

ANTI-PROVERBS IN ENGLISH AND SERBIAN

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Abstract. *The paper presents a set of anti-proverbs – innovative and typically satirical, ironic, or humorous alterations of traditional proverbs, from English and Serbian (e. g. Taste makes waist < Haste makes waste; Dobro se dobro zaboravlja < Dobro se dobrim vraća), and examines the strategies employed in the two languages in the process of their creation. The paper concludes that the process of creation of anti-proverbs from proverbs involves a number of strategies, all of them typically leading to the emergence of a new expression with a clear communicative message. Those strategies generally involve lexical substitution or lexical addition, whereby the overall syntactic pattern can be either preserved or changed. It also concludes that the strategies used in the creation of anti-proverbs, as well as their topics, are quite comparable both in English and in Serbian. The paper also presents a number of theoretical and methodological implications for further research.*

Key words: *anti-proverbs, proverbs, paremiology, proverb alteration mechanisms.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Anti-proverbs are innovative and typically satirical, ironic, or humorous alterations of traditional proverbs.

The terms anti-proverb (*Antispruchwort*) was first used by Mieder (1982), who has since published a number of papers on the issue and collections of anti-proverbs in German and English, often co-authored by Tóthné Litovkina (Tóthné Litovkina / Mieder 2006, Mieder 2003, 1989; Mieder / Tóthné Litovkina 1999).

Like proverbs, anti-proverbs can address a number of topics. In Anglo-American proverb alterations, those are money, love, marriage, divorce, sexuality, women, friendship, children and parents, taxes, God and religion, professions and occupations, among others (e. g. *Where there is a will, there is a lawyer bill < Where there is will, there is way, Practice makes perfect, but with lawyers it is more likely to make them rich < Practice makes perfect*) (Tóthné Litovkina / Mieder 2006, Tóthné Litovkina 2013, 2011a, 2011b, 2007). As no

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topic is sacrosanct in the creation of anti-proverbs, they can not only be humorous, but also offensive, hostile, and aggressive towards various social groups, and may enhance stereotyping (*The way to a man's heart may be through his stomach, but a pretty girl can always find a detour* < *The way to a man's heart is through his stomach*) (Tóthné Litovkina 2014, 2011c).

Anti-proverbs typically require a reader or a listener to be acquainted with the proverbs they are based on so that they can elicit humour and be used felicitously.

Anti-proverbs are as old as proverbs themselves – they were used in the classical times and have been used ever since. Examples of their use can also be found in the writings of notable philosophers and poets such as I. Kant, F. Schiller, Goethe, Voltaire (Mieder, 2007).

From the point of view of phraseology, the appearance of anti-proverbs can be viewed as a part of the process of *dephraseologization*, in which traditional and established multi-word expressions, under the influence of the processes of globalization and urbanization, lose their original function of enhancing the awareness about common identity and values, and their traditional semantic connotations. Anti-proverbs can be viewed as type of urban folklore (Pastor Kiči, 2013; for the term *multi-word expression* see Taylor 2002: 539–557).

In addition to phraseology, anti-proverbs can also be viewed as folkloristic, ethnological, dialectological, stylistic, literary, historical and other phenomena. This has contributed to the establishment of paremiology and paremiography in the second half of the 20th century, as two disciplines that aim to address these aspects of proverbs and anti-proverbs alike, and to establish a common terminology, typology and taxonomy in the area (Pastor Kiči, 2013).

Apart from the above-mentioned German and English languages, anti-proverbs have been studied in French, Russian, Hungarian and Bulgarian, by authors such as P. Barta, H. Hrisztova-Gotthardt, K. Vargha, M. A. Varga, M. Daczi, V. M. Mokienko and Tóthné Litovkina herself. Anti-proverbs in Serbian have been addressed by Pastor Kiči (2013) in comparison to Hungarian, and by Šabanović (2010) in comparison to German. In his book entitled *Rečnik srpskih antiposlovica*, Otašević (2011) actually presents aphorisms, formulaic phrases, catchphrases, clichés, witty sayings, literary quotations and song refrains (rather than proverbs) that have undergone transformations mentioned above (e.g. *Ako je istorija učiteljica života, zašto nas nije nešto naučila* < *Istorija je učiteljica života* [*Historia magistra vitae est* - Cicero]). This points to the fact that the term anti-proverb need not be used only for the expressions based on proverbs, but also for those based on other multi-word expressions.

Some anti-proverbs even become proverbial in themselves and get frequently included in proverb collections (e. g. *Absence makes the heart grow fonder – for somebody else* < *Absence makes the heart grow fonder; A new broom sweeps clean, but the old one knows the corners* < *A new broom sweeps clean*) (Tóthné Litovkina 2014).

The aim of this paper is to present and examine a set of anti-proverbs in English and Serbian, specifically in view of the mechanisms of proverb variation. They were sourced from two English and two Serbian websites listed at the end of the paper. The websites were chosen as they provide entire lists of anti-proverbs (typically for the purposes of fun). A total of thirty-five anti-proverbs from English and thirty-seven anti-proverbs from Serbian are examined. The starting point for the classification given below is the one presented in Pastor Kiči 2013, as well as the one given in Tóthné Litovkina 2014. The two classification models are here largely modified to suit the formal and functional properties of the examples extracted.

2. DATA AND DISCUSSION

The excerpted anti-proverbs can be classified as follows:

Table 1 Anti-proverbs involving lexical substitution / addition with the overall syntactic pattern preserved

<u>What doesn't kill you makes you stronger</u> (E1) What doesn't kill you makes you stranger	<u>U se i u svoje kljuse</u> (S1) U se i u svoje Ruse
<u>Silence speaks louder than words</u> (E2) Absence speaks louder than words	<u>Batina je iz raja izašla</u> (S2) Batina je iz kraja izašla
<u>A cat has nine lives</u> (E3) A chat has nine lives.	<u>Klin se klinom izbija</u> (S3) Klinka se klinkom izbija
<u>Fact is stronger than fiction</u> (E4) Fax is stranger than fiction	<u>Tiha voda breg roni</u> (S4) Tiha voda bubreg roni (S5) Tiha voda plafon roni
<u>Wonders will never cease</u> (E5) Windows will never cease	<u>Preko preče, naokolo bliže</u> (S6) Preko preče, naokolo još dalje.
<u>Moderation in all things</u> (E6) Modulation in all things	<u>Ko priznaje, pola mu se prašta.</u> (S7) Ko priznaje, pola mu se dodaje
<u>Absence makes the heart grow fonder</u> (E7) Absence makes the heart go wonder	<u>Čist račun, duga ljubav</u> (S8) Čist račun, kratka ljubav (S9) Čist račun – duga, duga, skočko, herc (S10) Čist račun, duga devetka
<u>Too many cooks spoil the broth</u> (E8) Too many clicks spoil the browse	<u>Mi o vuku, a vuk na vrata</u> (S11) Mi o vuku, a Vuk na vrata
<u>Penny wise and pound foolish</u> (E9) Pentium wise; pen and paper foolish	<u>Bolje umeti nego imati</u> (S12) Bolje imati nego umeti
<u>Home is where you hang your hat</u> (E10) Home is where you hang your @	<u>Bez muke nema nauke</u> (S13) Bez muke nema povraćanja
<u>Virtue is its own reward</u> (E11) Virtual reality is its own reward (E12) Virtue is its own punishment.	<u>Sto ljudi, sto čudi</u> (S14) Sto ljudi, pedeset zdravih jetri
<u>Haste makes waste.</u> (E13) Chaste makes waste (E14) Taste makes waist	<u>Um caruje, snaga klade valja</u> (S15) Um caruje, metak pancir buši
<u>Time heals all wounds.</u> (E15) Time wounds all heels.	<u>Fali mu daska u glavi</u> (S16) Fali mu cela pilana (S17) Fali mu pola drvne industrije
<u>Where there's a will, there's a way</u> (E16) Where there's a will, there's a relative.	
<u>Don't bite off more than you can chew</u> (E17) Don't byte off more than you can view.	

<u>An apple a day keeps the doctor away</u> (E18) An onion a day keeps everyone away.	<u>Čovek bez slobode kao riba bez vode</u> (S18) Čovek bez stomaka k'o mečka bez znaka
<u>A penny saved is a penny earned.</u> (E19) A penny saved is a penny taxed	(S19) Čovek bez stomak k'o mercedes bez znak
<u>What goes up must come down</u> (E20) What boots up must come down	<u>Što možeš danas ne ostavljaj za sutra</u> (S20) Sve što možeš danas ostavi za sutra
<u>Variety is the spice of life</u> (E21) Hell is the spice of life	(S21) Što možeš u junu ostavi za septembar
<u>A fool and his money are soon parted</u> (E22) A user and his leisure time are soon parted	(S22) Što možeš danas ostavi za prekosutra
<u>There's no place like home</u> (E23) There's no place like home.com!	<u>Para vrti gde burgija neće</u> (S23) Para vrti gde kliker neće
<u>Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach him to fish and you teach him for a lifetime</u> (E24) Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach him to use the Net and he won't bother you for weeks	
<u>Don't put off until tomorrow what you can do today</u> (E25) Never do today what can be done tomorrow	
<u>Still waters run deep</u> (E26) Still waters run stale	
<u>Honesty is the best policy</u> (E27) Beauty is the best policy	
<u>Money / Idleness is the root of all evil.</u> (E28) C:\ is the root of all directories	
<u>A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step</u> (E29) A journey of a thousand sites begins with a single click	

Table 1 includes anti-proverbs that include substitution of one or more words or word groups from the original proverb with other words, word groups or a symbol, while the overall syntactic pattern of the original proverb remains unchanged.

The substitutions are typically based on phonetic and / or lexico-semantic factors.

Phonetic similarity between a word used in the proverb and a word, a word group or the phonetic realization of the symbol used in the anti-proverb can be observed in examples E1

through E11 and in E13 (e. g. E1: *What doesn't kill you makes you stranger* < *What doesn't kill you makes you stronger*; E7: *Absence makes the heart go wonder* < *Absence makes the heart grow fonder*; E10: *Home is where you hang your @* < *Home is where you hang your hat*). Such substitutions typically involve compatibility of the meaning of the new element(s) and the overall meaning of the original proverb. The same applies to examples S1 from S4 from Serbian (e. g. S1: *U se i u svoje Ruse* < *U se i u svoje kljuse*; S4: *Tiha voda bubreg roni* < *Tiha voda breg roni*).

Table 2 Anti-proverbs involving syntactic change

<u>A penny saved is a penny earned</u> (E30) A penny saved is a penny indeed (E31) A penny saved makes Jack a dull boy.	<u>Dobro se dobrim vraća</u> (S24) Dobro se dobro zaboravlja <u>Ko čeka – dočeka</u> (S25) Ko čeka gubi vreme (S26) Ko čeka, taj nema nikog da ga uvede preko reda (S27) Ko čeka, taj se i načeka <u>Ispeci, pa reci</u> (S28) Ispeci pereci <u>Oteto – proketo</u> (S29) Oteto – potencijalno korisno <u>Što je svačije, to je ničije</u> (S30) Što je svačije, moje je <u>Čovek se uči dok je živ</u> (S31) Čovek se uči dok ga nešto interesuje <u>Um caruje, snaga klade valja</u> (S32) Um caruje, snaga dobro dođe
<u>Inclusion of the original proverb into a more complex syntactic structure</u>	
<u>The early bird catches the worm</u> (E32) The early bird catches the worm, but it is the early worm that gets caught	<u>Čovek se uči dok je živ</u> (S33) Čovek se uči dok je živ, a umre lud <u>Svako je kovač svoje sreće</u> (S34) Svako je kovač svoje sreće, a Marica kuje pedale za biciklo (S35) Svako je kovač svoje sreće, al' zamalo
<u>Practice makes perfect</u> (E33) If practice makes perfect and nobody's perfect, then why practice?	
<u>Syntactic change as a result of combining two proverbs</u>	
<u>One good turn deserves another.</u> <u>One man's meat is another man's poison.</u> (E34) One good turn is another man's poison	<u>Ko prvi devojci, njegova devojka</u> <u>Ko drugome jamu kopa, sam u nju upada</u> (S36) Ko prvi devojci, sam u nju upada
<u>Too many cooks spoil the broth.</u> <u>Two heads are better than one.</u> (E35) Too many cooks are better than one	<u>Ko rano rani dve sreće grabi</u> <u>Ko drugome jamu kopa sam u nju upada</u> <u>Vuk dlaku menja ali ćud nikad</u> (S37) Ko rano rani sam u nju upada ali ćud nikad

Substitution can also be based on the lexical relation of antonymy, when a word from the original proverb is substituted by its antonym (E12: *Virtue is its own punishment* < *Virtue is its own reward*). The same applies to examples S6 to S8 from Serbian (S7: *Ko priznaje, pola mu se dodaje* < *Ko priznaje, pola mu se prašta*).

Another lexical relation underlying the creation of proverbs is homonymy, which can be either complete (S9: *Čist račun - duga, duga, skočko, herc* < *Čist račun - duga ljubav*), or partial, namely homophony (E14: *Taste makes waist* < *Haste makes waste*; E15: *Time wounds all heels* < *Time heals all wounds*; E17: *Don't bite off more than you can view* < *Don't bite off more than you can chew*).

Polysemy as yet another lexical relation and a linguistic force behind the creation of an anti-proverb can be seen in the examples E16, S11, and S13 (E16: *Where there's a will there's a relative* < *Where there's a will, there's a way*; S13: *Bez muke nema povraćanja* < *Bez muke nema nauke*).

In addition, the examples characterized by either homonymy or polysemy also typically involve the substitution of one lexical item with a phonetically similar one (E14: *haste / taste*, E17: *chew / view*), inversion of key words, which undergo a semantic change in the process (see example E15, once again), as well as the substitution of one word with another related to it via the morphological process of conversion (E15: *wounds / wounds*). As it can be seen from the given examples, the use of a polysemous semantic item typically requires further lexical substitutions in the remainder of an expression so as to fit the meaning of the corresponding emergent expression (E16: *way / relative*, S13: *nauka / povraćanje*).

All the other anti-proverbs from Table 1 also involve those substitutions that ensure compatibility of the meaning of the substitute-element(s) and the overall meaning of the host proverb, so that amalgamation of the two produces a semantically coherent (and typically humorous) result. This process may involve the following:

a) substituting a word with another from the same semantic field (E18: *An onion a day keeps everyone away* < *An apple a day keeps the doctor away*, in which both underlined words belong to the domain of plants; E19: *A penny saved is a penny taxed* < *A penny saved is a penny earned* – in which both underlined words belong to the domain of finances);

b) exchanging the positions of two key words (S12: *Bolje imati nego umeti* < *Bolje umeti nego imati*);

c) substitution of a word or a word group with another belonging to the same semantic field (S16: *Fali mu cela pilana* / S17: *Fali mu pola drvne industrije* < *Fali mu daska u glavī*);

d) substitution of one or more words with another word or word group, between which no systemic phonetic and / or semantic relation can be established; still such substitution once again produces a semantically and / or pragmatically felicitous construction (E21: *Hell is the spice of life* < *Variety is the spice of life*; E27: *Beauty is the best policy* < *Honesty is the best policy*; E28: *C:\ is the root of all directories* < *Money / Idleness is the root of all evil*; S5: *Tiha voda plafon roni* < *Tiha voda breg roni*; S14: *Sto ljudi, pedeset zdravih jetri* < *Sto ljudi, sto ćudi*; S23: *Para vrti gde kliker neće* < *Para vrti gde burgija neće*). The same applies to the rest of the examples from Table 1, including example S10: *Čist račun, duga devetka* (< *Čist račun, duga ljubav*), that is they are primarily pragmatically (rather than semantically) felicitous. In addition, rhyme tends to be preserved in the process of substitution, even if that involves the use of substandard forms (S18: *Čovek bez stomaka k'o*

mečka bez znaka / S19: Čovek bez stomak k'o mercedes bez znak < Čovek bez slobode kao riba bez vode).

It is worth noting that the data presented in Table 1 include an instance of complete lexical analogy of a proverb from English and Serbian (*Don't put off until tomorrow what you can do today / Što možeš danas ne ostavljaj za sutra*), as well as an instance of partial lexical (but complete content) analogy (*Still waters run deep / Tiha voda breg roni*).

Table 2 presents anti-proverbs in which syntactic change has occurred in addition to lexical substitution. The syntactic change can also be based on linguistic factors such as: a) phonetic similarity (S28: *Ispeci pereci < Ispeci, pa reci*), b) near contextual synonymy (S29: *Oteto – potencijalno korisno < Oteto – proketo*), c) near contextual antonymy (S30: *Što je svačije, moje je < Što je svačije, to je ničije*). On the other hand, the change in the syntactic structure of the initial proverb need not be based on such linguistic factors and a systematic ground for proverb alteration may be difficult to pinpoint. Still, such examples of syntactic reshaping (e. g. E31: *A penny saved makes Jack a dull boy < A penny saved is a penny earned*; S26: *Ko čeka, taj nema nikog da ga uvede preko reda < Ko čeka – dočeka*), are syntactically well-structured and have a clear communicative role. The only exception to this is the example S37 (*Ko rano rani sam u nju upada ali ćud nikad < Ko rano rani dve sreće grabi, Ko drugome jamu kopa sam u nju upada, Vuk dlaku menja ali ćud nikad*).

3. CONCLUSIONS

The process of creation of anti-proverbs from proverbs involves a number of strategies based on both linguistic and extra-linguistic factors, all of them typically leading to the emergence of a new expression with a clear communicative message. The strategies used in the creation of anti-proverbs, as well as their topics, are quite comparable both in English and in Serbian.

The data and their discussion presented above have a number of practical, theoretical and methodological implications for further research. The practical implications include the need for collecting anti-proverbs from more sources, both written and oral, than those used for this paper. Once collected in larger numbers (especially for Serbian and other languages where this task has not yet received much attention), anti-proverbs can be studied from a variety of perspectives, such as focusing on their more precise classification, the motivation for their emergence, their cultural and historical analysis, the cross-cultural differences they can exemplify, and the cultural sub-groups that use them. In addition to their importance for paremiology and paremiography, anti-proverbs can be approached from a number of theoretical perspectives and related linguistic fields such as functionally oriented and usage-based approaches to language, including cognitive linguistics and the constructionist paradigm (cf. Rasulić 2010), as well as from the perspectives of psycholinguistics, applied linguistics and corpus linguistics, among others.

Corpus Sources:

<http://cogweb.ucla.edu/Discourse/Proverbs/English.html>

<https://wordsbybob.wordpress.com/tag/examples-of-anti-proverbs/>

<http://vukajlija.com/recnik/definicije/indeks>

<http://www.tarzanija.com/revizija-narodnih-poslovica/>

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ANTIPOSLOVICE U ENGLESKOM I SRPSKOM JEZIKU

Rad se bavi antiposlovicama u engleskom i srpskom jeziku. Antiposlovice predstavljaju višestruke izraze u kojima je došlo do inovativnog, i tipično satiričnog, ironičnog i duhovitog preoblikovanja tradicionalnih poslovice (Taste makes waist < Haste makes waste; Dobro se dobro zaboravlja < Dobro se dobrim vraća). U fokusu rada jesu strategije koje se koriste u data dva jezika prilikom preoblikovanja tradicionalnih poslovice u antiposlovice. Zaključuje se da procesi stvaranja antiposlovice u dva jezika uključuju korišćenje većeg broja strategija koje su zasnovane na lingvističkim i vanjezičkim faktorima, i da rezultat toga predstavljaju novi izrazi koji tipično imaju jasnu komunikativnu poruku. Zaključuje se i da su strategije izvođenja antiposlovice iz poslovice u data dva jezika sasvim slične, upravo kao i teme kojima se one bave. Na kraju se daje i pregled većeg broja teorijskih i metodoloških implikacija analize izvedene u radu.

Ključne reči i sintagme: *antiposlovice, poslovice, paremiologija, mehanizmi preoblikovanja poslovice.*