

## EXPLORING THE USE OF ANTI-PROVERBS

Lilia HERȚA, lector,  
Oxana GOLUBOVSKI, lector

### Rezumat

*Proverbele pot fi studiate în comparație cu cu alte expresii apropiate lor, cum ar fi expresii fraziologice, zicători, aforisme, maxime, metafore și anti-proverbe, deoarece caracteristicile distinctive ale proverbelor pot fi identificate în raport cu alte expresii de același tip. Acest lucru este important pentru studierea proverbelor, de aceea acest articol trasează o paralelă între anti-proverbe și proverbe cât și importanța cunoașterii și studierii acestora. Chiar dacă proverbele sunt considerate drept expresii stabile, ele sunt și flexibile, în sensul că permit crearea unor expresii umoristice și ironice așa ca anti-proverbele ce derivă din proverb.*

One can gain more insight into proverbs by comparing them to other related expressions such as idioms, sayings, aphorisms, maxims, metaphors and anti-proverbs, because the distinct features of proverbs can be identified in relation to other expressions of similar type. This is also important for this study so that proverbs are not confused with their neighbours.

Annette Sabban [1, p. 83] distinguishes two types of proverb variation: expression variants and new creations. Expression variants are proverbs which differ in one or more expressions but keep the same meaning due to the synonymic nature of the varying words. It follows that anti-proverbs have to belong to the category of new creations, since they are “the results of deliberate proverb innovations that may or may not negate the truth of the original piece” [2, p. 134]. These innovations can be substitutions of essential parts of an existing proverb or reversions of its original meaning. In most cases, the original structure remains the same, since aspects like “alliteration, rhyme, paronomasia, metaphor and many others are very effective for carrying different ideas to the society in a very compact form and thus provide the possibility of making changes in traditional English proverbs” [3, p. 379]. Even though proverbs are said to be fixed expressions, they are flexible in the sense that they allow creative play with their language as speakers have been changing the language and the message of proverbs or the way it is used to create humour and irony. This has resulted in the formation of anti-proverbs which are - parodied, twisted, or fractured proverbs that reveal humorous or satirical speech play with traditional proverbial wisdom [2, p.137]. The term anti-proverb that is widely accepted by scholars is coined by Wolfgang Mieder who has published several collections of anti-proverbs. It is not a term that is against the concept of proverb. Proverbs are still very useful and valuable in modern society and anti-proverbs which have become new proverbs appropriate for the modern age question the wisdom of proverbs and play with the proverb to create humour [2, pp. 145-146]. As well as these, anti-proverbs can simply be proverb variation in terms of wording to fit a particular context better. They show that proverbs have never been considered absolute truths and holy expressions. Mieder claims that anti-proverbs are as old as proverbs themselves and they are becoming more popular through mass media and internet [2, pp. 145-146].

The truth of a proverb can be questioned by adding - but|| followed by a short commentary (e.g. money talks but nobody notices what kind of grammar it uses); by adding – may be to a positive statement and - may not to a negative statement (e.g. money may not buy happiness but most of us are willing to make the experiment); by asking a question related to the truth of the proverb (e.g. if love is blind, how can there be love at first sight?); by changing a positive proverb statement into a negative one and vice versa (e.g. politics doesn't make strange bedfellows – marriage does; putting off for tomorrow what you can do today has one advantage: you may be dead tomorrow and then you won't have to do it); and by introducing a proverb with phrases such as —used to, —in the good old days, —there was a time and after the proverb, using phrases such as —nowadays, —then, —now (e.g. there was a time when a fool and his money were soon parted but now it happens to everybody) [2, p. 178].

The common types of proverb alterations are; (1) replacing a single word as in A good beginning is half the bottle; (2) substitute

ing two or more words as in One man's meat is another man's poison; (3) changing the second part of the proverb as in If at first you don't succeed, give up; (4) adding new words as in An apple a day keeps the doctor away and an onion a day keeps everyone away; (5) adding literal interpretations as for example When one door shuts, another opens which means that you live in a drafty house; Where there's smoke, there's pollution; (6) punning through the use of a word that is polysemous or two words that are homonymous as in Where there's a will (referring to future) there's a wait and time is money as the man said when he stole the patent lever watch; (7) miscellaneous that involves word-repetition as in The man who lives by bread alone, lives alone or the mixing of two proverbs as in A penny saved gathers no moss and (8) simultaneous employment of several methods in which the original text becomes almost unrecognizable with the survival of few words as in When the boss tells a joke, he who laughs, lasts [2, p. 177].

The popular proverb structures that have become the baseline formulas for many proverb alterations are —One X is worth a thousand Y's, —Where there's X, there's Y, One man's X is another man's Y, —An X a day keeps the Y away, —A(n) X in the hand is worth Y in the bush, —An ounce of X is worth a pound of Y, and —different X's for different Y's [184]. To illustrate, the proverb parodies based on the proverb An apple a day keeps the doctor away are: a chapter a day keeps the devil away; a crisis a day keeps impeachment away; a joint a day keeps reality away; a laugh a day keeps the psychiatrist away; a strike a day keeps prosperity away; an effort a day keeps failure away [2, p. 189].

Anti-proverbs in particular are important for studying as they are frequently used in every domain of life. For this reason, anyone learning English should have an active knowledge of proverbs so that they can recognize the changes made in them to understand the underlying message.

### **Bibliografie**

1. Mieder, Wolfgang, Proverbs are Never out of Season. Popular Wisdom in the Modern Age, Oxford University Press. Oxford, 1993.
2. Sabban, Annette, Die dümsten Bauern haben nicht mehr die dicksten Kartoffeln – Variationen von Sprichwörtern im und als Text", in: Annette Sabban & Jan Wirrer (eds.). Sprichwörter und Redensarten im interkulturellen Vergleich, Westdt Verlag, Opladen, 1991.
3. Valdeva, Tatiana, Anti-Proverbs or New Proverbs: The use of English Anti-Proverbs and their Stylistic Analysis Proverbium, 20, 2003.