldn't have become a proverb* and *If it weren't so, the proverbs wouldn't say it*). Recurring events have led to the coinage of proverbs, so their truth is guaranteed by collective experience. At the same time, collective experience is so much appreciated, even sacralized as in *A people's proverb is God's wisdom*. Proverbial speech, and folk discourse in general, is equated with God's wisdom.

Sacralization enhances the rhetorical power of proverbs as arguments. Perhaps that is why *Each proverb is an invaluable saying*, which also has a didactic purpose, since *Proverbs are all sensible words* and thus regulate social relations. This regulation of social relations highlights the function of the proverb as performance, since proverbs are not only texts, but also speech acts that are used on various occasions and for multiple purposes. This fact explains Roger D. Abrahams' choice to classify proverbs as a conversational genre, since in these genres of discourse, different forms of knowledge are communicated. In particular, regarding proverbs, Abrahams argues that "proverbs contain social wisdom and comment upon man's relation to other men" (Abrahams 1976: 201), thereby serving as a stabilizing form in social relations.

Finally, appropriateness is presented as one of the basic features of proverbs, since *Every proverb has its place*. The term "place" may have a local - cultural meaning or a pragmalinguistic meaning. In both cases it reveals two characteristics that from a folkloristic point of view are of pivotal importance: variation and the circumstance of communication (context). So, are *all proverbs true*? Yes, but only in a specific place and time, according to the metaproverb (4).

In sum, metaproverbs offer a self-reflection of the genre regarding what generates them (experience), their rhetorical power since they are used mainly as means of persuasion (truth/prudence/value) and how they should be used (where and when). What, then, could be a definition of the proverb within the frame-

work of Greek folk culture—one that could encompass all the above elements? Our proposal is as follows:

A proverb is condensed discourse stemming from a community's experiential knowledge of recurrent situations, employed on the appropriate occasion, as it is regarded as a bearer of truth, prudence, and wisdom, and at times is invested with sacred authority.

4. Emerging folklorists' definitions

With a view to bringing the issue of definition into the modern era, we next present six definitions of proverb offered by students, in order to determine whether emerging folklorists share the same views of the genre as those expressed in the metaproverbial texts analyzed above.

These definitions were provided by postgraduate students in the elective course “Myth, Fairy Tale, Proverb, Legend, Folk Poetry (Song), Autobiographical Narrative, Oral History, New Forms of Artistic Folk Discourse: Theoretical and Applied Approaches” of the master's program “Folklore and Literature – Georgios A. Megas” at the Department of Philology, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens.¹⁵

The definitions are as follows (in the order received):

1. Phrases with particularly imagistic language that compress within them the themes and issues of life. They often appear internally contradictory yet relate to the occasion in which they are uttered.
2. A proverb is a small “philosophy of life” that begins with the “we” and ends with the “I”.
3. A proverb is a short sentence with which an attempt is made to convey, concisely and compactly, a meaning or message. The meaning is usually expressed metaphorically, while a proverb often has meter/metrical segments or even rhyme.

¹⁵ I collected the definitions myself, as the course instructors (Mrs. Kaplanoglou and Mr. Kouzas) had invited me to give a lecture on the proverb. The lecture was delivered during the 2022–2023 academic year.

4. A proverb is folk wisdom used in specific instances to teach, advise, admonish—even to defuse—since it also has humor.
5. A proverb is the metaphorical rationalization of everyday events, human beings, and behaviors using images and rhythm.
6. A proverb is the shortest (often metrical) text that contains a dense meaning, a judgment regarding social life. It is aphoristic in character; it passes judgement and philosophizes.

The above definitions create a profile of the genre in terms of both form and function. Initially, the proverb is condensed speech: “phrases that compress” (def. 1), “short sentence” (def. 3), “the shortest text” (def. 6). At the same time certain linguistic devices are used such as metaphor (“metaphorical rationalization”, def. 5), imagery (“imagistic language”, def. 1) and rhythm (“metrical segments” / “rhyme”, def. 3, 6). Thus, proverbs are presented to carry metaphors, imagery and rhythm in a brief form. These characteristics contribute to memorability, mainly due to the brevity of the genre, while the “aphoristic character” (def. 6) gives authority to the proverb, since no validation of what it is said is required.

In terms of function, most of the definitions put emphasis on what proverbs can do as speech acts in daily discourse: “to convey a message concisely” (def. 3), “to teach, advise, admonish” (def. 4), “it passes judgement and philosophizes” (def. 6). At the same time the interpersonal dimension is highlighted in combination with pragmatic aspects, since the proverb is “for specific instances” (def. 4) and “relates to occasion” (def. 1). Thus, these context-oriented views do not recognize proverbs the authority of absolute truth since they often appear to be contradictory¹⁶ (def. 1), while according to Peter Seitel “Although relatively simple in their application of metaphor, proverbs are one of the most complex genres in that they are most sensitive to social context” (Seitel 1976: 141).

¹⁶ About contradiction as a feature of proverbs, see Meraklis (2007: 24).

Moreover, collectivity is another feature of the genre that emerges from definition No 2 (“A small philosophy of life that begins with ‘we’ and ends with ‘I’”), showing that the proverb functions as a mediator between collectivity and individuality, being activated in particular situations and bridging collective norms and individual strategies. Combining the definitions given by the students, we could argue that a definition from these emerging folklorists for the genre would be as follows:

A proverb is a brief, often rhythmic and imagistic, metaphorical utterance that compresses shared life experience into a dense message or judgment about social life; used to teach, advise, admonish, or defuse —sometimes with humor — moving from the communal “we” to the personal “I”, and capable of seeming contradictory while fitting the occasion.

5. *Definitions of the folk*

It is obvious that the six definitions provided by the students cannot be considered a representative sample – both because of the limited number and because of the students’ background, since most of them are graduates of Departments of Philology. Even if they had never previously reflected on what a proverb is, their academic background certainly explains why they placed particular emphasis on the genre’s morphological features.

Considering all the above, we thought that a third set of definitions gathered from people without a similar background would be essential, so that the results would be more reliable and, at the same time, bridging this way the gap between *folk* and *lore*. Following Wolfgang Mieder’s example in his paper *Popular Views of the Proverb* (1985), we collected 26 definitions for the proverb genre through fieldwork. The definitions were gathered in November 2025 by approaching friends, family and acquaintances. The survey included 15 women and 11 men, aged between 17 and 77 years. The definitions collected are as follows (in chronological order, according to the date they were received):

1. A proverb is a sentence that likens one thing to another.

2. A proverb is folk wisdom.
3. A proverb is a phrase passed from generation to generation, not necessarily free of prejudices. In general, it is a distillation of wisdom.
4. A proverb is a saying uttered by the people to remind folks of their roots and to act as an awakening.
5. A proverb shows reality through a story that evokes it without stating it. It is speech that awakens and makes one aware.
6. A proverb is something tied to a real habit from long ago; we have kept what it meant and still use it today.
7. A proverb is the past.
8. A proverb is something the old folks used to say.
9. A proverb is something we say because it has happened many times.
10. A proverb is folk wisdom.
11. A proverb is accumulated wisdom passed down from generation to generation, and it represents a deeply rooted ethos. It is something tacit that makes you think and encounter it within yourself.
12. A proverb is a folk expression with some metaphor.
13. It is a symbolization of a common assumption about the world—like a shared observation, but in a popular, vernacular way.
14. A proverb is the condensed wisdom of the old, so that the young may learn.
15. A proverb is a folk phrase with which we try to get a message across and communicate in a more idiomatic, commonly accepted way—like a code.
16. A proverb is something used socially when ordinary people cannot resort to scientific terminology; they try to explain things through proverbs. It is part of a people's tradition—something embedded in tradition.
17. A proverb is a more symbolic way to capture a collective/social/personal event.
18. A proverb is a phrase that comes from the affective memory of earlier generations and aims to point out a behavior.

19. A proverb is a way for information or a habit to pass from generation to generation, or to censure—criticize—or to reward certain behaviors.
20. A proverb is a saying used by the people to say something metaphorically.
21. A proverb is an expression that usually has a metaphorical/allegorical style and seeks to convey a deeper message.
22. A proverb is a playful maxim that seeks to convey a moral lesson figuratively.
23. A proverb is condensed folk wisdom.
24. A proverb is an expression with well-known conventional meanings that conveys a lesson— a truth—metaphorically.
25. A proverb is a saying that seeks to describe a situation in figurative language.
26. A proverb is an expression shaped by the people, with no known original author, that carries a lesson.

By examining these definitions, we observe that the informants emphasize on themes that organize meaning. Proverbs are anchored in tradition and transmission (“passed from generation to generation,” “the old,” “the past”), and are framed as practical wisdom that advises, awakens, criticizes, or commends behavior. Their warrant is experience—what “has happened many times,” “real habits from long ago”—and their force is contextual, used “at the right moment” to make a point. Form is envisaged as figurative compactness (metaphor, symbolism, condensation), while authorship is collective and anonymous (“shaped by the people”).

At the same time proverbs are considered as discursive strategies. Speakers mobilize metaphors of compression (“distillation,” “condensed”) and coding (“a code,” “symbolization”) to present proverbs as compressed social knowledge. Verbs of practice —“we say/use,” “to pass a message”— cast proverbs as speech acts rather than artifacts. Evaluative terms (“wisdom,” “lesson,” “ethos,” “awakening”) signals a moral-didactic stance. Also, an experiential modality dominates (“because it happens”), with “truth” appearing, when it does, through metaphor.

However, within the corpus of the definitions one can observe certain tensions and binaries, since several productive oppositions organize the discourse: past vs. present (heritage conserved vs. present reactivation), depiction vs. intervention (showing reality vs. delivering a moral), and universals vs. situatedness (rare universal “truth” vs. pervasive in-situ fit). These binaries frame the proverb as both memory and method—a resource that draws on the past yet operates pragmatically in the here-and-now.

Finally, collectivity and normativity appear to be core concepts of the definitions. Frequent use of “we/people” positions the community as both author and addressee; the proverb speaks for the group and to the group. The gnomic present (“is,” “we say”) lends generality and normative force, while the emphasis on use situates authority in performance. Overall, the footing is collective and pragmatic: proverbs are a vernacular code for guiding understanding and negotiating conduct within shared situations.

Considering all the above, and by combining the 26 definitions, one definition from the folk that arises is the following:¹⁷

A proverb is a short, conventional, often metaphorical saying of anonymous popular authorship that condenses inherited experience and ethos into memorable speech, passed across generations and activated in the proper context to frame and guide talk and action, conveying a lesson or “truth” whose authority rests chiefly in use rather than in universal warrant.

6. Discussion: Comparing metaproverbs, emerging folklorists’ and the folk’s definitions

In this article, an attempt was made to examine Greek metaproverbs as folk definitions of the genre. Each metaproverb focuses on different features (recurrent experience, authority, value, and appropriateness), which is why we sought to condense all the texts into a concise and coherent definition that would convey the overall essence of these texts.

¹⁷ At this point we must clarify that all definitions given in this paper are based on this material only. Different metaproverbs or different informants may have led to other definitions.

By comparing this definition with six definitions provided by postgraduate students, we aimed to determine the points of convergence and divergence. In both cases there is a broad agreement as far as it concerns the collective and empirical basis of the genre as well as the prudence and appropriateness of its use (context). On the other hand, the main divergences concern axiomatic universality, truth and divine legitimization that metaproverbs support, something which indicates that the students have a more pragmatistic understanding of the genre. Moreover, the students' definitions refer to formal and stylistic features of the proverb, such as metaphor, meter,¹⁸ image, and rhyme, thereby highlighting their poetic quality (Doulaveras 2010: 37-41), which are entirely absent from metaproverbs. Nevertheless, we should point out here that the more pragmatic dimension highlighted in the students' definitions does not necessarily signify a break with tradition but rather a shift in where the authority of proverbs is grounded; in these definitions it appears to relate more to how proverbs are used, without being perceived as dogmatic truths or axioms.

As far as the 26 folk definitions of the proverb are concerned and their comparison with metaproverbs, we could argue that they converge in viewing the proverb as arising from lived, recurrent experience; as practical prudence that guides action (teaching, advising, admonishing/defusing); and as effective only in context. They also agree on condensation and figurative language, and on collective, intergenerational transmission (anonymity, "of the people"). They diverge, however, in their rhetoric of authority: metaproverbs advance strong truth claims and, at times, sacralization ("all true," "God's wisdom," "invaluable speech"), whereas the folk definitions rarely invoke universal truth and ground authority in practical use and shared sense-making. In addition, metaproverbs explicitly name the principle of "place/appropriateness" ("Every proverb has its place"), while informants imply it functionally without terminology. Regarding form, folk definitions foreground metaphor/symbolism/condensation (and only rarely meter or rhyme), whereas metaproverbs

¹⁸ Especially for the metrical character of modern Greek proverbs, see Doulaveras (1989).

focus chiefly on value and normativity. Finally, metaproverbs articulate a causal genesis (“if it didn’t happen...”), while our informants emphasize transmission and reactivation in the present.

Taking all the above into account, it may ultimately be methodologically important to consider the emic conceptualizations of the folk itself regarding folklore genres. At the same time, the comparison between metafolkloristic commentaries and the views of contemporary informants helps bridge the gap between continuity and change, as it becomes clear which elements of tradition endure and which are now regarded as outdated. After all, especially in the case of proverbial discourse, we must always bear in mind that it is one thing for someone to know a proverb, another to believe that it holds true in the present—or that it holds true in a different way—and yet another to consider that it does not hold today.

In attempting to provide an emic definition of the proverb genre within the context of Greek folklore, we consider useful to combine the three definitions given above (from the metaproverbs, the students’ definition and the informants’ definition). We believe that such a definition would be as follows:

A proverb, in Greek folk culture, is the community’s condensed, conventional saying—of anonymous popular authorship rich in metaphor (often rhythmic) and memorably phrased, which distills inherited experience and ethos and is passed down through generations; it is activated in the appropriate context to frame and guide speech and action, claiming prudence (and at times truth or sacred warrant), with its authority resting chiefly on its aptness in use while reflecting traditional perspectives.

The composite definition proposed here is indeed close to several established folkloristic and paremiological definitions in emphasizing brevity, figurative expression, wisdom and contextual use. The present study does not argue that an emic approach is superior to scholarly paremiological approaches, nor that it can replace them. Its contribution lies elsewhere: in reconstructing how, the proverb is reflexively conceptualized within Greek folk discourse, in comparing that reflexive traditional evidence with disciplinary informed and non-specialist contemporary definitions, and in showing how the relative weight of defining fea-

tures shifts across these corpora. The emic and etic perspectives are thus treated here as complementary rather than comparative.

Metaproverbs permit us to “hear” what the genre has to say about itself, while compared to emerging folklorists’ and informants’ definitions, it is perceived more as a communicative strategy employed in various circumstances, being extremely useful in dealing with the complexity of life, since what seems important for people is what they can do with a genre. Such an approach rejects the broader effort of folk culture’s “museumization” and the contemporary era’s constant anxiety about innovation—even in everyday discourse.¹⁹ Innovation can also emerge from new uses, and this is something that proverbs continually demonstrate.

7. Conclusion

This article utilized metaproverbs—proverbs about proverbs—as an indicator of an inherent approach within Greek folklore to how the proverb genre essentially defines itself. By analyzing eight such proverbial texts which focus on origin, authority, function and appropriateness, it is highlighted that proverbs arise from recurrent experience, claim authority (sometimes even sacred warrant), and are regarded as sensible and invaluable speech, being effective in the proper context.

Comparing the above characteristics, through the definition proposed for the genre based on the metaproverbs, with contemporary definitions, both continuity and change were highlighted. The three data corpora seem to converge on condensation, practical wisdom and context, but diverge on the sacralization

¹⁹ This phenomenon is particularly pronounced, since many regard proverbs as stereotypes and clichés that ought not to be used, as they offer no originality. It is striking, moreover, that such a tendency toward negative terminology related to proverbial discourse is articulated even by scholars (Naciscione 2015). Within the framework of folk literature, however—which also includes proverbs—change and transformation are the rule. This does not, of course, exclude a tendency toward stability in folk literature, due chiefly to collective authorship and the memorized oral tradition (Meraklis 1988: 10). Proverbs in particular are easily memorizable texts that may not undergo major changes in form because of their brevity, yet they can be used each time in new contexts, which makes them valuable tools for everyday human communication—a process that effectively combines stability with change.

of proverbs and universal truth-claims. All of the above demonstrates that proverbs are no longer treated as axioms but as communication tools, shifting the locus of authority from above use to within use.

The contribution of this study lies less in proposing entirely new defining features than in grounding them emically and comparatively: it shows how these features are articulated within Greek metaproverbs and how they are reweighted in contemporary student and popular understandings, especially in relation to authority. Thus, the validity of this composite definition proposed here is necessarily culture -and language- bound. It concerns the Greek folk category “παροιμία” and its emic construal in archival and contemporary discourse and should not be read as a universally applicable definition of the proverb across languages and traditions. What may travel beyond the Greek case is less the resulting definition itself than the methodological procedure: combining metaproverbial discourse with contemporary elicited definitions to reconstruct and compare emic genre concepts.

We thus hope to have brought to light *the Greek concept of the proverb*, recalling Jan Fredrik Kindstrand’s emblematic study (1978), which focused on how the genre was understood by ancient authors. For our part, we have relied primarily on oral sources and contemporary informants, aiming to show how the concept of the proverb is perceived synchronically, while, at the same time, indicating both the constants that govern it and the shifts as perceived by its users.

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WOLFGANG MIEDER

THE WORD ORIGIN OF “ANTI-PROVERB”: A BRIEF SURVEY OF THE LITERATURE

It is no secret that the international community of paremiologists has credited me with having coined the scholarly term “*Antispruchwort*” (anti-proverb). Anna T. Litovkina, a most prolific surveyor of such proverb manipulations, may be cited to represent numerous other statements to this effect:

Wolfgang Mieder has coined the term *Antispruchwort* (anti-proverb) for deliberate proverb innovations (also known in English as *alterations*, *mutations*, *parodies*, *transformations*, *variations*, *wisecracks*, *deliberate proverb innovations*, or *fractured proverbs*) and has published several collections of anti-proverbs in both German and English. Wolfgang Mieder’s term *Antispruchwort* has been widely accepted by proverb scholars all over the world as a general label for such innovative alterations or reactions to traditional proverbs: *anti-proverb* (English), *anti(-)proverbe* (French), *antiposlovitsa* (Russian), and *anti(-)proverbium* (Hungarian) (T. Litovkina 2015: 326–327).

Naturally the term has by now been translated into numerous other languages, and many studies of anti-proverbs have indeed been published throughout the world to attest to this intentional linguistic “play” with traditional proverbs (Mieder 2009 and 2023).

The German folklorist and paremiologist Lutz Röhrich and I employed the term “*Antispruchwörter*” (the plural form) in our co-authored book *Spruchwort* (Röhrich and Mieder 1977: 115; Mieder 2004: 249) for the first time in 1977 by basing it on the

folkloristic term “Antimärchen” (anti-fairytale) taken from André Jolles’ significant book *Einfache Formen* (1972: 241). But as T. Litovkina mentioned above, five years later I began to publish several books about German anti-proverbs that most certainly helped to establish the word “Antispruchwort” as of 1982:

- *Antispruchwörter*. 3 vols. Wiesbaden: Verlag für deutsche Sprache, 1982 and 1985; and Wiesbaden: Quelle & Meyer, 1989.
- *Verdrehte Weisheiten. Antispruchwörter aus Literatur und Medien*. Wiesbaden: Quelle & Meyer, 1998.
- „Entkernte Weisheiten“. *Modifizierte Sprichwörter in Literatur, Medien und Karikaturen*. Wien: Praesens Verlag, 2017.
- „Hinterfragte Weisheiten“. *Modifizierte Sprichwörter in Literatur, Medien und Karikaturen*. Wien: Praesens Verlag, 2022.
- „Verdrehte Wendungen“. *Sprichwörtliches in Literatur, Medien und Karikaturen*. Wien: Praesens Verlag, 2025.

It is little wonder that the term and concept “Antispruchwort” caught on in the German-speaking countries, and I suppose I can also state that Anna T. Litovkina and I deserve some credit in spreading its English translation of “anti-proverb” worldwide through our two Anglo-American collections:

- *Twisted Wisdom. Modern Anti-Proverbs*. Burlington, Vermont: The University of Vermont, 1999.
- *Old Proverbs Never Die, They Just Diversify. A Collection of Anti-Proverbs*. Burlington, Vermont: The University of Vermont, 2006; Veszprém, Hungary: The Pannonian University of Veszprém, 2006.

With proper scholarly humility, Anna T. Litovkina and I can take some credit for establishing the “anti-proverbial” subfield of paremiology, which is being tilled by ever more folklorists, linguists, phraseologists, and naturally paremiologists (T. Litovkina et al. 2021). But how about the internationally accepted term

“anti-proverb”, which we and many others have used for several decades by now?

The impetus for the answer to this question came from a short e-mail message of September 21, 2022, from my friend and fellow folklorist/paremiologist Charles Clay Doyle:

Dear Wolfgang,

I believe your bibliographies do not include this small article:

William Coyle. “From Scatological to Social History: *Captain Billy’s Whiz Bang*.” *Studies in American Humor*, 3, no. 3 (1977), 135–141.

There’s an (early?) use of the English term *anti-proverb*.

Best, Charlie

The article deals with the humorous content of Captain Wilford H. Fawcett’s monthly magazine *Whiz Bang* that appeared in the United States between 1919 and 1930. Comparing the expressed humor to that of the great humorist Josh Billings (1818–1885) and others (Sweterlitsch 2001), William Coyle writes:

The kind of linguistic mayhem committed by Josh Billings, Petroleum V. Nassby, Bill Nye, and other late nineteenth-century humorists is represented by anti-proverbs and mock quotations and especially puns.

The anti-proverb, a speciality of Josh Billings, subverts a traditional admonitory form with anti-climax or some other incongruity.

[This is followed by a list of 15 examples from Captain Fawcett’s magazine of which these are definitely anti-proverbs]

- Hell hath no fury like a woman’s corn. (May 1923)
- Familiarity breeds attempt. (July 1923)
- Virility is the spice of life. ((Oct. 1923)
- To err is human and sometimes divine. (Jan. 1924)
- The best friends must park. (Feb. 1924)
- It is better to love a short man than never to have loved at all. (March 1924)
- Where ignorance is bliss, ‘tis folly to confess. (April 1924)

(Coyle 1977: 137–138)

Coyle uses the term one more time in the transitionary sentence “Like the anti-proverb, the mock quotation is essentially irrever-

ent as it travesties a traditional form, and the more eminent the original source, the more effective the mockery” (Coyle 1977: 138). One thing is for certain: even though William Coyle does not reveal where he found the term “anti-proverb”, he most certainly applies it in the same meaning as Lutz Röhrich and I did in the same year of 1977. However, while “Antispruchwort” caught on in German and its English translation, Coyle’s ingenious formulation did not.

While it may perhaps never be known whether Coyle coined the term on his own, my subsequent research on the term “anti-proverb” has yielded several references that predate that of 1977! Imagine my scholarly excitement when I discovered the following short text by British essayist and literary critic Thomas de Quincey (1785–1859), which appeared identically in *The London Magazine* (November 1823), 99. 496–497, and half a year later again in *The Museum of Foreign Literature and Science*, 4, no. 19 (1824), pp. 81–82:

Proverbs

As the ‘wisdom of nation,’ and the quintessential abstract of innumerable minds, proverbs must naturally be true: but how? In what sense true? Not *haplōs* [Greek for: singly, in one way], not absolutely and unconditionally, but in relation to that position from which they are taken, Most proverbs are hemispheres as it were; and they imply another hemisphere with an opposite pole; and the two proverbs jointly compose a sphere – *i. e.* the entire truth. Thus the one proverb says – ‘Fortune favours fools:’ but this is met by its anti-proverb – ‘Sapiens dominabitur astris [The wise will rule the stars].’ – Each is true, as long as the other co-exists; each becomes false, if taken exclusively.

The illustration, by the way, is not the best I might have chosen – with a little more time for consideration: but the principle here advanced of truths being in many cases no truths unless taken with their complements (to use a trigonometrical term), – and until they are rounded into a perfect figure by an opposite hemisphere, – this principle, I shall endeavor to show a little further on, is a most important one and of very large application (de Quincey 2000: 3, 160).

Indeed, de Quincey could have chosen more obvious English contrasting proverb pairs, like “Out of sight, out of mind” and “Absence makes the heart grow fonder.” But what he says about the limited truth of proverbs is right to the point. After all, it is the context in which a proverb appears that gives it its truth, and they are most certainly not universally true. Regarding his earliest known use of the English term “anti-proverb”, it is clear that here it has the meaning of a contradictory or opposite proverb. Such dueling proverbs, as they have also been called, have nothing to do with the modern meaning of anti-proverb. Clearly “anti” is here understood as opposite, as can be seen from two other references from 1916 and 1971:

It is manifest that the *art* of ethics can be practiced only when one is sure of his ethics. The practical aids which I have mentioned or indicated will be equally useful for all ethical systems, for they simply help to carry into effect the various principles; and every one of them has been foreshadowed in the proverbial sayings of mankind, although every proverb has, as it were, an *anti-proverb* which needs to be considered (Cox 1916: 218).

I have prepared the following list of looking-both-ways proverbs:

Cloches make the man. – Appearances are deceptive.

Misfortunes never come singly. – Lightning never strikes twice.

Haste makes waste. – Delays are dangerous.

[...]

And there are many more such mirror-pairs. It is great help in public debates to throw an anti-proverb into the teeth of your political rival every time he uses a proverb. But what is sauce for the goose can be sauce for the gander, and what you do to your adversary he may do to you (Khory 1971: 12).

To be sure, there are also some appearances of the term “anti-proverb” where the “anti” simply expresses being against proverbs as such. They consider proverbs useless, outdated, and unfit for today. Such opponents have been referred to as members of an “anti-proverb league,” “anti-proverb clique,” and “anti-proverb brigade”. Clearly the following statements from

1927, 1952, and 1974 have nothing to do with the concept of “anti-proverb” under discussion:

The Anti-Proverb League pridefully points out that Lindbergh couldn’t possibly have had any success had he paid any attention to the familiar saw about the wisdom of keeping one’s feet on the ground (Anonymous 1927: 57).

Every now and then there comes a moment of triumph for the anti-proverb clique. Its members happily treasure the memory of the time a Russian delegate, in a veritable proverb-quoting frenzy, announced that “truth is stranger than a needle in the haystack” (Rosenthal 1952: 14).

I’m just *not* a member of the cynical anti-proverb brigade. These comforting slabs of classical cliché have a great role to play in a world that changes its values on the hour every day. They have something of the therapeutic value of corny jokes, the soul-release and identity-comfort of wagon loads of New York graffiti (Andrews 1974: 181).

But with this, these deliberations take a sharp historical turn to the early seventeenth century, namely to the two small booklets of Nicholas Breton (1545–1626?) entitled *Crossing of Proverbs. Crosse-Answeres and Cross-Humours* (1616, 10 pp.) and *Crossing of Proverbs. The Second Part. With Certaine briefe Questions and Answers* (1616, 24 pp.). This early British paremiographer understood the “crossing of proverbs” as the juxtaposition of traditional proverbs with an equally short rejoinder (Robertson 1944). His collections always list the proverb (P) first followed in the next line with the crossing (C). Here are but a few examples from Breton’s reprinted works (Grossart 1879):

P. Good wine makes a merry heart.
C. Not when the conscience is wounded.

P. Many hands make quick work.
C. Not among the lazy.

P. Love will go through stone walls.
C. Not till there be holes in them.

P. Marriage is honourable.

C. Not when it is dishonored.

Some of these “proverb crossings” could be considered anti-proverbs in the way that modern aphoristic authors have reacted in a couple of lines to traditional proverbs. However, there is more to this when considering how Pierre-Alexandre Gratet-Duplessis documented Breton’s unique collection in his invaluable *Bibliographie parémiologique. Études bibliographiques et littéraires* (1847). Not only does he describe it in a solid page but he also includes two pages of examples of such crossings with French translations! He concludes all of this with this insightful paragraph:

La plupart de ces *Contre-proverbes* (*Crossings*) ne sont presque autre chose que des jeux de mots ou des espèces de calembourgs qui ne sauraient atténuer le moins du monde le sens et la portée des Proverbes qu’ils contredisent ; j’ajouterai toutefois et l’on reconnaîtra sans doute que quelques-uns de ces *Anti-proverbes* sont au moins assez ingénieux, même quand ils ne sont pas vrais (Gratet-Duplessis 1847: 394).

This might then well be the first appearance in French, in 1847, of “anti-proverbe” and it remains to be seen whether this term caught on in the scholarly world before 1977. I have not found it, but delight in citing it here as an example of another linguistic strand. Breton’s idea of proverb crossings continues to this day, as can be seen from a small collection by Spike Milligan in the British humor magazine *Punch* in 1974:

The apples on the other side of the wall are sweetest: Wrong: apples do not grow on the sides of walls.

Better late than never: Rubbish. If you never show up, you’ll never be late.

Don’t change horses in mid stream: Supposing the one you are on can’t swim?

(Milligan 1974: 58)

Such texts could count as anti-proverbs, but there is only the one French reference of “anti-proverbe” just mentioned that has used this term for them.

However, there is a second French reference from a travel account in Germany from 1843 by no one less than composer Hector Berlioz (1803–1969) that contains the French term in its meaning of anti-proverbs as they are understood by scholars today:

J'aurais l'air de reconnaître son [un ami L. Schlosser] hospitalité, quand je ne ferais que lui rendre justice. Nouvelle preuve de la vérité de l'anti-proverbe: Un bienfait est toujours perdu! (Berlioz 1870: 326)

The traditional French proverb is indeed “Un bienfait ne'est jamais perdu” making Berlioz's statement “Un bienfait est toujours perdu” a true anti-proverb"! His use of the term “anti-proverbe” is thus an early French reference! Great! But alas, it did not catch on and gain any currency in the French language.

The English translation from 1932 of this French reference reads as follows:

I should seem to be thanking him [a friend L. Schlosser] for his hospitality, when really I should only be doing him justice. A fresh proof of the truth of the anti-proverb, “A benefit is always lost!” (Berlioz 1932: 343)

This reference could therefore claim that it contains the first occurrence of the term “anti-proverb” in English. True as that might be, it did not gain any currency. It is also highly doubtful that William Coyle had come across this passage when he used the term in his essay from 1977.

Finally, then, there is one even more recent occurrence of the English term “anti-proverb” in an essay by the American economist Kenneth E. Boulding in his article on “The Need for Reform of National Income Statistics” (1971). At the beginning of his essay he writes:

However, one of my favorite anti-proverbs is that nothing fails like success, and the very success of National Income Statistics perhaps has induced a certain complacency among economists, who sit a little too secure in the high prestige of which National Income Statistics have been a considerable part of the purchase price (Boulding 1971: 383).

He is, of course, basing his anti-proverb on the well-known proverb "Nothing succeeds like success!" In fact, he liked his creation so much that he repeats it towards the end of his short article, introducing it once again as an anti-proverb:

The corollary of the anti-proverb that I quoted at the beginning – that nothing fails like success – is that we only learn from failure, which is why it is important to identify the right failures and to learn the right things from them (Boulding 1971: 585).

Together with William Coyle's statement from 1977, this reference from 1971 is clearly also a precursor to the way the term "anti-proverb" is employed internationally for this play with proverbs today. It is doubtful they influenced each other and that they were of any influence on its scholarly employment that conquered the paremiological world after 1977. I myself used it repeatedly already in my books *Tradition and Innovation in Folk Literature* (1987: 155–156) and *American Proverbs: A Study of Texts and Contexts* (1989: 242–244 and 274–275). For me personally, it fills my heart to know that I have had the honor and privilege to have been part of making the study of anti-proverbs a truly international phenomenon.

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Рецензия

Поступила 8 февраля 2026 г.

Принята к публикации 3 марта 2026 г.

ВАЛЕРИЙ М. МОКИЕНКО
ЕЛЕНА К. НИКОЛАЕВА

Екатерина В. Огольцева. *Синонимия устойчивых сравнений в русском языке*. Москва: Директ-Медиа, 2025. 420 с. ISBN 978-5-4499-5093-2.

Монография Е. В. Огольцевой подводит итог многолетним исследованиям русской компаративной фразеологии и фразеологии. Сама структура книги, включающая 5 глав, объективно отражает доминантные аспекты таких исследований. После обстоятельного Введения, в 1-й главе автор аналитически обобщает теоретические трактовки синонимии в сфере фразеологии и предлагает свою интерпретацию специфики синонимии устойчивых сравнений (далее – УС) (Огольцева 2025: 10–93).

Автор книги подробно останавливается и на формировании компаративной фразеологии и фразеологии как неотъемлемой части общей фразеологии, подчеркивая и характеризуя заслуги своих предшественников. Раскрываются не только общие моменты в трактовке компаративных фразеологизмов как особых языковых единиц, но и различия в структуре и в суперсегментном значении.

Критериями синонимичности УС на основе этого признаются: 1) единство понятия, 2) единство предметной отнесенности и 3) совпадение валентности. Сама возможность синонимических отношений определяется свойством воспроизводимости, присущим любому устойчивому сравнению как единице языка.

Специфика синонимии УС в значительной мере определяется спецификой компаративного значения: в семантике устойчивого сравнения денотативный аспект не столько именует признак, сколько индивидуализирует его посред-

ством образного выражения (Огольцева 2025: 70). Пожалуй, к этому следует добавить и различия в градуировании экспрессивности, возникающие при подобной индивидуализации, которые создаются внутренней формой компаративных фразеологизмов, аккумулирующей лингвокультурологическую информацию. Не упускает автор книги и возможности измерения узуальности-неузуальности УС путем анкетирования носителей языка.

Характеризуя широкий спектр признаков, объединяющих компаративную фразеологию с устойчивыми сочетаниями иной структуры, Е. В. Огольцева выделяет и ряд особенностей, связанных со спецификой их структуры и с особенностями компаративной семантики (Огольцева 2025: 92):

- единство понятия в системе УС-синонимов проявляется как совпадение элемента С (признака сравнения) при различии элементов В (образов сравнений);
- в УС-синонимах единство «предметной отнесенности» предстает как выражение элемента С либо тем же словом, либо его синонимическими вариантами в пределах одного *tertium comparationis*;
- совпадение валентности проявляется как единство объекта приложения сравнения (элемента А).

Все УС-члены синонимического ряда являются «стилистическими» синонимами, поскольку им всем присущи живая образность и экспрессивность.

2-я глава монографии (Огольцева 2025: 94–193) посвящена идеографическому анализу компаративной фразеологии. Под фразеосемантическим полем (ФСП) при этом понимается «система устойчивых выражений, которые находятся в определённых семантических отношениях между собой и объединяются общностью темы, а следовательно, и единством выражаемых ими понятий» (Огольцева 2025: 98). При такой трактовке ФСП понимается не как часть лексико-семантического поля, а как особая, относительно самостоятельная подсистема. Термином тематическая группа автор обозначает совокупность устойчивых сравнений, имеющих

общую сему и системно связанных между собой, а термином идеографическое поле – принцип внутренней организации той или иной тематической группы, которая, в свою очередь, может включать в себя подгруппы. Первичной классификационной единицей в этой иерархической системе является синонимический ряд УС.

Осознавая и отмечая объективную сложность тематического описания системы УС, автор выстраивает собственную идеографическую рубрикацию устойчивых сравнений, подчиняя ее основной задаче своего исследования – анализу синонимических рядов УС.

В системе устойчивых сравнений выделяются следующие тематические группы: 1) «Внешность, внешний вид человека (редко – животного)»; 2) «Состояние окружающей среды; физическое и психологическое состояние человека»; 3) «Черты характера, темперамента; поведение человека»; 4) «Движение; подвижность/неподвижность человека (предмета)»; 5) «Отношения между людьми»; 6) «Речь, речевое поведение человека; голос»; 7) «Физические свойства предметов и действия, направленные на изменение этих свойств»; 8) «Действия; работа, трудовая деятельность человека»; 9) «Образ жизни, условия жизни человека»; 10) «Интеллектуальные качества человека» («Ментальная деятельность»); 11) «Нравственные качества человека»; 12) «Внешние (визуально наблюдаемые) свойства предметов; 13) «Восприятие действительности органами чувств». Структура этих групп и общая характеристика синонимических рядов рассматривается в особом разделе (Огольцева 2025: 114–183), а общей характеристике периферийных тематических групп уделено особое внимание (Огольцева 2025: 184–193). Отмечает автор и гендерные различия в характеристике объектов сравнения.

Квалифицируется также частотность употребления анализируемых синонимических рядов. В поле зрения Е. В. Огольцевой постоянно находится аксиологическая характеристика описываемых тематических групп, причем нащупывается превалирование негативной оценочности над позитивной.

Специальное внимание уделено характеристике слов-сопроводителей УС, представленных разными частями речи.

Анализ всего этого обширного пространства иллюстрируется удачно подобранными контекстами из классической и современной литературы и средств массовой информации, а иллюстрации из Национального корпуса русского языка подтверждают актуальность анализируемых УС. При этом границы между их тематическими группами носят условный и подвижный характер, а взаимодействие между ядром и периферией имеет разную степень интенсивности.

В 3-ей главе (Огольцева 2025: 194–250) Е. В. Огольцева сосредоточивается на анализе семантических отношений между словами, выражающими образ (компонент В), в составе синонимических рядов компаративных фразеологизмов. Такие стержневые компоненты являются иррадиаторами семантики и структуры УС, поэтому особое внимание к ним оправдано. Основание сравнения характеризует индивидуальный признак предмета, что и является не только основной функцией образного сравнения, но и мерилom его внутренней формы.

Синонимия УС нередко сопряжена с принадлежностью образов к одному идеографическому пространству (resp. лексико-семантическому полю). Хотя такие УС-синонимы обычно образованы по одной модели, в их семантической структуре обнаруживаются заметные различия. Весьма избирательно и их употребление.

Заключительный (7-й) параграф 3-ей главы посвящен анализу образов сравнений в многочленных синонимических рядах УС (Огольцева 2025: 231–250). Представленные автором примеры свидетельствуют о том, что даже при условии предельной семантической близости между синонимичными УС наблюдаются более или менее тонкие различия, выявляющиеся при контекстуальном анализе. Отсюда – убедительный вывод: «УС-синонимы всегда в той или иной мере являются «идеографическими», а иногда семантические различия осложняются стилистическими» (Огольцева 2025: 250). Именно сопоставление компаративных синонимов позволяет дифференцировать различные средства образной индивидуализации одних и тех же признаков.

После тщательного анализа синонимических отношений Е. В. Огольцева переходит к антонимии. Во многом различие

во взглядах фразеологов-компаративистов на антонимию определяется разным пониманием статуса слов-сопроводителей, что отмечает и автор монографии: «Деление УС-антонимов на «контрарные» и «контрадикторные» было бы возможно в случае, если бы каждый компаративный фразеологизм употреблялся лишь с одним, строго определённым словом-сопроводителем...» (Огольцева 2025: 257). По мнению Е. В. Огольцевой, это не соответствует действительности, но именно так считают ее оппоненты, в частности, И. В. Кузнецова, с которой автор дискутирует в 4-ой главе. А при условии, что левый компонент сравнения, выражающий основание сравнение, является полноценным воспроизводимым компонентом УС, можно обнаружить проявления антонимии в УС и при полном совпадении образа сравнения (компонента В) (хотя Е.В. это отрицает), можно рассматривать и векторную антонимию (Огольцева 2025: 254), и контрарную и контрадикторную антонимию, признавать особенности проявления антонимии у адъективных и глагольных УС (Огольцева 2025: 255), как делают сторонники этого похода. Однако Е. В. Огольцева не включает левый компонент в состав сравнения и с этих позиций последовательно представляет свое видение проблем антонимии УС.

По ее мнению, «антонимические оппозиции в системе УС формируются при совпадении следующих факторов: 1) градуируемость признака-основания и, как следствие, наличие антонимов у слов-сопроводителей; 2) коммуникативная востребованность оппозиции в целом; 3) необходимая для реализации антонимического противопоставления «симметричность» контрастирующих сем; 4) противопоставление одного (нескольких) дифференциальных семантических признаков на фоне одного интегрального, «стержневого»; 5) возникновение семантической оппозиции на ступени актуального звена компаративной цепи, чаще всего на уровне вторичной ступени уподобления, представленной наречиями-обстоятельствами; 6) общность (полная либо частичная) компонента А – объекта приложения образной характеристики; 7) сходство речевых ситуаций» (Огольцева 2025: 302).

Исследуя взаимную зависимость синонимии и антонимии, автор выявляет вполне определённую тенденцию: с од-

ной стороны, «если устойчивая компаративная структура не вступает в синонимические связи, антонимы, как правило, также отсутствуют» (с. 263), с другой, отмечает, что у оборотов с широким синонимическим рядом также наблюдается отсутствие антонимических отношений. Хотя некоторые из наблюдений кажутся сомнительными – например, утверждение об отсутствии антонимии в группе УС о глубоком и безмятежном сне (Огольцева 2025: 296). Несомненно, крепкий сон гораздо более широко представлен не только в русской, но и в славянской фразеологии, однако существуют и единицы (хоть и немногочисленные) с противоположным значением ‘спать чутко’: *спать как заяц* (общесл.), *спать как собака на заборе* (модель: спать в неудобном месте – ‘чутко, неглубоко’, представлена во всех славянских языках), *спать соловьиным сном*.

Последняя глава монографии посвящена омонимии УС, разногласия фразеологов во взглядах на которую также зависят от отношения к словам-сопроводителям. По мнению сторонников компонентного воспроизводимого статуса каждой лексемы-основания сравнения (и ее синонимов), к омонимам относятся только УС, имеющие разные значения при одинаковых основаниях сравнения (то, что В. М. Огольцев и автор монографии называют «созначениями»), а УС с разными значениями трактуются как разные сравнительные обороты с собственным значением, что значительно сужает круг компаративных омонимов. Однако, несмотря на теоретические разногласия фразеологов, скрупулезный семантический (в частности, контекстуальный) анализ, проведенный Е. В. Огольцевой с целью демонстрации разницы в значениях и созначениях УС, впечатляет и убеждает.

Исследование Е. В. Огольцевой, таким образом, дает целостную характеристику лингвистического своеобразия устойчивых сравнений русского языка как органической части общей фразеологической системы. Практически все аспекты избранной ею проблематики освещены последовательно и детально. Поводов для критических или дискуссионных замечаний (обязательных в жанре рецензии) поэтому немного. Выскажем некоторые из них.

1. Лингвокультурологическая значимость УС. Е. В. Огольцева в разных частях монографии справедливо подчеркивает, что компаративная фразеология дает ценный материал для понимания национальной языковой картины. Не всегда, однако, тот или иной русский оборот может быть паспортизован как сугубо национальный. Так, автор книги констатирует: «Выделим синонимические ряды, наиболее богатые в количественном отношении, а, следовательно, отражающие те участки данного идеографического поля, которые особенно значимы для русской лингвокультуры: как пулемёт, как из пулемёта (строчить, стрекотать, выпаливать); как <базарная> баба (болтать), как балаболка, как пустая бочка (греметь), как трещотка (трещать), как сорока (стрекотать)» (Огольцева 2025: 155–156). Подобные утверждения типичны для русистов, реконструирующих русскую языковую картину без сопоставительного анализа. Понятно, что «значимость для русской лингвокультуры» не адекватна «чисто русскому» происхождению УС, в любом случае, однако, такое утверждение преувеличивает собственно национальную их специфику. А ведь образы, которым придается здесь национальная маркировка, собственно русскими можно назвать лишь относительно. Так, для УС как пустая бочка (греметь) и язык как у базарной бабы у кого нетрудно найти славянские параллели – ср., напр., чеш. *tá hlas jako ze sudu* и *mluví jako bába na trhu*. Коннотативность же сороки с болтовней, имплицированная в УС как сорока (стрекотать), имеет широкие и древние индоевропейские корни – ср. *štěbetá jako straka*, серию немецких паремий с теми же коннотациями (*er hat von der Elster gegessen; er kann Elster schwatzen lehren; man muss keiner Elster das Ohr leihen; Die Elster stiehlt, so gut sie schwatzt; So lange die Elstern schwatzen, singen die Schwäne nicht* (ср. лат. *Tunc canent cygni, quam tacebunt graculi*) и под.) или древнегреческое *σου δεῦω λαλιστέραν ουλωποτ εἶδον κίτταν* (букв. болтливее тебя я и сороки не ви-

дал) (Alexid. Athen. 4, 133 с.). Такого рода параллели свидетельствуют об интернациональном характере многих русских УС. Обусловлен ли он универсальными (типологическими) или генетическими факторами – особый вопрос, требующий специального сопоставительного или историко-этимологического анализа.

2. Кстати, диахроническому аспекту исследования русской компаративной фразеологии, как кажется, Е. В. Огольцевой следовало бы уделить больше внимания, ибо именно историко-этимологический комментарий почти всегда и направлен на поиски лингвокультурологической информации, которая столь интересует автора.
3. Не кажется оправданным использование термина лексической семантики семантический вариант (ЛСВ) в значении «устойчивое сравнение с другим значением/созначением»: «Общее количество УС (в случае полисемии – их *семантических вариантов* – значений и созначений)» (Огольцева 2025: 187); «В случае, когда УС характеризуется двумя (и более) значениями, в синонимические отношения, по существу, вступают *семантические варианты* компаративной структуры» (Огольцева 2025: 310). Такой подход может породить терминологическую путаницу, поскольку понимание вариантов в теории компаративной фразеологии связано именно с сохранением семантического тождества, что признает и сам автор монографии: «варианты есть модификации формы и содержания устойчивой единицы, не нарушающие её тождества» (Огольцева 2025: 92). Другими словами: **вариант** – это изменение формального облачения сочетания, **синоним** – сопряжение оборотов по семантике.

Отдельные примеры, приведенные автором для обоснования некоторых утверждений, вызывают сомнение, например, отнесение УС (полосатый) *как тигр* к моносемантам (ср.: *злой, разъярённый как тигр*), а также отрицание наличия у него

синонимов (ср. *полосатый как зебра*). Непонятно, почему УС (прилип) *как банный лист* не учитывается в качестве синонима к УС *как (словно, точно) муха к мёду* (о человеке, который слишком явно, навязчиво проявляет симпатию, привязанность к кому-л., «липнет» к кому-л.) (Огольцева 2025: 316).

Все это не снижает общего положительного впечатления от монографии Е. В. Огольцевой. В книге впервые намечена типология отношений между образами синонимичных сравнений и предложена модель реализации отношений семантического тождества в разных тематических группах устойчивых сравнений. Автор выявляет участки системы устойчивых сравнений, наиболее богатые синонимическими рядами и демонстрирует различные аспекты взаимодействия синонимии, антонимии и полисемии. Системные отношения в сфере русской компаративной фразеологии исследуются с привлечением методов структурно-семантического моделирования, компонентного анализа, а также анализа словарных дефиниций и микроконтекстов, извлечённых, в частности, из Национального корпуса русского языка. Обильная и информативная библиография дает возможность оценить многолетний опыт исследования компаративной фразеологии и задуматься об их перспективе.

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Marcas Mac Coinnigh. *Mnemonic Structure and Style in Irish Proverbs*. Online Supplement Series of Proverbium Yearbook of International Proverb Scholarship, Osijek, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences 2025, 258 pp. ISSN 3044-3873, (eBook), <https://naklada.ffos.hr/knjige/index.php/ff/catalog/category/proverbium>.

Mnemonic Structure and Style in Irish Proverbs by Marcas Mac Coinnigh represents a major contribution to modern paremiological and stylistic studies. This monograph is the fifth volume in the *Proverbium Online Supplement Series* and examines the structural and stylistic features that make Irish-language proverbs memorable. This study is long overdue and provides the first systematic linguistic and mnemonic analysis of Irish-language proverbs. As stated in the opening chapter, “proverbs and proverbial language occupy a distinctive and enduring place in the Irish linguistic tradition, with documented roots reaching back to Old Irish literature” (Mac Coinnigh 2025: 20). Despite this rich linguistic legacy, a comprehensive examination of the structural and stylistic features of Irish-language proverbs has never been undertaken. Drawing on both close qualitative reading and corpus-based description, the analysis identifies recurring patterns across the data and offers valuable insights for linguists, folklorists, paremiologists, and scholars of the Irish language. Irish-language material has remained peripheral to international paremiology, even as the field has broadened to include traditions as varied as Ancient Greek, Hebrew, Arabic, Spanish, Russian, and Yiddish. Mac Coinnigh engages critically with foundational research by international scholars in the field and demonstrates the ways in which Irish-language proverbial material both conforms to and diverges from cross-linguistic norms.

The primary data set for analysis consists of over 18,000 proverbial entries from the three major dialectal collections of the twentieth century – Énrí Ó Muirghesea’s *Seanfhocla Uladh* (1907, 1936), Pádraig Ó Siochfhradha’s *Seanfhocail na Mui-mhneach* (1926), and Tomás S. Ó Máille’s *Sean-Fhocla Chonnacht* (1948, 1952). Chapter 1 examines the significance of these works to this study, outlining the methodological strengths and limitations of each collection. This material is contextualised through an examination of proverbial usage from the Old Irish period (8th–9th centuries) through to the bilingual lexicographic tradition of the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, and into the major documentary initiatives of the twentieth century. The significant contribution of Robert Shipboy MacAdam (1808–1895) to Irish paremiology in the mid-nineteenth century is noted. His unique methodical approach to the collection and classification of proverbs is highlighted, as well as his foresight in grappling with questions that remain among the most contested and resistant to resolution in the field. MacAdam not only complemented each Irish proverb in his collection with an English translation, but, in many cases, provided comparative equivalents from a range of European linguistic traditions, leading Hughes (1998) to characterise him as an early example of a “good European” (Mac Coinnigh 2025: 24).

Chapter 2 is one of the most taxonomically focused sections of the monograph. This chapter follows on naturally from the discussion towards the end of the opening chapter on the challenges associated with defining proverbs, issues concerning terminology, and the cataloguing of proverbial subforms. Different kinds of expressions that exist alongside “so-called ‘true’ proverbs” (Mac Coinnigh 2025: 54) in the Irish dialectal collections are the primary focus of this chapter. Particular attention is given to proverbial expressions, proverbial comparisons, Wellerisms (including culturally specific references to the importance of the wren in the Irish-language material), enumerative proverbs and proverbial questions. This framework offers many useful examples, together with translations and, in instances where the literal meaning diverges from the lexicalised sense of the proverbial subform being examined, additional explanatory glosses.

- (1) (14) *Éisteacht na muice bradaí*. (M§220)
 ‘The hearing of a thieving pig.’ (= keen hearing)

A distinct subcategory within the Irish tradition is highlighted in section 2.6 of this chapter, which focuses on enumerative proverbs (Mac Coinnigh 2025: 93–108). The historical development of enumerative structures in Irish literature is outlined and their arrangement in groups of three (triads) or four (tetrads) serves as a means of organising knowledge, moral instruction, and social values into compact and memorable numerical sets (Mac Coinnigh 2025: 94).

- (2) **Triad:**
 (66) *Trí neithe ná múintear: guth, féile ná filidheacht*. (M§1857)
 ‘Three things that are not taught: voice, generosity, and poetry.’

- (3) **Tetrad:**
 (67) *Na ceithre nídh is féarr do’n bhuailteoir: lámhchrann cuilinn, buailtín coill, punann amháin, agus urlár glan*. (U§46)
 ‘The four best things for the thresher: a holly handle, a hazel striker, a single sheaf, and a clean floor.’

Such examples provide one of the clearest examples of the book’s central thesis: that Irish proverbs are shaped by mnemonic devices which make proverbs easier to remember and transmit orally. The rigorous classification detailed in this chapter provides an important guiding framework for any future scholarly research in the field.

Chapters 3 and 4 examine syntactic, semantic, and prosodic features as mnemonic devices. The analysis of Irish-specific structures may be seen to enrich comparative theory, given that international paremiology has been shaped, whether explicitly or implicitly, by the dominant Modern European language traditions. Chapter 3 provides evidence of this through a detailed analysis of emphatic word order, a grammatical feature that distinguishes proverbs as a discrete linguistic form. As Irish is a

VSO language and does not employ sentence stress for emphasis, the copular construction is often utilised as a means of focusing in Irish. It is argued that such marked word order enhances memorability (Mac Coinnigh 2025: 143) and various examples demonstrate how syntactic foregrounding is used for emphasis in Irish.

(14) (93) *Is é **an gad is giorra don scornaigh** is córa a réi-teach ar dtúis.* (M§1576)

‘It is **the noose closest to the throat** that should be loosened first.’

Chapter 4 turns from the syntactic structures examined in the previous chapter to the semantic and prosodic aspects of Irish proverbs. The argument that metaphor, personification, alliteration, and rhyme all serve to help make proverbs memorable and suitable for oral transmission is strongly made. The centrality of metaphor in defining proverbs is acknowledged, and the case of Irish is reassessed through a measured analysis that makes for noteworthy reading (Mac Coinnigh 2025: 160).

Chapter 5 examines the social function of proverbs and serves as an appropriate closing chapter to this study. This chapter examines the *blason populaire*, a genre of traditional verbal stereotype directed at a folk group or a particular region. As a concluding chapter that focuses not only on the formal devices that contribute to proverbial memorability but also on the social and ideological functions of proverbs, it is likely to be of considerable interest to a wider academic audience. The legacy of colonialism is reflected in the fact that the English are the most frequently targeted foreign nation in the examples in the Irish material (Mac Coinnigh 2025: 198). Interestingly, an inverse correlation between a region’s geographical size and the frequency of blasons populaires is reported in the findings. The smaller the geographical unit (townland vs. nation), the more abundant the blasons populaires. Such findings resonate with Kavanagh’s celebrated claim that ‘parochialism is universal; it deals with the fundamentals’, a perspective that the poet Seamus Heaney later developed in his influential reflections on the role

of place in shaping the Irish psyche and its imaginative structures (Heaney 1980: 139).

Marcas Mac Coinnigh offers a comprehensive overview of Irish-language paremiology to date and lays out a coherent framework for future research in *Mnemonic Structure and Style in Irish Proverbs*. The recommendations for future research are especially pertinent for contemporary scholars. Integration with developments in the digital humanities, including large-scale lexicographic and corpus-building initiatives such as *Foclóir Stairiúil na Nua-Ghaeilge* (Historical Dictionary of Irish)¹ and *Corpas Náisiúnta na Gaeilge* (National Corpus of Irish)² is especially noteworthy. Such suggestions contribute to corpus-based and computational approaches to paremiology. Similarly, the ongoing digitisation of the *National Folklore Collection*³ provides valuable ethnographic data which contributes to the interpretation and analysis of proverbial material. This database contains one of the largest online proverb repositories in any language (Mac Coinnigh 2025: 226) and provides a unique foundation for future research in this area. Such future interdisciplinary research would provide a greater understanding of usage, structural variation, dialectal analysis, and linguistic patterns in proverbs.

Overall, this work is a timely and significant publication. Not only does Mac Coinnigh break new ground in Irish-language paremiological research, but he also reorients the study of Irish proverbs from an antiquarian emphasis on collection towards approaches grounded in structural, linguistic, and cognitive analysis. In doing so, it situates Irish proverbial traditions within broader international paremiological scholarship. *Mnemonic Structure and Style in Irish Proverbs* clearly establishes Marcas Mac Coinnigh as the foremost scholar in Irish-language paremiology, and this work should be viewed as a core reference and guiding text for students and scholars of Irish-language paremiology alike.

¹ <https://www.ria.ie/research-programmes/focloir-stairiuil-na-gaeilge/>

² <https://www.corpas.ie/en/cng/>

³ <https://www.duchas.ie/en>

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WOLFGANG MIEDER

INTERNATIONAL BIBLIOGRAPHY OF NEW AND REPRINTED PROVERB COLLECTIONS

For Rainer Metzner

It is with much excitement that I present this annual bibliography of old, reprinted, and new proverb collections. The number of 26 items is, of course, not very impressive, but there are reasons for it. Two of them are that the expense of buying book collections from abroad is prohibitive, with the postage adding yet another major expense to it. But there is also the problem that packages can not be sent to the United States from some countries. For example, I published a book in Vienna, Austria, a few months ago. The publisher sent me two copies with a special currier, but to this day I am waiting for a larger package with additional copies.

But this small bibliography contains several treasures just the same. My friend Christian Grandl drew my attention to Georg Mayr's sixteenth-century collection *Etliche hundert schöner / lustiger / vnd gemainer Teütschen Sprüchwörter / von allerlay guten Tugenten / Und von vermeydung manicherlay bösen Lastern / welliche vormalen nicht in Truck auß gangen / mänigklich sehr nutzlich zu lesen seind* (Augsburg: Philipp Ulhart, 1567). I actually have a photocopy of it but had never registered it in one of my bibliographies. But I also want to mention that my friend Fionnuala Carson Williams from Belfast sent me three Irish collections that I would most likely not have come across by myself. And then there is once again an invaluable Christmas present from my American brother George Schumm. Just imagine my surprise and joy when I opened the beautifully wrapped copy of the third edition of John Ray's *A Compleat Collection of English*

Proverbs; Also The most Celebrated Proverbs of the Scotch, Italian, French, Spanish, and other Languages (London: J. Hughes, 1737). Those are the joys of an octogenarian paremiographer!

I should also single out an amazing but somewhat hidden collection of Russian anti-proverbs dealing with the COVID-pandemic assembled by my two special friends Harry Walter and Valerii M. Mokienko, “Slovar’ russkikh kovidnykh antiposlovits-karantinok.” *Slovar’ russkogo iazyka koronavirusnoi epokhi. Polnia versiiia*. Ed. M.N. Priemysheva. 2 vols. (Sankt-Peterburg: Institut Lingvisticheskikh Issledovaniï RAN, 2025) 2, 1231-1287. There are smaller studies of anti-proverbs dealing with this tragic time, and together they show that paremiography and paremiology do address issues of the modern time.

As always I thank my friend Peter Unseth from the Graduate Institute of Applied Linguistics at Dallas, Texas, for sending me the information of some of the collections listed here. This also reminds me to encourage you to send me new collections for which I am more than happy to reimburse you. Please remember that I only list items in my annual bibliographies for which I have obtained copies to integrate into my International Proverb Library. Finally, as has become a tradition, I would like to dedicate this bibliography to a dear friend, this time Rainer Metzner, who has published a number of German collections of Biblical proverbs and proverbial expressions of which the newest volume is listed in this bibliography.

1. Andrews, Eamonn. “A Proverb a Week ...” *Punch*, 267 (July 31, 1974), 181-182.
2. Berger, Nicola. *Das große Quiz der Redewendungen & Sprichwörter*. Kempen: Moses Verlag, 2024. (card game with 75 cards with questions and answers)
3. Binker, Mary Jo (ed.). *What Are We For? The Words and Ideals of Eleanor Roosevelt*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2019. 236 pp.
4. Dinter, R. *Deutsches Sprichwörter-Album. Eine Sammlung von Sprüchen und Denkverse über Beispiele und Regeln des Lebens*. Breslau: R. Dinter, ca. 1908. 84. With illustrations.

5. Doyle, Charles Clay, and Wolfgang Mieder. *"Love Trumps Hate". The Dictionary of Modern Proverbs (A Supplement)*. Burlington, Vermont: The University of Vermont, 2025. 192 pp.
6. Edwards, Ann. *It's All Downhill from Here ... Wit and Wisdom Now You're Older*. Dublin: Boxer 2024. 94 pp. With numerous illustrations.
7. Ghanalanyan, A.T. *Haykakan aratsani [Armianskie poslovitsy]*. Erevan, Armenia: Haykakan SSR GA Hratarakh'ut'yum, 1951. 199 pp. (Armenian proverb collection). I thank my friend Tomás Vicente Ferreira for giving me this book as a special present.
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11. Macdonald, David. "Tibetan Proverbs and 'Good Sayings'." *Folklore* (London), 42, no. 1 (1931), 82-85.
12. Mayr, Georg. *Etliche hundert schöner / lustiger / vnd gemainer Teütschen Sprüchwörter / von allerlay guten Tugenten / Und von vermeydung manicherlay bösen Lastern / welliche vormalen nicht in Truck auß gangen / mänigklich sehr nützlich zu lesen seind*. Augspurg: Philipp Ulhart, 1567. 78 pp. I thank my friend Christian Grandl for drawing my attention to this treasure.
13. Mckeown, Jim C. *A Cabinet of Greek Curiosities. Strange Tales and Surprising Facts from the Cradle of Western Civ-*

- ilization*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. 286. With illustrations.
14. Metzner, Rainer. *Mit Feuereifer und Engelszungen. Kleines Lexikon deutscher Wörter biblischer Herkunft*. München: C.H. Beck, 2026. 221 pp.
 15. Milligan, Spike. "A Proverb a Week ..." *Punch*, 267 (July 10, 1974), 59.
 16. Mokienko, Valerii M., and T. G. Nikitina. *Frazeologicheskii slovar' Pskovshchiny*. Pskov: Logos, 2026. 346 pp.
 17. Ó Nualláin, Fiann. *52 Proverbs to Build Resilience against Anxiety and Panic. Irish Holistic Wisdom*. Cork: Mercier Press, 2023. 223 pp.
 18. Ó Nualláin, Fiann. *52 Proverbs to Fight Depression & Trauma. Irish Holistic Wisdom*. Cork: Mercier Press, 2024. 221 pp.
 19. Ray, John. *A Compleat Collection of English Proverbs; Also The most Celebrated Proverbs of the Scotch, Italian, French, Spanish, and other Languages. The whole Methodically Digested and Illustrated with Annotations, and proper Explifications. To which is added, (Written by the same Author) A Collection of English Words Not Generally Used With their Significations and Original in two Alphabetical Catalogues*. The Third Edition. London: J. Hughs, 1737. 319 pp. and 150 pp.
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 21. Seidl, Helmut A. *Ging Barbarossa nach Canossa? Adlige in historischen Sprichwörtern und Redensarten*. Hamburg: Books on Demand, 2025. 135 pp. With many illustrations.
 22. Soares, Rui João Baptista, Irina Zimonyi-Kalinyina, and Aurélie Ferandes. *Provérbios Europeus. European Proverbs. Európai közmondások*. Tavira, Portugal: Tipografia Tavirense, 2025. 262 pp. With many illustrations generated by AI.

23. Vali, Al di. *Wise Irish Words. Proverbs & Sayings*. Kilcoole, County Wicklow: Picture Press, 2024. 64 pp. With illustrations.
24. Völkel, Ulrich. *Eine Gardinenpredigt für das Arschgesicht. Die Welt der alten Redewendungen*. Daun: Regionalia Verlag, 2024. 127 pp. With illustrations.
25. Walter, Harry, and Valerii M. Mokienko. “Slovar’ russkikh kovidnykh antiposlovits-karantinok.” *Slovar’ russkogo iazyka koronavirusnoi epokhi. Polnia versiia*. Ed. M.N. Priemysheva. 2 vols. Sankt-Peterburg: Institut Lingvisticheskikh Issledovaniï RAN, 2025. 1409 pp. The small unique collection is in vol. 2, pp. 1231-1287.
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WOLFGANG MIEDER

INTERNATIONAL PROVERB SCHOLARSHIP: AN UPDTAED BIBLIOGRAPHY

For Maria Teresa Barbadillo de la Fuente

It is with much pleasure that I can list the impressive number of 347 publications that I was able to add this year to my International Proverb Library at the University of Vermont in Burlington, Vermont (USA). This means that I find a new publication pretty much every day. Once again I want to mention that Peter Unseth from the Graduate Institute of Applied Linguistics at Dallas, Texas, was of invaluable help in locating some obscure publications. We are in constant communication, and it is always a special joy when yet another few bibliographical references appear on my computer screen. More often than not, Peter also attaches PDF files that I can then print out in order to add to my archive as hard copies.

As can be imagined, I store more than ten thousand printed publications by now, and there are times when I wonder what might become of them one of these days. Luckily, I have been able to donate my nine thousand books about paremiological and phraseological matters to the University of Vermont Library a few years ago. All of this rich material awaits scholars and students from around the world to use for their research projects. Quite a few have come to Vermont over the years, and it is my pleasure and honor to welcome them with open arms and to assist them in any way I can.

Regarding this year's bibliography, I might point out that paremiology is truly modern by now! As you will see, there are several publications dealing with AI, the Internet, and various da-

tabases. There is also the continued interest in anti-proverbs and how some of them were created as reactions to the COVID-pandemic. Not surprisingly, this bibliography also contains articles about the use of the computer to translate proverbs. All of this is ample proof that proverb studies do in fact reflect on modern issues and employ the newest technology.

As always, the bibliography contains a number of essay volumes with numerous contributions, among them A. D. Bakina, A. M. Polikarnov, and O. B. Ponomareva (eds.), *Aktual'nye problemy frazeologii v kontekste noveishikh issledovanií XXI veka* (Moskva: Akademiia Estestvoznaniia, 2025), Ewa Komorowska, Magdalena Lisiecka-Czop, and Danuta Stanulewicz (eds.), *From Words to Fixed Expressions. Lexical Studies of Selected Indo-European Languages* (Göttingen: V & R unipress, 2025), Rui J.B. Soares and Outi Lauhakangas (eds.), *Proceedings of the Eighteenth Interdisciplinary Colloquium on Proverbs, 3rd to 10th November 2024, at Tavira, Portugal* (Tavira: Tipografia Tavirense, 2025), and several others. I should also mention that the sixteenth volume of the *Yearbook of Phraseology*, edited by Carmen Mellado Blanca and Fabian Mollica, the thirty-fifth volume of *Paremia*, edited by Manuel Martí Sánchez, and the forty-second volume of *Proverbium: Yearbook of International Proverb Scholarship*, edited by Melita Aleksa Varga and Hrisztalina Hrisztova-Gotthardt have appeared during this year. There is no doubt that paremiology and phraseology are truly international and interdisciplinary disciplines throughout the world. In order to register as many new publications as possible every year, it is important that you inform me of your published work. If at all possible, please send articles as e-mail attachments. Also please send newly published books for which I can reimburse you.

Finally, as has been my custom for many years, I would like to dedicate this year's bibliography to a very special Spanish friend from Madrid. I have known Maria Teresa Barbadillo de la Fuente for many years, and I value her erudite scholarship highly. The present bibliography lists a number of her more recent publications. We are not only great friends, but we are also both very interested in the proverbial language included in Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra's famous novel *Don Quixote*. Of course, it is good to know that all of us are not fighting windmills with our

work but that we make insightful contributions to a better understanding of a humane world.

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