

Book review

T. Litovkina, Anna, Hrisztova-Gotthardt, Hrisztalina, Barta, Péter, Vargha, Katalin, Mieder, Wolfgang. (2021). *Anti-Proverbs in Five Languages: Structural Features and Verbal Humour Devices*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer Nature.

Presently, the genre of anti-proverbs is becoming more widespread due to the huge influence of mass media and the Internet. Currently, anti-proverbs appear very frequently in advertising, newspapers headlines, magazines, as well as in social media memes. Therefore, the present book which is authored by Anna T. Litovkina, Hrisztalina Hrisztova-Gotthardt, Péter Barta, Katalin Vargha and Wolfgang Mieder is an excellent contribution which offers a pioneering comparative monograph of English, German, French, Russian, and Hungarian anti-proverbs that are based on well-known proverbs.

The authors are internationally recognised paremiologists who have conducted in-depth research of anti-proverbs. It is worth mentioning that apart from many papers written individually on this topic, some of them have already co-authored books together: *Twisted Wisdom: Modern Anti-Proverbs* (1999) by Mieder & Tóthné Litovkina; *Old Proverbs Never Die, They Just Diversify: A Collection of Anti-Proverbs* (2006) by Litovkina & Mieder; *Anti-proverbs today: a comparative linguistic analysis of five languages* [A közmondásferdítések ma: Öt nyelv antiproverbiumainak nyelvészeti vizsgálata] (2018) by Hrisztova-Gotthardt, T. Litovkina, Barta & Vargha; and *Marriage Seen through Proverbs and Anti-Proverbs* (2019) by Litovkina & Mieder.

The main aim of the present book is to “analyse the genesis, alteration modes, structure and use of anti-proverbs in five European languages: English, German, French, Russian, and Hungarian” (p. 33). This monograph reviews the formal features of the alterations (i.e. surface structure, morphology, and phonology) that are commonly exploited to create anti-proverbs. Moreover, it examines the functional features (i.e. verbal humour, stylistics, rhetoric) originating in anti-proverbs.

The material of the book is really plentiful and varied. It comprises Anglo-American anti-proverbs (i.e. over 6,000) which have been mainly selected from American and British written sources. Also, the chief part has been part of Wolfgang Mieder’s international archive of proverbs in Burlington, Vermont and two collections of Anglo-American anti-proverbs compiled by Wolfgang Mieder and Anna T. Litovkina (Mieder & Tóthné Litovkina 1999; T. Litovkina & Mieder 2006).

German-language anti-proverbs in the book were used from collections compiled by Wolfgang Mieder and Erika Gossler, as well from an unpublished collection of anti-proverbs from the Internet compiled by Hrisztalina Hrisztova-Gotthardt in 2005–2019.

The French anti-proverbs have been extracted from Péter Barta’s corpus which contains over 1,800 French anti-proverbs. The anti-proverbs collections from Russian language have been compiled by Harry Walter and Valeriy Mokienko. Hungarian anti-proverbs have been recorded by Anna T. Litovkina and Katalin Vargha and derived from their corpus of over 7,000 Hungarian anti-proverbs.

The book consists of two parts. The first part “focuses on the structural features of anti-proverbs, while the second turns to the typical devices of verbal humour” (p. 33). These two parts are divided into chapters that are followed by conclusions and a reference section. Each reference section contains an exhaustive bibliography.

The introductory chapter investigates the frequent amount of innovative anti-proverbs and shows types of traditional proverbs that are suitable for diverse anti-proverbs. The rest of the chapters in the book are separated into two parts.

The first part of the book titled “Types of proverb alterations” starts from the second chapter which is titled “Addition in anti-proverbs.” The aim of this chapter is to discuss one of the first basic types of proverb alterations which is *addition*. Firstly, the authors examine all sentences in comparison with the original proverb that is modified. In other words, the authors introduce subchapters where the addition involved one new sound (Ge: *Lende gut, alles gut* {*Ende gut, alles gut*}; *You cannot put new swine in old bottles* {*You cannot put new wine in old bottles*}) (p. 56); two or three sounds (*Let sleeping dogmas lie* {*Let sleeping dogs lie*}; Fr: *À bon chateau, bon râteau* {*À bon chat bon rat*}) (p. 57); a new word (Ru: *От любви до ненависти один шаг. Налево* {*От любви до ненависти один шаг*}; Hu: *Nem az a legény, aki adja, hanem aki állja – a ceppet* {*Nem az a legény, aki adja, hanem aki állja*}) (p. 57-58); a phrase (*Ignorance is a voluntary condition of bliss* {*Ignorance is bliss*}; Hu: *Ember tervez, de ki az Isten végez?* {*Ember tervez, Isten végez*}) (p. 58), a sentence or even a few sentences (Ru: *Дорога в ад вымощена благими намерениями: пора бы и заасфальтировать* {*Дорога в ад вымощена благими намерениями*}; Ge: *Alter schützt vor Torheit nicht – es macht sie schwieriger* {*Alter schützt vor Torheit nicht*}) (p. 59). Then, there were two subchapters about special genres: Wellerism and Tom Swifities (“the twentieth century development of the form of folklore called wellerism,” p. 64). Finally, the authors stressed the place of the addition, i.e. after the original proverb, before the original text of a proverb (*Advice – The only thing which it is “More blessed to give than receive”* {*More blessed to give than receive*}) (p. 68); or both at the beginning and the end (*A business conference is a meeting in which everyone agrees that there is no such thing as a free lunch while eating one* {*There is no such thing as a free lunch*}) (p. 69).

The third chapter “Omission in anti-proverbs” deals with *omission* as a second basic type of proverb alteration. The authors try to analyse this type of the alteration separately as it was done with addition in the previous chapter. Each type of omission is explained in separate subchapters: omission of one sound (*The best things in life are free* {*The best things in life are free*}) (p. 77); omission of two or three sounds (Ge: *Ohne Eis kein Preis!* {*Ohne Fleiss kein Preis*}) (p. 78); omission of one word (Fr: *Ne fais pas aux trües ce que tu ne voudrais pas qu'on te fit* {*Ne fais pas à autrui ce que tu ne voudrais pas qu'on te fit*}) (p. 79); omission of two or three words (Ge: *Liebe deinen Nächsten. Selbst* {*Liebe deinen Nächsten wie dich selbst*}) (p. 80); truncation of the original proverb (Ru: *Без труда не вынешь! Без труда не вынешь и рыбку из пруда*) (p. 81); omission of a punctuation mark (Ru: *He рои другому яму сам* {*He рои другому яму, сам в нее попадешь*}) (p. 81); and mere allusion to the original proverb (Hu: *A már üzemelő Citadella Garden. Előre ittak?* {*Ne igyál előre a medve bőrére*}) (p. 83).

Chapter 4 “Substitution in anti-proverbs” presents one of the most popular methods of twisting proverbs which is *substitution*. The first section titled “The exchange of two sounds or groups of sounds within a proverb” and the second one “Word-order reversal” discuss the cases where the existing elements of the proverb change place. For example: *Let sleeping gods lie* {*Let sleeping dogs lie*}; Ru: *Ученье – сленг, а неученье – мат* {*Ученье – свет, а неученье – тьма*} (p. 90); *Pleasure before business* {*Business before pleasure*}; Fr: *Les oreilles ont des murs* {*Les murs ont des oreilles*} (p. 91).

In the next eight sections, the authors discuss the replacement of different elements of the original utterance. For example, punctuation marks (*Two can live as cheaply as one what?* {*Two can live as cheaply as one*}) (p. 94); one or two sounds (Ge: *Neue Wesen kehren gut* {*Neue Besen kehren gut*}; Fr: *Téléski qui croyait prendre* {*Tel est pris qui croyait prendre*}) (p. 95); one or more words (Ru: *Баба не волк, в лес не убежит* {*Работа не волк, в лес не убежит*}) (p. 96); Hu: *Kicsi a bors, de nagyot lehet tüsszenteni tőle* {*Kicsi a bors, de erős*}) (p. 100); and finally phrases (*If at first you don't succeed, blame it on your wife* {*If at first you don't succeed, try, try again*}; Ge: *Frech gesagt, ist halb gewonnen* {*Frisch gewagt, ist halb gewonnen*}).

Chapter 5 “Blending of proverbs” examines the proverbs of the five languages that are used for blending. This chapter is divided into subchapters which are about the blending of two proverbs (*A penny saved gathers no moss* {*A penny saved is a penny earned; A rolling stone gathers no moss*}; Fr: *Il ne faut pas mettre la charrue avant d'avoir tué la peau de l'ours* {*Il ne faut pas mettre la charrue avant les boeufs; Il ne faut pas vendre la peau de l'ours avant de l'avoir tué*}); the blending of proverbs with idioms, sayings or proverbial phrases (*Old cows never die, they just kick the bucket* {*Old soldiers never die, they just fade away; to kick the bucket*}; Ru: *Не плюй в колоду – пригодится в нее садиться!* {*Не плюй в колодец: пригодится воды напиться; сесть в колоду*}); the blending of three or more proverbs (*Clothes: Meat wrappers. Different cloaks for different folks. They cover a multitude of skins. To wear is human. Man does not live by thread alone. “As ye sew so shall ye rip”* {*Different strokes for different folks; Charity covers a multitude of sins; To err is human; Man does not live by bread alone; As you sow, so shall you reap*}); and a special type of utterances, i.e. syllogism (*God is love; Love is blind; Ray Charles is God* {*God is love; Love is blind*}; Fr: *Qui dort dîne? Or, l'appétit vient en mangeant! Donc, l'insomnie fait maigrir* {*Qui dort dîne; L'appétit vient en mangeant*}).

The second part of the book “Anti-proverbs and verbal humour” follows a pragmatic approach and seeks to explore the question of the humorous effect. This part consists of three chapters. Chapter 6 “Punning in anti-proverbs” examines punning based on paronomasia (*A fool and his money are soon parted* {*A fool and his money are soon parted*}; Hu: *Hóból is megárt a sok* {*Jóból is megárt a sok*}); homonymy and polysemy (*Where there's a will – there's a delay; “Time is money,” as the man said when he stole the patent lever watch* {*Time is money*}; *Old fairies never die, they merely blow away* {*Old soldiers never die, they just fade away*}; *Annual sex orgy here on Friday – First served, first come* {*First come, first served*}); and homophony (*Know thyself, and no thy selfishness* {*Know thyself*}; *The good die young, but the old dye for various reasons* {*The good die young*}). Moreover, this chapter includes multiple puns and modification of word boundaries in proverbs. For example: *No body is perfect* {*Nobody is perfect*}; *Faith can move mountains – she's a big girl* {*Faith can move mountains*}; *Epitaph of a man called Longbottom who died young* *Ars longa, vita brevis* {*Art's long, life is short; Lat: Ars longa, vita brevis*}; *Figures don't lie – except on the beach* {*Figures don't lie*}).

On the other hand, Chapter 7 “Further humour devices as used in anti-proverbs” investigates other sources of linguistic humour, e.g. repetition (*Moderation in all things ... including moderation?* {*Moderation in all things*}; *Feed a cold, feed a fever* {*Feed a cold, starve a fever*}); rhyme (*Early to bed and early to rise – and you'll never see red in the whites of your eyes* {*Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise*}; Ge: *Eile mit Keile* {*Eile mit Weile*}); and literalisation (“*No friend like a bosom friend,*” as the man said when he pulled out a louse {*No friend like a bosom friend*}; *Marriage is a lottery! Yes, but you can't tear up your ticket if you lose!* {*Marriage is a lottery*}).

Chapter 8 “Summary and implications for further research” contains the summary of the present book and implications for further research. Subchapter 8.1 gives an overview of the general trends despite the diversity of presented languages, as well as a general overview of

anti-proverbs. The final section draws the attention to combining different approaches, the context, comparative studies, and quantitative surveys.

The present monograph offers a comprehensive examination of five languages which differ in their origin. Four out of the five languages are Indo-European (but from different branches) while Hungarian is Finno-Ugric. Moreover, the languages in question show a highly diverging picture from a typological point of view (e.g. English is essentially an analytic language, German, French, and Russian were more inflectional, whereas Hungarian was an agglutinative). These basic variations made it possible for readers to assess and to understand anti-proverbs in different languages.

Focused on various anti-proverbs, the book draws attention to various mechanisms of proverbs variations. However, all these mechanisms are usually combined in various ways. In addition, it was noticed that sometimes anti-proverbs can keep only one or two words from the original proverb. Nevertheless, the proverb is still recognisable.

The current study is particularly valuable because of the organization of the book. The authors managed to make a valuable and well-structured comparison of proverbs and anti-proverbs from five distinct languages. Thus, it draws the attention to certain social changes that happened over time and can be noticed by native speakers of these languages in the study.

The book will be of interest to phraseologists and paremiologists humour researchers, ethnolinguists, and scholars specialising in cultural and contrastive linguistics. Moreover, it will be appealing for those who focus on the creative use of language, in particular researchers who study the modifications of fixed expressions.

To sum up, the book shows how proverbs from different languages can be analysed cross-linguistically and cross-culturally. Therefore, it establishes an essential framework that enables other scholars to develop their own methodology of research on proverbs. The monograph is informative as it can provide readers with data on both proverbs and anti-proverbs in these five languages. Furthermore, the book can be stimulating and inspiring for researchers to conduct similar studies in other languages. Consequently, this can make the book highly recommended source of that can depict anti-proverbs in five different languages.

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