15 Anti-proverbs

15.1 Introduction

This chapter gives a definition of the anti-proverb and terminology, discusses its occurrence, treats proverbs most popular for variation and proverbs with international distribution, addresses different mechanisms of proverb variation and topics emerging in anti-proverbs, and last but not least reviews the background of anti-proverb research. The vast majority of the anti-proverbs quoted in this chapter are in English, and were taken primarily from American and British written sources. In some additional cases, anti-proverbs from other languages (Russian, French, German, and Hungarian) might also be quoted.

15.2 Terminology

Proverbs have never been considered sacrosanct; on the contrary, they have frequently been used as satirical, ironic or humorous comments on a given situation. For centuries, they have provided a framework for endless transformation. In the last few decades, they have been perverted and parodied so extensively that their variations have been sometimes heard more often than their original forms. Wolfgang Mieder has coined the term *Antisprichwort* (anti-proverb) for such 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 (see Mieder, 2006; Mieder & Tóthné Litovkina, 1999).

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185 All the texts of Anglo-American anti-proverbs quoted here can also be found in two collections of Anglo-American anti-proverbs compiled by Wolfgang Mieder and Anna T. Litovkina (T. Litovkina & Mieder, 2006; Mieder & Tóthné Litovkina, 1999).

186 German-language anti-proverbs quoted in the chapter come from collections compiled by Wolfgang Mieder (1982a, 1985, 1989a, 1998) and Erika Gossler (2005), as well as from an unpublished collection of anti-proverbs from the Internet compiled by Hrisztalina Hrisztova-Gotthardt in 2005–2006. The French examples are quoted from Péter Barta’s corpus of over 1,800 French anti-proverbs, the vast majority of which include items from the Internet, as well as from a tiny collection of French anti-proverbs (Mignaval 2004). The Russian texts can be found with references to their sources (primarily, the Internet) in two anti-proverb collections compiled by Harry Walter and Valerij Mokienko (see Walter & Mokienko, 2001, 2005). Hungarian anti-proverbs quoted here were recorded by Anna T. Litovkina and Katalin Vargha and come from their corpus of over 7,000 Hungarian anti-proverbs, some of which have already been published (see T. Litovkina & Vargha, 2005a, 2005b, 2006).
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1982a, 1985, 1989a, 1998) and English (see T. Litovkina & Mieder, 2006; Mieder, 2003; Mieder & Tóthné Litovkina, 1999). Wolfgang Mieder’s term Antisprichwort has been widely accepted by proverb scholars all over the world as a general label for such innovative alterations of and reactions to traditional proverbs: anti-proverb (English), anti(-)proverbe (French), антисловицa (Russian), and anti(-)proverbium (Hungarian) (see the general discussion of the genre of anti-proverbs in T. Litovkina 2007b; T. Litovkina & Mieder, 2006: 1–54; Mieder, 2004, 2007). Besides the term anti-proverb, many other terms exist in different languages for such phenomena, e.g.:  

German: verballhornte Parömien, Sprichwortparodien, verdrehte Weisheiten, “entstellte” Sprichwörter, sprichwörtliche Verfremdungen.  
French: faux proverbe, perverbe, proverbe déformé, proverbe dérivé, proverbe détourné, proverbe modifié, proverbe perverti, proverbe tordu, pseudo-proverbe.  
Russian: трансформa, пословицa “переделка”, прикол.  
Hungarian: szokásmondás-közhely, közmondás-paródia, közmondás tréfás ferdítése, (el)ferdített közmondás, közmondás-persziflázs, kvázi-közmondás.  

Some anti-proverbs question the truth of a proverb through employing antonyms (An exception disproves the rule (< An exception proves the rule), transforming the proverb into its opposite (A friend that isn’t in need is a friend indeed (< A friend in need is a friend indeed); Crime pays – be a lawyer (< Crime doesn’t pay) or posing a naive question (Still waters run deep – but how can they run if they are still? (< Still waters run deep); If love is blind, how can there be love at first sight? (< Love is blind). The vast majority of anti-proverbs, however, put the proverbial wisdom only partially into question, primarily by relating it to a particular context or thought in which the traditional wording does not fit (Money isn’t everything – but it’s way ahead of what’s in second place (< Money isn’t everything)).

Anti-proverbs may contain revealing social comments (American money talks in just about every foreign country (Money talks); A condom a day keeps AIDS away (< An apple a day keeps the doctor away), but they may also be based on mere wordplay or puns, and they may very often be generated solely for the goal of deriving play forms (A fool and his monkey are soon parted (< A fool and his money are soon parted)).

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187 The terms from the German language have been supplied by Hrisztalina Hrisztova-Gotthardt, and those from the French by Péter Barta.
15.3 Occurrence of Anti-proverbs

Like traditional gems of wisdom, anti-proverbs appear in a broad range of generic contexts, from personal letters to philosophical journals, from public lectures and sermons to songs, from science fiction to comics and cartoons (Mieder, 1989b, 2007). Anti-proverbs are also found in great abundance on the Internet (Mieder, 2007; for a detailed discussion of the use of Hungarian anti-proverbs on the Internet, see Vargha, 2005; for a discussion of the use of Bulgarian anti-proverbs on the Internet, see Hristova-Gotthardt, 2006, 2007), in advertising slogans (Forgács, 1997a; Mieder, 1989b, 2007), in the titles of books and articles, and in magazine and newspaper headlines. They are commonly quoted in collections of puns, one-liners, toasts, wisecracks, quotations, aphorisms, maxims, quips, epigrams and graffiti (see the lists of bibliography in T. Litovkina, 2005: 211–228; T. Litovkina & Mieder, 2006: 349–357; Mieder & Tóthné Litovkina, 1999: 246–254). There is no sphere of life where anti-proverbs are not used.

But the anti-proverb is not a new genre born in the era of mass media and the Internet (Mieder, 2007); rather, it can be traced back to the distant past. Proverb alterations are as old as proverbs themselves: they flourished in classical times and in all subsequent eras. Thus, in the eighteenth century the traditional wisdom of many proverbial gems was questioned by a number of philosophers, writers and poets (to name just a few: G. C. Lichtenberg, I. Kant, F. Schiller, Goethe, Voltaire), who created and inspired many proverb transformations.

The vast majority of anti-proverbs are the products of the playfulness of a solitary author; they do not catch on, and thus will be found in just one source. There are some texts, however, which appear in many sources, exactly in the same form (for more, see T. Litovkina & Mieder, 2006: XV–XVI). For some anti-proverbs numerous variants have been found. The difference may lie in the use of an article, conjunction, or punctuation mark, or in the substitution of one more or less synonymous term for another. Let us view the variants of the proverb To err is human, to forgive divine below: To err is human – to totally muck things up needs a computer; To err is human, but to really foul things up requires a computer; To err is human, but it takes a computer to completely fuck things up; To err is human, but to really screw things up you need a computer (for more, see T. Litovkina & Mieder, 2006: XVI–XVII). Some anti-proverbs have even become proverbial in themselves and have been frequently included in recent proverb collections, for example, A new broom sweeps clean, but the old one knows the corners (< A new broom sweeps clean); Absence makes the heart grow fonder – for somebody else (< Absence makes the heart grow fonder).
15.4 Proverbs Most Popular for Variation

Typically, an anti-proverb will elicit humour only if the traditional proverb upon which it is based is also known, thus allowing the reader or listener to perceive the incongruity (violation of expectation) between the two expressions. Otherwise, the innovative strategy of communication based on the juxtaposition of the old and new proverb is lost. The juxtaposition of the traditional proverb text with an innovative variation forces the reader or listener into a more critical thought process. Whereas the old proverbs acted as preconceived rules, the modern anti-proverbs are intended to activate us into overcoming the naive acceptance of traditional wisdom.

Below the reader will find the list of the ten most frequently transformed Anglo-American proverbs, followed by the lists of German, French and Hungarian proverbs most frequently parodied. Each proverb is followed by a number in parentheses indicating the number of anti-proverbs that has been located for it. Proverbs other than Anglo-American are followed by their translations into English (given in [] brackets).

The ten most frequently transformed Anglo-American proverbs from T. Litovkina and Mieder’s second anti-proverb collection (see T. Litovkina & Mieder, 2006: 12) are found below:

Old soldiers never die (, they simply fade away). (79)
If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again. (65)
Money talks. (65)
An apple a day keeps the doctor away. (63)
A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. (49)
Never [Don’t] put off till [until] tomorrow what you can do today. (48)
A fool and his money are soon parted. (47)
Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise. (46)
To err is human (, to forgive divine). (45)
Opportunity knocks but once. (43) (for the list of 54 Anglo-American proverbs that have generated over twenty anti-proverbs in their corpus of Anglo-American anti-proverbs, see T. Litovkina & Mieder, 2006: 12–13)

Proverbs most popular for alteration in the German language are from Mieder’s anti-proverb collection (1998: IX–X) and were translated into English by Melita Aleksa Varga:

Morgenstunde hat Gold im Munde. [ww: The morning hour has gold in its mouth.] (76)
Lügen haben kurze Beine. [ee: Lies have short legs.] (75)
Im Wein ist (liegt) Wahrheit. [ee: The truth is (lies) in wine.] (65)
Wer andern eine Grube gräbt, fällt selbst hinein. [ee: Who digs a hole for another, falls into it himself.] (62)
Reden ist Silber, Schweigen ist Gold. [ee: Talking is silver, being silent is gold.] (61)
Der Klügere gibt nach. [ww: The wiser gives in.] (59)

Der Zweck heiligt die Mittel. [ww: The goal hallows the means.] (54)

Man soll den Tag nicht vor dem Abend loben. [ww: One shoud not praise the day before the evening.] (52)

Alter schützt vor Torheit nicht. [ww: Old age does not protect from foolishness.] (51)

Wo ein Wille ist, ist auch ein Weg. [ee: Where there is a will, there is a way.] (51)

The list of ten proverbs most frequently transformed in the French language compiled and translated into English by Péter Barta is given below:¹⁸⁸

Qui vole un œuf vole un bœuf. [ee: He that steals an egg will steal an ox.] (34)

Pierre qui roule n’amasse pas mousse. [ee: A rolling stone gathers no moss.] (30)

Rien ne sert de courir, il faut [mieux vaut] partir à point. [ww: It is no use running, you must [it is better to] start on time.] (22)

Tant va la cruche à l’eau qu’à la fin elle se casse [brise]. [ee: So often the pitcher goes to water till it breaks.] (22)

La musique adoucit les mœurs. [ww: Music softens morals.] (22)

Chassez le naturel, il revient au galop. (21) [ww: Chase away the natural and it returns at a gallop.]

L’argent ne fait pas le bonheur. [ee: Money does not buy happiness.] (20)

Noël au balcon, Pâques aux tisons. [ww: (If it’s warm enough to spend) Christmas at the balcony, (you’ll spend) Easter at the firebrands.] (20)

À bon chat bon rat. [ww: To a good cat, a good rat.] (18)

Il ne faut pas remettre au lendemain ce qu’on peut faire le jour même [ww: You mustn’t put off to tomorrow what you can do on that very day.] (variant: Ne remets pas à demain ce que tu peux faire aujourd’hui [le jour même].). [ee: Never put off till tomorrow what you can do today [on that very day].] (18)

L’habit ne fait pas le moine. [ww: Clothes do not make a monk.] (18)

À vaincre sans péril on triomphe sans gloire. [ww: If you win without risk, you triumph without glory.] (18)

Let us demonstrate here the list of the ten most frequently transformed proverbs in T. Litovkina and Vargha’s corpus of over 7,000 Hungarian anti-proverbs (see T. Litovkina & Vargha, 2005b: 16–17):

Addig jár a korsó a kúttra, (a)míg el nem török. [ee: The pitcher goes to the well until it breaks.] (178)

¹⁸⁸ The list (first published in T. Litovkina, Vargha, Barta, et al., 2007: 52) is based on Peter Barta’s corpus of over 1,800 French anti-proverbs, which were primarily located in the Internet, as well as in Mignaval’s collection of anti-proverbs (2004).
15.5 Anti-proverbs with International Distribution

When translated from one language to another, an anti-proverb more often than not will lose its message: the puns, parodies or wordplay characteristic of one language will seldom carry over successfully into another. Nevertheless, there are cases in which an internationally spread proverb inspires parallel anti-proverbs in two or more languages. This often represents a convincing example of the polygenesis of similar or even identical anti-proverbs. Here are some examples (they were first quoted in T. Litovkina & Mieder, 2006: 9–10189):

English: Don’t do today what you can put off until tomorrow; Never do today what can be done tomorrow.

Hungarian: Amit holnap is megtehetsz, ne teدد meg ma!; Amit ma megtehetsz, azt holnap is megteheted. < Amit ma megtehetsz, ne halaszd holnapra.

Russian: Не делай сегодня то, что можно сделать завтра. < Не откладывай на завтра то, что можно сделать сегодня.

German: Was du heute kannst besorgen, das verschiebe nicht erst morgen. < Was du heute kannst besorgen, das verschiebe nicht auf morgen.

French: Pourquoi remettre à demain ce qu’on peut faire la semaine prochaine < Il ne faut pas remettre au lendemain ce qu’on peut faire le jour même.; Il faut savoir remettre à plus tard pour avoir le temps d’accomplir aujourd’hui ce qu’on aurait dû faire hier. < Il ne faut pas remettre au lendemain ce qu’on peut faire le jour même.

189 The texts of French anti-proverbs were supplied by Péter Barta.
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English: *To err is human – to totally muck things up needs a computer.*
Hungarian: *Tévedni emberi dolog, de igazán összekutyulni valamit csak számítógéppel lehet.*
Russian: *Человеку свойственно ошибаться, но с помощью компьютера это ему удается намного лучше.*
German: *Irren ist menschlich, aber für das totale Chaos braucht man einen Computer.*
French: *L’erreur est humaine, mais un véritable désastre nécessite un ordinateur.*

English: “*Everyone makes mistakes,*” said the hedgehog after trying to mount the hairbrush.
Hungarian: *Tévedni emberi dolog, szólt a sündisznó és lemászott a gyökérkeféről.*
Russian: *„Как обманчива внешность“, – сказал еж, слезая со щетки.*
German: *„Irren ist menschlich,“ sagte der Igel, da sprang er von der Haarbürste.*
French: *Tout le monde peut se tromper, dit le hérisson (confus) en descendant d’une [de la] brosse (à chaussure/à habits/à cheveux).*

15.6 Types of Proverb Alterations

Although proverb transformations arise in a variety of forms, several types stand out. There are a number of mechanisms of proverb variation (which are by no means mutually exclusive), e.g., replacing a single word; substituting two or more words; changing the second part of the proverb; adding a tail to the original text; adding literal interpretations; punning; word-repetition; melding two proverbs; word-order
reversal; etc. The most common mechanisms will be demonstrated separately here, with some representative examples.190

Very popular are such proverb parodies that pervert the basic meaning of a proverb by simply replacing a single word: *He who hesitates is constipated* (< *He who hesitates is lost*). The authors of our anti-proverbs very often try to find a word phonologically similar to the one from the original proverb, as in the following examples: *Matrimony is the root of all evil* (< *Money is the root of all evil*); *Hair today, gone tomorrow* (< *Here today, gone tomorrow*). Of particular interest are such proverb transformations in which only one letter of the alphabet is changed, added or omitted: *A good beginning is half the bottle* (< *A good beginning is half the battle*); *The best things in life are free* (< *The best things in life are free*); *Strike while the irony is hot* (< *Strike while the iron is hot*).

Another characteristic mechanism of proverb parody is the substitution of two words which appeared to the coiners of our examples not fitting their own observations of human life. As Mieder (1989b: 241) points out, proverbs that possess binary structures (Dundes, 1975) have become especially popular formulas on which to base multiple proverb variations, as for example *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*. Many anti-proverbs are based on linguistic structures that remain the same even as slight verbal changes introduce dramatically new images and ideas. The proverb *One man’s meat is another man’s poison*, which is among the most popular proverbs for this kind of variation, is simply reduced to the pattern *One man’s X is another man’s Y*, and X and Y can be substituted by whatever variables are necessary in the context. To illustrate it, let us refer to the three examples below: *One man’s Claire is another man’s affair; One man’s drive is another man’s funeral; One man’s Jill is another man’s thrill*. Typical proverb parodies of this sort based on the proverb *An apple a day keeps the doctor away* are *A joint a day keeps reality away; A laugh a day keeps the psychiatrist away; An effort a day keeps failure away*. Other examples of this

190 For detailed analysis of techniques of variation in Anglo-American anti-proverbs; see T. Litovkina, 2005: 29–86, 2006a, 2007a; T. Litovkina & Mieder, 2006: 17–26; for types of proverb variation in the Hungarian language, see T. Litovkina & Vargha, 2012; Vargha, 2004; Vargha & T. Litovkina, 2007b; for various techniques in proverb alteration in the Hungarian and English languages, see T. Litovkina & Mieder, 2005: 158–176; for types of proverb variation in the French language, see, Barta, 2005a, 2005b, 2006a, 2006b; for analysis of proverb alteration in Dutch anti-proverbs, see Prędota 1994, 1995, 2002, 2007; for various techniques in proverb alteration in the Russian and English languages, see T. Litovkina 2006b; for the types of alteration and humour devices most frequently employed in Anglo-American, German, French, Russian and Hungarian anti-proverbs, see Bartá, T. Litovkina, Hrisztova-Gotthardt et al., 2008, 2009a, 2009b; Hrisztova-Gotthardt, Bartá, T. Litovkina et al., 2007; Hrisztova-Gotthardt, T. Litovkina, Bartá et al., 2008; Hrisztova-Gotthardt, T. Litovkina, Vargha et al., 2009; T. Litovkina, Vargha, Bartá et al., 2007, 2008; Vargha, T. Litovkina, Bartá et al., 2007; etc.
mechanism of proverb alteration include: *Widows rush in where spinsters fear to tread* (*Fools rush in where angels fear to tread*); *A soft drink turneth away company* (*A soft answer turneth away warth*). Again, phonologically similar words are very often chosen for this purpose, as for example in the proverb alterations below: *Taste makes waist* (*Haste makes waste*); *A brain is no stronger than its weakest think* (*A chain is no stronger than its weakest link*).

Very frequent are such anti-proverbs in which the second part of the proverb is entirely changed. One of the most popular proverbs for this type of variation in T. Litovkina and Mieder’s anti-proverb collection of Anglo-American anti-proverbs (2006) is *If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again* which has generated the second largest number of parodies (65). Here are only three of them: *If at first you don’t succeed, blame it on your wife; If at first you don’t succeed, do it the way your wife told you; If at first you don’t succeed – you are fired*. Proverbs often exploited for this type of alteration are also: *Behind every successful man there is a woman; Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise; Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we may die; and People who live in glass houses shouldn’t throw stones*. Examples reworking these proverbs include: *Behind every successful man is a woman complaining she has nothing to wear; Early to bed, early to rise doesn’t make a girl a friend of the guys; Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you may not be able to afford it; People who live in glass houses should screw in the basement*.

Many proverb transformations keep the actual text of the proverb without any change, adding new words, or a tail to it. Evan Esar calls this type of twisted proverbs “the extended proverb” (Esar, 1952: 201). It is amazing with what ease some proverbs (e.g., *Half the world doesn’t know how the other half lives*) have been extended into a great number of twists of this kind: *Half the world doesn’t know how the other half lives – and it’s none of its business; Half the world doesn’t know how the other half lives, but it has its suspicions; Half the world doesn’t know how the other half lives on the husband’s salary*. The extended type of proverb variation and parody can also be clearly shown through wellerisms. Wellerisms, named for Charles Dickens’ character Samuel Weller, are particularly common in the USA, Great Britain and Ireland (Carson Williams, 2002, 2007; Mieder, 1982b, 1989b: 223–238; Mieder & Kingsbury, 1994). This proverbial formulation is normally made up of three parts: 1) a statement (which often consists of a proverb or proverbial phrase), 2) a speaker who makes this remark, and 3) a phrase that places the utterance into an unexpected, contrived situation. The meaning of the proverb is usually distorted by being placed into striking juxtaposition with the third part of the wellerism. In this way a wellerism often parodies the traditional wisdom of proverbs by showing the disparity between the wisdom of the proverb and actual reality (Mieder 1989b: 225). Observe, for example: “*Out of sight, out of mind,*” said the warden as the escaped lunatic disappeared over the hill (Out of sight, out of mind.); “*Tough luck,*” said the egg in the monastery, “out of the frying pan into the friar.” (*Out of the frying pan into the fire.*).
According to Shirley Arora, metaphor is one of the most effective indicators of proverbiality (Arora, 1984: 12). Metaphor is one of the most common devices (among personification, hyperbole, etc.) which helps to achieve figurativeness in proverbs.\(^{191}\) It belongs to the most powerful markers of proverbiality,\(^{192}\) and it is exactly this vivid imagery of many proverbs which makes them so appealing to us. Thus, metaphorical proverbs are remarkably common and typically used metaphorically. In numerous anti-proverbs in our material, however, the meaning of a metaphorical proverb is narrowed by putting it in a context in which it is to be interpreted literally, i.e., the literal-metaphorical relationship is exploited, to wit the following proverb transformations: *When one door shuts, another opens...which means that you live in a drafty house* (When one door shuts, another opens.); “*No friend like a bosom friend,*” as the man said when he pulled out a louse (< *No friend like a bosom friend.*); *A bird in hand is probably contaminated with salmonella* (< *A bird in hand is worth two in the bush.*).

While talking about various forms of proverb alteration, we have to mention one of the most popular humorous techniques created through puns.\(^{193}\) Numerous proverbs in our material have provided good models for exploiting ambiguity through the use of a single word that is polysemous (i.e., having two meanings) or two words that are homonymous (i.e., having identical graphemic and phonemic representation), thus creating comic surprise with unforeseen links between words or ideas. According to Victor Raskin:

> For many speakers, the mere exposure to a homonymous or polysemous word or phrase constitutes an irresistible temptation to make a joke. ... It is the easy availability of puns which makes them a cheap and somewhat despicable type of humor for many individuals and social groups. However, the same factor prevents them from disappearing, and every new generation goes through many cycles of discovering the puns, getting tired of them, rejecting them and eventually rediscovering them again. (Raskin, 1985: 116)

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\(^{191}\) Tóthné Litovkina’s research (1998) has shown that 68.2\% of the 151 best-known American proverbs from the Folklore Archives at University of California at Berkeley lend themselves to figurative interpretation. By contrast, out of the 102 proverbs from five randomly selected pages from “A Dictionary of American Proverbs” (see Mieder 1992), 49\% of proverbs have imagery that would lend itself to figurative interpretation.

\(^{192}\) Such markers can be: certain grammatical or syntactical features (e.g., omission of the article is a conspicuous and frequent cue in Spanish and Danish proverbs), semantic markers (e.g., metaphor, parallelism, paradox, irony), lexical markers (e.g., archaic or old-fashioned words; quantifiers such as “never”, “always”, “everybody”, etc.), phonic markers (e.g., rhyme, alliteration, meter), etc. (see Arora, 1984).

\(^{193}\) For a detailed discussion of categories of puns, as well as punning in Anglo-American anti-proverbs, see T. Litovkina, 2005: 55–86, 2006b, 2009a, 2009b; for the comparative analysis of punning in Russian and Anglo-American anti-proverbs, see T. Litovkina 2006a; for a comparative study of punning in Anglo-American, German, French, Russian and Hungarian anti-proverbs, see Hrisztova-Gotthardt, T. Litovkina, Barta, et al., 2008; T. Litovkina, Barta, Hrisztova-Gotthardt, et al., 2008a; T. Litovkina, Vargha, Barta, et al., 2008.
Certain ambiguous words have become real favorites of punsters in our material, as the word will in the proverb Where there's a will, there's a way: Where there's a will, there's an inheritance tax; Where there's a will – there's a delay; Where there's a will there's a wait; Where there's a will there's a won't. In the following three anti-proverbs the word lie (deceive) is opposed to the lie (be found, exist): Figures don't lie – except on the beach (<Figures don't lie.>); As you have made your bed, why lie about it? (<As you have made your bed, lie in it.>); Truth lies at the bottom of a well, but if it lies, how can it be the truth? (<Truth lies at the bottom of a well.>). The list of polysemous or homonymous words employed in our anti-proverbs could be extended beyond the limits of patience: time, shot, rod, blood, miss, bridge, and port are only a few of them. Some examples include: “How time flies,” as the monkey said when it threw the clock at the missionary (<Time flies.>); Blood will tell: nobody criticizes your faults quicker than your relatives (<Blood flies tell.>); Any port in a storm – preferably expensive port (<Any port in a storm.>.

One meaning of an ambiguous word may be risqué or indecorous. Anti-proverbs of this type, which combine a sexual meaning with a non-sexual one, present examples of double entendre in its strictest sense. The humor of many proverb parodies is based upon the incongruous use of the vulgar or taboo word, as well as on the contrast between an innocent text of a proverb and the sexually-loaded reinterpretation of it: A cock in the hand is worth two in the pants (<A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.>); Buggers can’t be choosers (Beggars can’t be choosers.). In order to understand the numerous puns quoted in this chapter and in the collections of Anglo-American anti-proverbs it is essential to know an array of slang terms and euphemisms for sex organs (e.g., bush for female genitalia or pubic hair; cock, meat, rod, prick or yard for penis; balls for testicles), for masturbation (jack off, pull off, in the hand), for ejaculation (come, shoot), for sexual intercourse (to go to bed, to screw), for homosexual male (fairy, gay, queer, bugger), and so on.

Word-repetition is a very common device not only in proverbs but in anti-proverbs as well. The following examples represent such word duplication: The man who lives by bread alone, lives alone (<Man doesn’t live by bread alone.>); Opportunity knocks but last night a knock spoiled my opportunity (<Opportunity knocks but once.>.) The use of triplication and quadruplication is less often encountered among our examples than simple duplication: “Every little helps,” said Mr. Little and took the six little Littles out to help him saw a pile of wood (<Every little helps.>); such proliferation normally occurs when the original text of the proverb itself also contains

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194 Word-repetition is very common in American proverbs and has been found in about a quarter of American proverbs (see Tóthné Litovkina, 1994, 1998), e.g., Do as I say, not as I do; A penny saved is a penny earned; Fools’ names and fools’ faces often appear in public places; A friend in need is a friend indeed; for more on repetition figures in American proverbs, see T. Litovkina & Mieder, 2005: 94–95; Norrick, 1991.
Types of Proverb Alterations

duplication: *There’s no fool like an old fool who marries a young fool* (< *There’s no fool like an old fool*.).

The mixing of two proverbs (contamination) is also a very popular technique in our material. In about half of the cases of this technique, the beginning of one proverb is combined with the ending of another proverb, without any further change: *A penny saved gathers no moss* (< *A penny saved is a penny earned; A rolling stone gathers no moss.*); *Necessity is the mother of strange bedfellows* (< *Necessity is the mother of invention; Politics makes strange bedfellows.*). Other examples of proverb contamination are: *Behind every successful man is a fish with a bicycle* (< *Behind every successful man there is a woman; A woman without a man is like a fish without a bicycle.*); *A sleeping dog never bites* (< *Let sleeping dogs lie; A barking dog never bites.*); *Two in a bush is the root of all evil* (< *A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush; Money is the root of all evil.*).

Word-order reversal is also a relatively common technique of proverb transformation in our corpus: *Better never than late* (< *Better late than never.*); *Happiness can’t buy money* (< *Money can’t buy happiness.*); *The hand that rules the cradle rocks the world* (< *The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world.*).

As opposed to the frequent change of the second part of proverbs, the change of their first part is relatively rare: *A patient without health insurance keeps the doctor away* (< *An apple a day keeps the doctor away.*). Similarly, in contrast to the frequent expansion of proverb texts, it is quite rare to drop off part of a proverb (e.g., to omit (the last) word(s) of the source proverb). We can call these proverbs truncated or clipped: *Familiarity breeds* (< *Familiarity breeds contempt.*); *Beauty is only skin* (< *Beauty is only skin deep.*).

Many proverb alterations simultaneously employ several methods of variation discussed before. The following example of a sexual proverb parody illustrates the variety of forms that proverbial variation can assume: *One orgasm in the bush is worth two in the hand* (One bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.). This anti-proverb displays the word-order reversal (*bush* and *hand*), double entendre (while *bush* is here a euphemism for the vagina or pubic hair, *in the hand* implies masturbation), and the replacement of *bird* by *orgasm*.

In the vast majority of the proverb transformations in our corpus, the structure of the original proverb is maintained. Sometimes, however, the authors of proverb alterations, in order to fit their modern needs, twist a proverb so dramatically that only a few words survive from the original text – or until the structure of the parent proverb is completely rearranged. Consider examples such as: *The only golden thing that some women dislike is silence* (< *Silence is golden.*); *The noblest of all animals is the dog, and the noblest of all dogs is the hotdog. It feeds the hand that bites it* (< *Don’t bite the hand that feeds you.*). As Mieder (1993c: 121) states, “Mere proverb allusions run the risk of not being understood, even if they refer to very common proverbs. Nevertheless, such lack of communication is rather rare among native speakers...” Indeed, the person who does not acquire competence in using proverbs will not understand anti-proverbs, which presuppose a familiarity with traditional proverbs. However,
parodies like the ones above might be completely unrecognizable to a foreigner. This is one more reason why anyone wishing to communicate or read in a language should have an active knowledge of its most popular proverbs. Like proverbs, anti-proverbs can provide an especially effective pedagogical medium for the teacher of a foreign or native language (for more on incorporation of anti-proverbs in the language classroom, see Forgács, 1997b; T. Litovkina 2004, 2005: 120–141; T. Litovkina & Mieder, 2006: 36–45; Tóthné Litovkina, 1996, 1998, 1999c; Walter, 2001).

15.7 Themes Treated in Proverb Transformations

There is hardly a topic that anti-proverbs do not address. As Mieder states, “Just as proverbs continue to comment on all levels and occurrences in our daily life, so do anti-proverbs react by means of alienating and shocking linguistic strategies to everything that surrounds us” (Mieder, 1989b: 244). Among the themes treated in Anglo-American proverb alterations are sexuality, women, professions and occupations, money, love, marriage, divorce, friendship, education and learning, alcohol and drugs, children and parents, taxes, God and religion, telephones, cars and computers (for a more detailed analysis of themes treated in Anglo-American proverbs, see T. Litovkina, 2005: 87–119; T. Litovkina & Mieder, 2006: 17–26).

Numerous texts of anti-proverbs are sexually oriented (for more on techniques of creating sexual proverb parodies and themes in sexual proverb variation, see T. Litovkina, 2005: 87–99, 2011c; T. Litovkina & Mieder, 2006: 26–29; Tóthné Litovkina 1999a, 1999b). Plenty of proverb parodies relate to sexual intercourse: People who live in glass houses should screw in the basement (< People who live in glass houses should not throw stones>). Many anti-proverbs depict or speak of kissing: A kiss is as good as a smile (< A miss is as good as a mile>). One common subject of anti-proverbs is oral-genital intercourse (fellatio and cunnilingus): Cunnilingus is next to godliness (< Cleanliness is next to godliness>); Sucking a cock every day keeps the doctor away (< An apple a day keeps the doctor away>). Orgasm is a pervasive theme in a number of proverb alterations: Christmas comes, but once a year’s enough (< Christmas comes once a year>). Female or male body parts, particularly vagina, breasts, testicles, penis, and anus are mentioned or alluded to in a number of alterations: The penis is mightier than the sword (< The pen is mightier than the sword>). A striking proportion of anti-proverbs refers to adultery: Love thy neighbor, but make sure her husband is away (< Love thy neighbor as thyself>). Numerous anti-proverbs from our material conjure up images of homosexuality: One man’s meat is another man’s perversion (< One man’s meat is another man’s poison>). Proverb transformations discuss a number of other sexual themes, e.g., the contraceptive pills, condoms, sexually transmitted diseases, bigamy, pornography, erection, libido, chastity, masturbation, sexual relations with animals, sexual orgies and three-person sexual liaisons, conception and birth etc.
Like traditional Anglo-American proverbs in general (e.g., *Women and dogs cause too much strife*; *Women are the devil's net*; *Women are the root of all evil*), many proverb parodies in our corpus are antifeminist and demeaning to women. Hostility toward women is very prominent in the following transformations that rework one of the most widespread anti-feminist proverbs in the English language, *A woman's place is in the house*: *The male was made to lie and roam, but woman's place is in the home.*

There are many anti-proverbs reducing women to the status of sex objects: *Behind every good moan – there’s a woman* (< *Behind every good man – there’s a woman.*); *The breasts on the other side of the fence look greener* (< *The grass on the other side of the fence looks greener.*). Other stereotyping proverb transformations portray women as promiscuous or lustful: *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.*). A number of anti-proverbs depict women as stupid, talkative and stubborn: *Where there’s a woman, there’s a way – and she usually gets it* (< *Where there’s a will, there’s a way.*); *Woman’s work is never done, probably because she can’t get off the telephone long enough to do it* (< *Woman’s work is never done.*). Many additional anti-proverbs portray females as vain and materialistic: *Blondes prefer gentlemen with money* (< *Gentlemen prefer blondes.*); *Man proposes and the girl weighs his pocketbook and decides* (< *Man proposes, God disposes.*). The overwhelming majority of Anglo-American anti-proverbs depicting women in a role deal with women as wives. One of the most deep-rooted stereotypes is that of the quarrelsome, stupid, demanding, manipulating, nosy and bossy woman: *A man’s castle is his home, and his wife has the keys to all the rooms* (< *A man’s home is his castle.*); *The early bird gets up to serve his wife breakfast in bed* (< *The early bird gets the worm.*); *’Tis better to have loved and lost than to marry and be bossed* (< *’Tis better to have loved and lost than to have never loved at all.*). Another object of ridicule in our corpus is the omnipotent mother-in-law, who is uniformly depicted as a man’s enemy: *No man is a hero to his mother-in-law* (< *No man is a hero to his wallet.*); *When mother-in-law comes in at the door, love flies out the window* (< *When poverty comes in at the door, love flies out the window.*). The figures of spinster and widow are also frequently ridiculed in our material. Unlike the male bachelor, the female spinster is treated as a person who is unhappy and unfulfilled; similarly, widows are more admirable than spinsters because the former were once married and more likely to marry again: *Spinsters live longer than married women because where there’s hope there’s life* (< *Where there’s life there’s hope.*) (for more on women in Anglo-American anti-proverbs, see T. Litovkina, 2005: 100–106; 2011b; T. Litovkina & Mieder, 2006: 29–31).

There is a wide range of professions and occupations depicted in our material (for more on professions and occupations addressed in Anglo-American anti-proverbs, see T. Litovkina, 2005: 107–112; T. Litovkina & Mieder, 2006: 31–33). Without any doubt, the lawyer is the most popular target of humor in our anti-proverbs (for more on lawyers treated in Anglo-American anti-proverbs, see T. Litovkina, 2005: 107–112, 2011a: 82–96). The greatest anger and irritation are directed at the cost of lawsuits,
the high income of lawyers, and their greed: Crime pays – be a lawyer (<Crime doesn’t pay.>); Practice makes perfect, but with lawyers it is more likely to make them rich (<Practice makes perfect.>). The havoc created by an ignorant lawyer is a common theme. Just observe the examples reworking the popular proverbs Ignorance of the law is no excuse and Necessity knows no law: Ignorance of the law excuses no man – from practicing it; Necessity knows no law, and neither does the average lawyer. Politicians receive almost the same treatment as lawyers; their portrait is also very unflattering: In politics the choice is constantly between two evils (<Between two evils choose the least.>); Politics makes strange bad fellows (<Politics makes strange bad fellows.>). Qualities most often ridiculed in politicians are corruption and dishonesty: A politician is known by the promises he doesn’t keep (<A man is known by the company he keeps.>); Figures don’t lie, except political figures (<Figures don’t lie.>) (for more on the figure of politician in Anglo-American anti-proverbs, see T. Litovkina, 2013). After lawyers and politicians, doctors are among the most frequent targets for fun in our material. The most irritable qualities in doctors – ignorance and greediness – are identical to those in lawyers. In the two examples below, lawyers and doctors are even brought together: The lawyer agrees with the doctor that the best things in life are fees (<The best things in life are free.>); Advice is cheap...except when you consult a doctor or lawyer or tax accountant (<Advice is cheap.>.

15.8 Background of Research

Although the collection and the study of anti-proverbs nationally and internationally have begun a while ago, both pursuits are becoming increasingly popular in the field of paremiology and paremiography. Indeed, just thirty-one years have passed since the first collection of German anti-proverbs was published (Mieder, 1982a). The first such collection in the English language, the book Twisted Wisdom: Modern Anti-Proverbs, written by Wolfgang Mieder in cooperation with Anna Tóthné Litovkina, was published only 14 years ago (see Mieder & Tóthné Litovkina, 1999195).

In Europe and North America the genre of transformed proverbs is becoming more and more popular, especially due to the mass media and the Internet. In fact, one may easily believe that the Century of the Anti-Proverb is now in progress. Consider the following catalogue of anti-proverb collections that have seen print, as well as panels on anti-proverbs presented at conferences, during the last decade. In the course of 2005,
four anti-proverb collections were published, including the first two to appear in Hungarian („Viccében él a nemzet”. *Magyar közmondás-paródíák* [“The Nation Lives in Its Jokes”: Hungarian Proverb Parodies] (see T. Litovkina & Vargha, 2005b)\(^{196}\) and „Éhes diákkal álmodik”. *Egyetemisták közmondás-elváltoztatásai* [“A Hungry Student Dreams about a Parcel”: Twisted Proverbs of Students] (see T. Litovkina & Vargha, 2005a)\(^{197}\) by Anna T. Litovkina and Katalin Vargha). Also, a collection of Russian anti-proverbs and aphorisms (Антипословицы русского народа by Harry Walter and Valerij Mokienko, see Walter & Mokienko, 2005) was published in St. Petersburg, and a new German collection (*Besser Arm dran als Bein ab: Anti-Sprichwörter und ihresgleichen* by Erika Gossler, see Gossler, 2005) saw print in Vienna.

The year 2006 began with the publication of a new collection of Russian anti-proverbs (Прикольный словарь (антипословицы и антипоговорки) by Harry Walter and Valerij Mokienko (see Walter & Mokienko, 2006), as well as the appearance of the second collection of Anglo-American anti-proverbs, titled *Old Proverbs Never Die, They Just Diversify: A Collection of Anti-Proverbs* by Anna T. Litovkina and Wolfgang Mieder (see T. Litovkina & Mieder, 2006)\(^{198}\).

In the course of 2006 two conferences held in Hungary featured panels on anti-proverbs: the XVI. Hungarian Congress of Applied Linguistics *Nyelvi modernizáció – Szaknyelv, fordítás, terminológia* [Language Modernization – Professional Language, Translation, Terminology] held at Szent István University (Gödöllő, Hungary, April 10–12, 2006); the International Conference *Disciplinary and Interdisciplinary Phraseology* held at the Pannonian University of Veszprém (Veszprém, Hungary, June 9–11, 2006) (for more on the panels, see T. Litovkina, 2007b: 3–16).

In 2007 a special issue of *Acta Ethnographica Hungarica* on *Anti-Proverbs in Contemporary Societies* saw print in Budapest. The issue, co-edited by Anna T. Litovkina

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196 The book contains about 1,500 anti-proverbs based on 324 original Hungarian proverbs. While the vast majority of the sources came from the Internet, recent Hungarian newspapers, fiction, and advertisements, some texts were recorded orally.

197 The collection contains over 1,700 proverb parodies based on 287 Hungarian proverbs. The sources were collected by Anna T. Litovkina’s students attending her classes on socio-linguistics and folklore at Illyés Gyula College of Education, University of Pécs (Szekszárd) from their friends, relatives, etc. in 2004–2005; some were created by them.

198 The second collection of Anglo-American anti-proverbs includes over 5,000 texts based on 580 traditional Anglo-American proverbs, providing also a much longer and detailed introduction than the first compilation.
and Carl Lindahl, and published in four languages (English, German, French and Russian) contains 10 articles and 12 reviews by 16 contributors.\footnote{This issue grew principally from two panels on anti-proverb research presented in Hungary in 2006 and additional contributions written especially for this issue (for more, see the introduction to the volume, T. Litovkina, 2007b: 7–9). The core conference presentations expanded for this publication include Dóra Boronkai’s analysis of the preliminary results of a sociolinguistic survey assessing how age, sex and education influence appreciation of humor in Hungarian anti-proverbs. For this issue the paper was reworked with the help of Anna T. Litovkina (Boronkai & T. Litovkina, 2007), Péter Barta’s study on proverb blending in French anti-proverbs (Barta, 2006b, the paper has been translated into French for this special issue (Barta, 2007b), and Katalin Vargha’s discussion of a sociolinguistic survey of popular views of anti-proverbs and their functions in Hungary (for this issue the study was reworked with the help of Anna T. Litovkina (Vargha & T. Litovkina, 2007a). In preparation for publication, two additional works were prepared by individual scholars from Hungary – Péter Barta’s examination of French anti-proverbs on food and drinks (Barta, 2007a), and Hrisztalina Hrisztova-Gotthardt’s treatment of Bulgarian proverbs from the Internet (Hrisztova-Gotthardt, 2007). Also, four co-authors residing in Hungary (Anna T. Litovkina, Katalin Vargha, Péter Barta, and Hrisztalina Hrisztova-Gotthardt) pooled their resources to produce an additional article on the most frequent types of alteration in Anglo-American, German, French, Russian and Hungarian anti-proverbs (T. Litovkina, Vargha, Barta, et al., 2007). In addition, four articles by internationally known anti-proverb researchers from beyond Hungary’s borders were brought into the mix to round out the coverage, so that this special issue of Acta Ethnographica Hungarica could represent not only the best Hungarian but the best international anti-proverb research as well: Wolfgang Mieder (Mieder, 2007) provided an essay on anti-proverbs and mass communication; Harry Walter and V. M. Mokienko submitted a contribution on Russian anti-proverbs and their lexicographic description (Walter & Mokienko, 2007); Stanisław Prędota offered an exploration of Dutch anti-proverbs from the Internet (Prędota, 2007), and Fionnuala Carson Williams contributed a study on proverbs in wellerisms (Carson Williams, 2007).}

Clearly, anti-proverb research has been experiencing a boom in the last three decades. Moreover, this new field has become a gold mine not only for individual paremiologists and paremiographers, but particularly for researchers working in pairs, based on the principle expressed in the proverb \textit{Two heads are better than one} (especially if they are anti-proverbialists’ heads).

Thus, German-born Wolfgang Mieder and Russian-born Anna T. Litovkina have assembled two compilations of Anglo-American anti-proverbs (T. Litovkina & Mieder, 2006; Mieder & Tothné Litovkina, 1999), and they have also co-authored a monograph, one chapter of which focuses on Hungarian and Anglo-American anti-proverbs (T. Litovkina & Mieder, 2005: 150–176).

A productive anti-proverb collaboration in the field of Russian anti-proverbs has occurred between V. M. Mokienko from Russia and Harry Walter from Germany (Walter & Mokienko, 2005, 2006).

Anna T. Litovkina and Katalin Vargha from Hungary have undertaken a number of anti-proverb projects together. One of them was to collect Hungarian anti-proverbs. Now their corpus of anti-proverbs includes over 7,000 examples, some of which have
already been published in anti-proverb collections (see T. Litovkina & Vargha, 2005a, 2005b, 2006). Vargha and T. Litovkina have also written a number of co-authored articles analyzing various types of transformation and humour devices in Hungarian anti-proverbs (T. Litovkina & Vargha, 2009, 2012; Vargha & T. Litovkina, 2007b). The co-authors have also conducted a survey exploring popular views of proverbs and anti-proverbs in contemporary Hungarian society (for a more detailed analysis of the results of their survey, see T. Litovkina & Vargha, 2009; T. Litovkina, Vargha & Boronkai, 2012; Vargha & T. Litovkina, 2007a).200

Anna T. Litovkina and Dóra Boronkai from Hungary have conducted socio-linguistic surveys in the USA and Hungary (see Boronkai & T. Litovkina, 2007, 2009, 2010; T. Litovkina & Boronkai, 2009, 2011; T. Litovkina, Vargha & Boronkai, 2012). The main purpose of the surveys was to employ the methods of correlational and quantitative sociolinguistics to assess how age and sex (in case of Hungarian respondents, educational level as well) influence the appreciation of humor in anti-proverbs.201 Following T. Litovkina and Boronkai’s line of research, Bulgaria-born researcher residing in Hungary, Hrisztalina Hrisztova-Gotthardt, Melita Aleksa Varga from Croatia and Anna T. Litovkina have analyzed the reception of humour of anti-proverbs in Germany, Austria and Switzerland (see Aleksa, Hrisztova-Gotthardt & T. Litovkina, 2009, 2010; Hrisztova-Gotthardt, Aleksa & T. Litovkina, 2009).

Apart from the productive partnerships already mentioned, other scholarly teams have recently formed to conduct various anti-proverb projects (in particular, 200 Each participant in the survey received a questionnaire containing 30 questions. The task of the informants was to respond to 14 questions concerning the use of proverbs and ten touching upon anti-proverbs. Additionally, the questionnaire contained questions concerning respondents’ gender, age, educational level, profession, place of residence (county), and type of residence (city/town, village) at birth and at present. This survey focused on three major questions. First, the authors’ aim was to establish the lists of the proverbs most popular for variation. Their second goal was to discover our subjects’ thoughts about the use of anti-proverbs, as well as about their views of the people who use them. Thirdly, they compared what people say about their own usage of anti-proverbs against what they think about the ways in which other people use them (for more, see T. Litovkina & Vargha 2009; T. Litovkina, Vargha & Boronkai, 2012; Vargha & T. Litovkina, 2007a).

201 Each participant in the survey received a list of anti-proverbs (which were identified as “proverb transformations” in English, or “közmondás-paródiák” [proverb parodies] in Hungarian). The task of respondents was to read the anti-proverbs and to evaluate each item according to its “rate of funniness,” from 0 to 10 (0 = the least funny, 10 = the most funny). Additionally, participants were asked to provide minimal personal background information: their sex, age, etc. The survey focused on three major questions. First, how do sex and age (in Hungarian survey one more variable was added, educational level) influence the overall response to the questionnaires? The second goal was to consider the ways in which differences of the variables discussed in the survey influenced responses to the thematic categories treated in the anti-proverbs, particularly sexuality, obscenity, males, females, and family. Finally, the aim of the authors was also to establish and analyze the lists of the most funny and least funny anti-proverbs (for more, see Boronkai & T. Litovkina, 2007, 2009, 2010; T. Litovkina & Boronkai, 2009; T. Litovkina, Vargha & Boronkai, 2012).
comparative studies concentrating on anti-proverbs in different languages and social and cultural contexts). Thus, a group residing in Hungary, consisting of Anna T. Litovkina, Katalin Vargha, Péter Barta and Hrisztalina Hrisztova-Gotthardt, has been working on the types of alteration and humour devices most frequently employed in Anglo-American, German, French, Russian and Hungarian anti-proverbs (see Barta, T. Litovkina, Hrisztova-Gotthardt et al., 2008, 2009a, 2009b; Hrisztova-Gotthardt, T. Litovkina, Vargha et al., 2009; T. Litovkina, Vargha, Barta et al., 2007, 2008; Vargha, T. Litovkina, Barta et al., 2007; etc.).

Naturally, many other important questions connected with anti-proverbs could have been touched here as well, but it would have stretched the length of the chapter past the limits of patience.

15.9 Summary

As the numerous examples quoted in the chapter show, anti-proverbs respect nobody. Nothing is too valuable or sacrosanct to avoid exposure to proverbial ridicule. Anti-proverbs may contain elements not only of funniness, but also of offensiveness, hostility, and aggression directed toward various social groups, including women, homosexuals, people of different professions, and so on. The sensitive and controversial topics of anti-proverbs may make them “one man's meat and another man's poison”, affirming the truth of what William Shakespeare tells us in “Love's Labour's Lost” (V, 2):

A jest's prosperity lies in the ear  
Of him that hears it, never in the tongue  
Of him that makes it...

As it was pointed out in the introduction to their second collection of Anglo-American anti-proverbs:

In fact, the “anti” component in the term “anti-proverb” is not directed against the concept of “proverb” as such. Proverbs and their wisdom continue to be of much value and relevance in modern society. But some so-called anti-proverbs have become new proverbs with their own wisdom that is perfectly appropriate for the modern age (T. Litovkina & Mieder, 2006: 5).

Since proverbs are considered by many of us sacrosanct, their reinterpretation in innovative ways can create humor. We laugh at some anti-proverbs because they skew our expectations about traditional values, order, and rules. We are, however, sometimes struck by the absurdity of some situations portrayed in proverb parodies, especially when they rely purely upon linguistic tricks employed for the sole purpose of making punning possible. Very often, however, anti-proverbs move beyond the realm
of fun and wordplay to commenting on important aspects of society, e.g., AIDS, education, politics, work, love, sex, money, air-pollution, etc. As Mieder points out, “In this respect even the anti-proverbs become moralistic if not didactic statements to a degree...” (Mieder, 1989b: 243). As Mieder states elsewhere:

These alterations of existing proverbs might be mere humorous wordplay, but more often than not such anti-proverbs represent a critical reaction to the worldview expressed in seemingly antiquated proverbs....The juxtaposition of the traditional proverb text with an innovative variation forces the reader into a more critical thought process. Whereas the old proverbs acted as pre-conceived rules, the modern anti-proverbs are intended to activate us into overcoming the naive acceptance of traditional wisdom (Mieder, 1993c: 90).

The great abundance of anti-proverbs presented here, as well as the anti-proverbs being created daily in the contemporary world, definitely show that the proverb continues to be used as an effective means of communication in our modern society (Mieder, 1989b: 223). And even if one finds some of the transformations displayed here to be obscene, vulgar, flat, nevertheless, they are the proof of human creativity, and thus, like traditional proverbs, must be collected and studied by proverb scholars. As a linguist and a folklorist, I am fully in agreement with Walter and Mokienko (2005: 4), who stress that modern paremiologists and paremiographers must not only collect and publish traditional and new proverbs, but also collect and publish their transformations and discover their functions and interpret their meanings in the modern world and its communicative processes.

15.10 Implications for Further Research

Anti-proverbs are, like proverbs themselves, both the most pervasive and the most elusive of expressions. In everyday life, they are so common that we seldom remember the first time that we heard them. The average American may have heard variants of such twisted sayings as Money isn’t everything – but it’s way ahead of what’s in second place (Money isn’t everything.) hundreds of times, but a paremiologist searching for an example of that expression may have to wait many months to record it in vivo. Yet written anti-proverbs are all too easy to collect: currently, omnipresent lists of them circulate on the Internet and in vernacular published collections. The same situation has obtained with the parent form, the proverb, for millennia. Classical and medieval scribes have left us long lists of proverbs: orators and preachers would memorize them and have to ready to mind for application in their speeches and sermons. Yet no one today knows just how and when they were used.

In attempting to bring the study of proverbs as textual phenomena into harmony with the understanding of proverbs as living speech acts, we once more follow the lead of Wolfgang Mieder, who states:
(...) it would be a mistake to reduce the phenomenon of anti-proverbs to a mere linguistic or phrasological matter. There is a definite folkloric element involved in all of this that should be part of the discussion. It is not enough to identify hundreds of anti-proverbs and place them into collections organized according to the original proverbs followed by the altered texts or thematically by the subjects and meanings of the anti-proverbs. Scholars must also interpret the use and function of anti-proverbs in oral and written contexts and reflect upon the significance of this preoccupation with anti-proverbs by the folk themselves. (Mieder, 2007: 18)

A rich understanding of anti-proverbs requires a concerted melding of diverse approaches: the lexicographer’s expertise at assembling long lists from written sources, the linguist’s skill of deciphering and explicating the grammatical and phonological strategies as work in the transformations, the sociologist’s strengths of statistical analysis applied to the various populations and sub-groups that use anti-proverbs, the comparativist’s expertise at assessing cultural differences, and the folklorist’s focus on ways in which proverbs live in everyday oral discourse.

It goes without saying that the all-important initial goal for paremiographers in the field of anti-proverbs is collecting and publishing anti-proverbs in any culture where they flourish, by following the example of Wolfgang Mieder (T. Litovkina & Mieder, 2006; Mieder, 1982a, 1985, 1989a, 1998, 2003; Mieder & Tóthné Litovkina, 1999). I refer to the languages already reasonably well represented by in current collections (English, German, and Russian), as well as to those in which published research has only just begun (e.g., French and Hungarian), and to many other tongues in which anti-proverbs exist but are not yet represented in scholarship.

Another equally exciting goal for future research entails conducting cultural-historical analyses of individual proverbs, tracing their various appearances in the form of anti-proverbs. Models for such studies are readily available in a number of Wolfgang Mieder’s publications (see Mieder 1993a, 1993b, and many other of his articles and books).

A third important task is to compare and contrast the most common types of proverb transformation in languages other than those discussed in numerous publications (English, German, French, Russian, Hungarian and Dutch).

Since proverbial language is said to reflect the system of values and conventions of a country, it would be useful not only to discuss basic attitudes presented in anti-proverbs of separate languages (some analysis of different topics in separate languages, in particular, English, Russian and French, has already been done separately by Péter Barta, Anna T. Litovkina and Harry Walter202), but also to conduct

cross-cultural studies of topics most frequently treated in anti-proverbs from different languages, in different countries.

Following Wolfgang Mieder and Fionnuala Carson Williams’s research on proverbs in wellerisms (Carson Williams, 2002, 2007; Mieder, 1982b, 1989b: 223–238; Mieder & Kingsbury, 1994), it would be an interesting task to examine what proverbs turn up in wellerisms in many other cultures and languages.

It is also apparent that there are some anti-proverbs with international distribution. Some of such examples have been already quoted above. Thus, a very exciting task for the future is to identify anti-proverbs identical in different languages. A very important goal for further research would be analyzing the processes of creativity involved in coining and performing anti-proverbs. Methods of folklore fieldwork and cognitive linguistics would be crucial for such studies.

A detailed analysis of the functions of anti-proverbs is also needed. Thus, an important task for the future is to conduct further socio-linguistics surveys the main goals of which would be exploring popular views on anti-proverbs and their functions in contemporary societies (similar to the study conducted by Katalin Vargha and Anna T. Litovkina in Hungary, the preliminary results of which have been already reported, see T. Litovkina & Vargha, 2009; T. Litovkina, Vargha, & Boronkai, 2012; Vargha & T. Litovkina, 2007a).

Last but not least, another possible future task for researchers could be to extend Aleksa, Boronkai, Hrisztova-Gotthardt and T. Litovkina’s methods of evaluating the funniness of anti-proverbs to cultures other than Hungary, the USA, Germany, Austria and Switzerland (see Aleksa, Hrisztova-Gotthardt & T. Litovkina, 2009, 2010; Boronkai & T. Litovkina, 2007, 2009, 2010; Hrisztova-Gotthardt, Aleksa & T. Litovkina, 2009; T. Litovkina & Boronkai, 2009, 2011; T. Litovkina, Vargha & Boronkai, 2012). Along with analyzing the results of surveys conducted in each country separately, it would be interesting to do comparative analysis and to investigate how the cultures correspond, and how they differ, in humor perception.

The work summarized in this chapter also poses many other possibilities for future research. Some of the tasks described above (in particular the ones concentrating on different languages and different cultural backgrounds, or involving broader and more interdisciplinary research projects, e.g., sociological, psychological, textual) require scholarly teamwork. I encourage scholars of varied languages and cultural backgrounds, representing different scholarly disciplines, to join the team of enthusiastic anti-proverbialists in our anti-proverb scholarship.

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