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## Main Mechanisms of Proverb Variation in Anglo-American Anti-Proverbs about Children

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**Abstract.** For centuries, proverbs have provided a framework for endless transformation. In recent decades, the modification of proverbs has taken such proportions that sometimes we can even meet more proverb transformations than traditional proverbs. Wolfgang Mieder has invented a term anti-proverb (or in German Antispruchwort) for such deliberate proverb innovations. Although proverb transformations arise in a variety of forms, several types stand out (which are by no means mutually exclusive), e.g., adding new words to the original text; replacing a single word; substituting two or more words; changing the second part of the proverb; melding two proverbs; punning; adding literal interpretations. The focus of this study is on the analysis of main mechanisms of proverb variation in 43 transformations of 6 Anglo-American proverbs about children. The anti-proverbs discussed in the present study were taken primarily from written sources.

**Keywords:** anti-proverb, proverb, transformation, punning, homonym, paronym, homophone.

Research area: social structure, social institutions and processes; languages of the peoples of the foreign countries (English).

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## Главные механизмы трансформации пословиц в англо-американских антипословицах о детях

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**Аннотация.** На протяжении веков пословицы служили основой для бесконечной трансформации. В последние десятилетия модификация пословиц приняла такие масштабы, что иногда мы можем встретить даже больше пословичных трансформ, чем традиционных пословиц. Вольфганг Мидер предложил термин «антипословица» (по-английски: *anti-proverb*, по-немецки: *Antispruchwort*) для обозначения таких намеренных пословичных инноваций. Трансформация пословиц происходит в самых разных формах. Основными типами таких трансформаций (которые ни в коем случае не являются взаимоисключающими) выступают, например, добавление новых слов к оригинальному тексту; замена одного слова; замена двух или более слов; изменение второй части пословицы; смешение двух пословиц; каламбур; использование буквального значения вместо метафорического. В центре внимания данной статьи – анализ различных механизмов трансформации пословиц в 43 трансформации 6 англо-американских пословиц о детях. Источниками антипословиц, рассматриваемых в настоящей статье, являются преимущественно письменные источники.

**Ключевые слова:** антипословица, пословица, трансформация, каламбур, омоним, пароним, омофон.

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### Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The focus of the present study is on the most popular mechanisms of proverb variation in 43 Anglo-American anti-proverbs (or proverb transformations) about children. Although proverb transformations arise in a variety of forms, several types stand out. The Anglo-American anti-proverbs selected for the study were taken primarily from American and British written sources.

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<sup>1</sup> Some parts of this study have appeared or have been published in T. Litovkina, 2005; T. Litovkina et. al., 2021; Mieder & Tóthné Litovkina, 1999; T. Litovkina & Mieder, 2006.

### Theoretical framework

For centuries, proverbs have provided a framework for endless transformation. In recent decades, the modification of proverbs has taken such proportions that sometimes we can even meet more proverb transformations than traditional proverbs. Wolfgang Mieder has invented a term *anti-proverb* (or in German *Antispruchwort*) for such deliberate proverb innovations, also known as alterations, parodies, transformations, variations, wisecracks, mutations, or fractured proverbs. This term has been widely accepted by proverb scholars all over the world as a general label for such innovative

alterations and reactions to traditional proverbs: *антисловица* (Russian), *anti-proverb* (English), *anti(-)proverbe* (French) (see the general discussion of the genre of anti-proverbs in T. Litovkina, 2005; T. Litovkina & Mieder, 2006: 1–54; T. Litovkina et al., 2021).

Besides the term *anti-proverb*, many other terms exist in different languages for such phenomena, e.g.:

Russian: *трансформа, пословичная «переделка», прикол.*

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.*

Anti-proverbs may contain revealing social comments (*American money talks in just about every foreign country* (McKenzie, 1980: 343) {*Money talks*}<sup>2</sup>), 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* (Margo 1982) {*A fool and his money are soon parted*}).

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. Because it always refers to an original text, the innovative anti-proverb can be understood as the appearance of intertextuality: to use Neal Norrick’s terminology

(1989: 117), we can call anti-proverbs “intertextual jokes.” “Intertextuality occurs any time one text suggests or requires reference to some other identifiable text or stretch of discourse, spoken or written” (Norrick, 1989: 117)

All’s fair for anti-proverbs – there is hardly a topic that anti-proverbs do not address. Among the most frequent themes discussed in proverb alterations are women (see T. Litovkina, 2005; 2018a;; T. Litovkina & Mieder, 2019, etc.), sexuality (see T. Litovkina, 2011b; 2018a: 149–170; T. Litovkina & Mieder 2019: 65–79, etc.), professions and occupations (see T. Litovkina, 2011a, 2013, 2016), marriage and love (T. Litovkina, 2017; 2018a; 2018b; 2024; T. Litovkina & Mieder, 2019, etc.).

### The focus of this study

The focus of this study is on the analysis of the main mechanisms of proverb variation in the 43 Anglo-American anti-proverbs about children.

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 new words; repeating words; adding literal interpretations; melding two proverbs; word order reversal, and reversal of sounds, etc. (for more, see T. Litovkina, 2005; T. Litovkina et al., 2021).

### Methodology

Without any doubt, children are a frequent theme in Anglo-American anti-proverbs.

First of all, there are numerous proverbs in our corpus which contain such words as “child/children”, “baby/babies”, “son/sons”, “daughter/daughters” that have been transformed into anti-proverbs. Examples of such proverbs: *Spare the rod and spoil the child; Children should be seen and not heard; Like mother, like daughter; Like father, like son.*

Second, there are scores of proverbs that might not contain the words listed above but in their transformations, however, these words occur. Let me exemplify this phenomenon by three alterations of the proverb *Necessity is the*

<sup>2</sup> For the reader’s convenience all anti-proverbs in this chapter are followed by their original forms, given in {} brackets.

*mother of invention* below, all of which contain the word “children”:

If necessity is the mother of invention, she must be worried about having so many children that won't work. (Esar, 1968: 441)

Necessity is the mother of invention, and she certainly has some queer children. (Esar, 1968: 440).

When children ask embarrassing questions, invention is the necessity of mother. (Esar, 1968: 263).

This study makes an attempt to analyze the main mechanisms of proverb variation in 43 transformations of 6 Anglo-American proverbs about children. For this analysis out of the corpus that contains over 6000 anti-proverbs of almost 600 proverbs, I have selected only the proverbs that contain the words “children” or “child” (6) and all their transformations (43).

Below you can find these proverbs. Each proverb is followed by a number in parentheses indicating the number of anti-proverbs that I have been able to locate for it:

Spare the rod and spoil the child. (14)  
Children should be seen and not heard. (12)

It's a wise child that knows its own father. (6)

A burnt [burned] child dreads [fears] the fire. (4)

The child is father of the man. (4)

It's a wise father who knows his own child. (3)

The 43 anti-proverbs discussed and analyzed in the present study were taken primarily from American and British written sources (see all of them in the Appendix at the end of the study). The texts of anti-proverbs were drawn from hundreds of books and articles on puns, one-liners, toasts, wisecracks, quotations, aphorisms, maxims, quips, epigrams, and graffiti the vast majority of which have been published in two dictionaries of anti-proverbs compiled by Wolfgang Mieder and Anna T. Litovkina: “Twisted Wisdom: Modern Anti-Proverbs” (Mieder & Tóthné Litovkina, 1999) and “Old

Proverbs Never Die, They Just Diversify: A Collection of Anti-Proverbs” (T. Litovkina & Mieder, 2006).

## Discussion

The most common mechanisms of proverb transformations found in 43 anti-proverbs (i.e., adding new words, replacing words and punning) will be demonstrated here, with some representative examples.

### 1. Adding new words

Many proverb transformations keep the actual text of the original proverb intact, but add new words, or a tail, to it. Evan Esar calls this type of twisted proverbs “the extended proverb.” According to his opinion, this is the most extensive class of proverb alteration. As he points out: “The popularity of the extended proverb is due to the ease with which all proverbs can thus be transformed” (Esar, 1952: 201). Some of proverb transformations of this type have become proverbial in themselves, for example, *An apple a day keeps the doctor away, and an onion a day keeps everyone away* {*An apple a day keeps the doctor away*}; *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*}.

#### 1.1. Adding a phrase, a sentence or a few sentences

In the vast majority of our anti-proverbs a phrase, a sentence or even a few sentences are added to the proverb text. It is amazing with what ease some proverbs (e.g., *The child is father of the man*; *A burnt child dreads fire*) have been extended into a great number of twists of this kind. Let us observe some transformations of these proverbs:

*The child is father of the man*

The child is father of the man...unless the offspring happens to be a girl. (Berman, 1997: 54).

The child is father to the man, but there's no second manhood for second childhood. (Esar, 1968: 715).

The child is father to the man, except when the child is a girl. (Esar, 1968: 344).

“The child is father to the man.” This was written by Shakespeare. He didn’t often make that kind of mistake. (Brandreth, 1985: 222).

*A burnt child dreads fire*

A burnt child dreads fire ...until the next day. (M. Twain, in Berman, 1997: 54).

A burnt child will dread the fire only if it survives. (Feibleman, 1978: 126).

Another example of this mechanism of proverb alteration is:

It’s a wise father who knows his own child – will do everything he is told not to do. (Esar, 1968: 232). *{It’s a wise father who knows his own child}*

The extended type of proverb variation and parody can be clearly shown through wellerisms. Wellerisms, named for Charles Dickens’ character Samuel Weller, are particularly common in the USA, Great Britain and Ireland (see Mieder & Kingsbury, 1994; Mieder, 1989: 223–238). This form of folklore 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, 1989: 225). Observe, for example:

“Little boys should be seen and not heard,” as the boy said when he could not recite his lesson. (Mieder & Kingsbury, 1994: 14). *{Children should be seen and not heard}*

**1.2. Other types of word addition**

New words may be added not only after the original text of a proverb, but before it,

though in our material it happens not as often as adding a tail. Addition of new words only at the beginning occurs very rarely (it can happen in jokes, see below, Section 3.1.):

In the example below besides introduction of new words, one word is changed in the original proverb:

Nerve: Breaking the hair-brush on the disobedient scion, then making him pay for a new one. See revised version, “Spare the rod and spoil the hair-brush!” (Wurdz, 1904). *{Spare the rod and spoil the child}*

Quite rarely in our material words or phrases are just put somewhere inside the proverb text:

It’s a wise father who knows as much as his own child. (Judge, in Prochnow, 1955: 104). *{It’s a wise father who knows his own child}*

Proverbs are also reformulated into longer statements by expanding a proverb both at the beginning and end. Evan Esar (1952: 202) calls such transformations “the sandwich species” (with an original proverb in the middle of it):

When children are seen and not heard it’s apt to be through binoculars. (McKenzie, 1980: 69). *{Children should be seen and not heard}*

**2. Replacing words**

**2.1. Replacing a single word**

Very popular are such proverb parodies that pervert the basic meaning of a proverb by simply replacing a single word, as is shown in the three alterations of the well-known proverb *Spare the rod and spoil the child*:

Spare the dekameter and spoil the child. (Colombo, 1975).

Spare the rod and spoil the wife. (Livia Horváth, in Litovkina, 2004: 318).

The opposite view may be achieved through employing antonyms, for example, “save” is used instead of “spoil”:

Spare the rod and save the child.  
(Hubbard 1973: 150). {Spare the rod and  
spoil the child}

The authors of our anti-proverbs very often try to find a word phonologically similar to one from the original proverb, as in the following example which might be called paronomastic pun (for more on paronomastic puns, see Section 3.2. below):

Children should be obscene and not heard. (Kandel, 1976). {*Children should be seen and not heard*}

Replacement of a word in my corpus is very frequently combined with some other mechanisms of variation.

## 2.2. Changing the second part of the proverb

Very frequent are such anti-proverbs in which the second part of the proverb is entirely changed:

It's a wise child that resembles its rich relatives. (Esar, 1968: 668). {*It's a wise child that knows its own father*}

It's a wise novelist that knows his own screen child. (Esar, 1968: 138). {*It's a wise child that knows its own father*}

A burned child makes an ash of itself. (Christie Davies, 1999<sup>3</sup>). {*A burned child dreads the fire*}

Spare the rod but use iron and the child will be as desired. (Brigitta Stalter, in Litovkina, 2004: 318). {*Spare the rod and spoil the child*}

## 2.3. Other types of word change

Sometimes one word (*seen* and *child*) might be exchanged by two (*on scene* and *drag race* respectively), as in the two examples below:

Children should be on scene and not heard. (Kilroy, 1985: 241). {*Children should be seen and not heard*}

Spare the rod and spoil the drag race. (library staff lounge, in Reisner, 1971: 187). {*Spare the rod and spoil the child*}

The following proverb transformations employ both word exchange and word order addition (preceding the original proverbs):

Traffic slogan: Children should be seen and not hurt. (Crosbie, 1977: 167). {*Children should be seen and not heard*}

To the boy with a toy pistol – It's a wise child that knows its own popper. (Loomis, 1949: 354). {*It's a wise child that knows its own father*}

Change of two words takes place in the following proverb alteration:

Spare the marcel and spoil the woman. (Loomis, 1949: 357). {*Spare the rod and spoil the child*}

The parody below while substituting the word *heard*, introduces the word *obscene*, thus, playing upon the resemblances of similar-sounding words *seen* and *obscene*:

Humorists should be seen and not obscene. (Loomis, 1949: 354). {Children should be seen and not heard}

The proverb *It's a wise child that knows its own father* is simply reduced to the pattern "It's a wise X that knows its own Y," and X and Y can be substituted by whatever variables are necessary in the context. To illustrate, let us refer to the two examples below:

It's a wise stock that knows its own par. (Esar, 1968: 573).

It's a wise horse that knows its own fodder. (Esar, 1968: 395).

Another characteristic mechanism of proverb parody is the substitution of three or more words. The structure of the proverb usu-

<sup>3</sup> Two anti-proverbs in this study marked as Davies 1999 were submitted to me at Berkeley in May 1999 by the late professor Christie Davies (Reading, Great Britain) after he had read the collection "Twisted Wisdom: Modern Anti-Proverbs" (Mieder & Tóthné Litovkina, 1999).

ally remains the same, the number of words in the alteration, however, may differ. In the example below the substitution of two words is based on phonological similarity (*noses* and *knows*, *fodder* and *father*):

It's a wise horse that noses his own fodder. (Loomis, 1949: 354). {It's a wise child that knows its own father}

#### 2.4. Word order reversal

There exists a tradition of parodying individual proverbs by word-order reversal (frequently called *metathesis* or *spoonerism*), which questions, or even rejects, their wisdom. Nouns and verbs are reversed most frequently.

Two words (*spare* and *spoil*) are interchanged in the following proverb alteration:

Spoil the rod and spare the child. (William Dean Howells, in Esar, 1968: 422). {Spare the rod and spoil the child}

In the following example, besides the transposition of the noun “fire” and verb “dreads”, the noun “fire” switches its nominal function to the verbal, and the verb “dreads” is turned into a noun sounding identically “dread”:

A burned child fires dread (in its parents). (Christie Davies, 1999). {A burned child dreads the fire}

Word order reversal (*heard* and *seen*), word change (*should be* and *are*) and addition of new words at the beginning and the end of a proverb are exploited in the following transformations of the proverb *Children should be seen and not heard*:

When children are seen and not heard it's apt to be through binoculars. (McKenzie, 1980: 69).

### 3. Puns

While talking about various forms of proverb alteration, we have to mention one of the most popular humorous techniques creat-

ed through puns. Puns occur almost always in combination with other techniques (e.g., change, addition or omission of letters or words). Salvatore Attardo, along with many other humor researchers, distinguishes four subcategories of puns – paronyms, homonyms, homographs, and homophones (Attardo, 1994: 110–111). This section discusses three main types of punning in our anti-proverbs about children, that is, paronomasia, homonymy, and homophony.

#### 3.1. Homonymous puns

Numerous proverbs in my 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. Puns of this nature are referred to in my study as homonymous puns.

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).

Let us consider here two jokes employing the well-known proverb *Spare the rod and spoil the child* as a punchline, as well as two transformations of this proverb. In the following jokes, the text of this proverb is preserved. The word “rod,” however, in both of the jokes adopts a very different meaning. In the first joke it is sexual (phallic):

An Irishman in a maternity ward is worried that the thin and sickly baby he sees is his own. “No,” says the nurse, point-

ing to a fine, chubby, baby boy, “this is yours; the other child was born by artificial insemination.” “Just what I’ve always heard said: ‘*Spare the rod and spoil the child*.’” (Legman, 1968: 589)<sup>4</sup>.

In the second joke and two proverb alterations below, the word “rod” gets other connotations:

Ephraim’s son Willie was a hot-rod enthusiast. He spent every moment of his leisure time – and many hours of what should have been his study time – tinkering, adjusting, or otherwise monkeying with the unlikely heap that shone in the garage. Ephraim’s patience grew shorter and shorter as Willie’s schoolwork suffered.

One day Willie, satisfied at last that his auto was ready, needed only a few spare tires to allow him to enter the annual hot-rod contest. His father adamantly refused to contribute even a single penny, saying, “*Spare the rod and spoil the child*.” (Heller, 1974: 279).

Spare the rod – and you’ll get struck by lightning. (Esar, 1968: 479).

Spare the rod and you’ll have no fish for dinner. (Loomis, 1949: 357).

### 3.2. Paronomastic puns

As it has been stated elsewhere (see Section 2.1, see also T. Litovkina, 2005), one of

<sup>4</sup> The following examples of sexual jokes might not be relevant to the present work on anti-proverbs but offer too clear a parallel to omit:

The girl who ‘warned two corporals that she had “syphilis.” The word was new to them [!] and they looked it up in the dictionary, finding it defined as a “disease of the privates.” Being corporals, they felt safe, and fucked her anyway.’ (Legman, 1968: 308) (play on the *privates*)

An Italian laborer is told by the social-worker to avoid having any more children by using the condoms which he is given, with directions to put them on his organ before intercourse. His wife gets pregnant anyhow, and he explains, “No gotta organ – so I putta da rubber onna da piano.” (Legman, 1968: 549) (play on the *organ*)

the most popular techniques of proverb alteration is perverting the basic meaning of a proverb by simply replacing a single word. Very often the choice of a word is purely phonologically motivated, as is shown in the following parodies of the proverb *Children should be seen and not heard*. Both the alterations below contain paronomastic puns, i.e., puns involving two similar but not identical strings of sounds and graphemes (*had – heard, hurt – heard*):

Children should be seen and not had. (Safian, 1967: 45).

Children should be seen and not hurt. (Braude, 1955: 384).

### 3.3. Homophones

In this subsection let us view three anti-proverbs from our material employing homophones (words pronounced the same but spelled differently). The first two are both transformations in which the word *seen* from the original proverb is perverted by the word *scene* in the parodies):

Children should be on scene and not heard. (Kilroy, 1985: 241). {Children should be seen and not heard}

What do you say to a silent movie star?

“You should be scene and not heard.” (Benny, 1993: 51). {Children should be seen and not heard}

Some puns employing homophones might not be even perceived as puns if not read, specifically the ones in which no other mechanism of variation occurs, as in the last example above and the one below:

It’s a wise father that no’s his own child. (Esar, 1968: 228). {It’s a wise father that knows his own son}

Many more types of proverb variation could be considered here. But I have to put a point on it now.



### Conclusion and implications for further research

This study has focused on Anglo-American anti-proverbs (deliberate proverb innovations, alterations, parodies, transformations, variations, wisecracks, fractured proverbs) and proverbs about children. The most frequent types of proverb alteration (e.g., adding new words; replacing words, punning, etc.) and their subtypes has been discussed and demonstrated here. It is important to point out that the mechanisms of proverb variation are very often combined, and in a variety of ways. In my analysis I have put main emphasis on the formal features of the alteration.

As we can see from our discussion, proverb parodies respect nobody. Nothing is too holy or sacrosanct to avoid exposure to proverbial ridicule. Humor of numerous proverb transformations listed and analyzed is aimed at children. Anti-proverbs may contain elements not only of funniness, but also of offensiveness, hostility and aggression directed, as we have seen from the texts above, toward children, e.g. *Aural sex should be heard and not obscene*. (Kilroy 1985: 280) {*Children should be seen and not heard*}. In this respect none the traditional proverb *Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me* or its parody – “*Sticks and stones may break my bones, but joke will never hurt me* (Saper, 1991: 238) – are true; many anti-proverbs are far from innocent.

The literary basis of humor comes from the irony of the situation in which unfulfilled expectations give birth to unexpected results. According to Arthur Koestler, “Humour depends primarily on its surprise effect: the bi-sociative shock. To cause surprise the humorist must have a modicum of originality – the ability to break away from the stereotyped routines of thought” (Koestler, 1964: 91). 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 lin-

guistic 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. As Mieder points out, “In this respect even the anti-proverbs become moralistic if not didactic statements to a degree...” (Mieder, 1989: 243). The great abundance of Anglo-American anti-proverbs about children presented and analyzed in this study, 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, 1989: 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, should be collected and studied by proverb scholars.

I hope that the present study will project some implications for further research into this field of study not only in American culture but also in other cultures. Thus, it would be important to do a detailed cross-cultural analysis of anti-proverbs about children in American and other societies, and to compare and contrast basic mechanisms of alteration of proverbs about children, as well as attitudes towards children reflected in anti-proverbs from different languages.

### Appendix

The organization of our 43 anti-proverbs for 6 traditional proverbs about children is based on the following pattern: The actual proverbs are arranged in alphabetical order and are printed in italics. Each proverb is followed by a number in parentheses indicating the number of anti-proverbs that I have been able to locate for it in two collections of Anglo-American anti-proverbs compiled by Wolfgang Mieder and Anna T. Litovkina (see Mieder & Tóthné Litovkina, 1999; T. Litovkina & Mieder, 2006). It is followed by a short statement concerning the meaning of the proverb, and, last but not least, the anti-proverbs. The anti-proverbs themselves are arranged alphabetically, and for each text a precise reference is provided.

*A burnt [burned] child dreads [fears] the fire. (4)*

Meaning: A person who has suffered from something will try to avoid it after that and not to repeat a painful lesson again.

A burned child fires dread (in its parents). (Christie Davies, 1999).

A burned child makes an ash of itself. (Christie Davies, 1999).

A burnt child dreads fire ...until the next day. (M. Twain, in Berman, 1997: 54).

A burnt child will dread the fire only if it survives. (Feibleman, 1978: 126).

*Children should be seen and not heard. (12)*

Meaning: Children should not be obtrusively noisy in the presence of adults.

Aural sex should be heard and not obscene. (Kilroy, 1985: 280).

Children should be heard and not seen plastered to the TV. (The Burlington Free Press, June 3, 1995).

Children should be obscene and not heard. (Kandel, 1976).

Children should be on scene and not heard. (Kilroy, 1985: 241).

Children should be seen and not had. (Safian, 1967: 45).

Children should be seen and not hurt. (Braude, 1955: 384).

Children should neither be seen nor heard from – ever again. (W.C. Fields, in Metcalf, 1993: 36).

Humorists should be seen and not obscene. (Loomis, 1949: 354).

“Little boys should be seen and not heard,” as the boy said when he could not recite his lesson. (Mieder & Kingsbury, 1994: 14).

Traffic slogan: Children should be seen and not hurt. (Crosbie, 1977: 167).

What do you say to a silent movie star?

“You should be scene and not heard.” (Benny, 1993: 51).

When children are seen and not heard it's apt to be through binoculars. (McKenzie, 1980: 69).

*It's a wise child that knows its own father. (6)*

Meaning: A person can never be sure that a certain man is his father.

It's a wise child that resembles its rich relatives. (Esar, 1968: 668).

It's a wise horse that knows its own fodder. (Esar, 1968: 395).

It's a wise horse that noses his own fodder. (Loomis, 1949: 354).

It's a wise stock that knows its own par. (Esar, 1968: 573).

It's a wise novelist that knows his own screen child. (Esar, 1968: 138).

To the boy with a toy pistol – It's a wise child that knows its own popper. (Loomis, 1949: 354).

*It's a wise father who knows his own child. (3)*

Meaning: Good parents know their children well.

It's a wise father that no's his own child. (Esar, 1968: 228).

It's a wise father who knows as much as his own child. (Judge, in Prochnow, 1955: 104).

It's a wise father who knows his own child – will do everything he is told not to do. (Esar, 1968: 232).

*Spare the rod and spoil the child. (13)*

Meaning: When misbehaving children need physical punishment, otherwise they will grow up spoiled and will expect everyone to indulge them.

An Irishman in maternity ward is worried that the thin and sickly baby he sees is his own. “No,” says the nurse, pointing to a fine, chubby, baby boy, “this is yours; the other child was born by artificial insemination.” “Just what I've always heard said: ‘Spare the rod and spoil the child.’” (Legman, 1968: 589).

Don't spare the rod, or you may some day find junior carrying one. (Esar, 1968: 650).

Ephraim's son Willie was a hot-rod enthusiast. He spent every moment of his leisure time – and many hours of what

should have been his study time – tinkering, adjusting, or otherwise monkeying with the unlikely heap that shone in the garage. Ephraim’s patience grew shorter and shorter as Willie’s schoolwork suffered.

One day Willie, satisfied at last that his auto was ready, needed only a few spare tires to allow him to enter the annual hot-rod contest. His father adamantly refused to contribute even a single penny, saying, “*Spare the rod and spoil the child.*” (Heller, 1974: 279).

Nerve: Breaking the hair-brush on the disobedient scion, then making him pay for a new one. See revised version, “Spare the rod and spoil the hair-brush!” (Wurdz, 1904).

Spare the dekameter and spoil the child. (Colombo, 1975).

Spare the hot rod and save the child. (Safian, 1967: 37).

Spare the marcel and spoil the woman. (Loomis, 1949: 357).

Spare the rod and save the child. (Hubbard, 1973: 150).

Spare the rod and spoil the drag race. (library staff lounge, in Reisner, 1971: 187).

Spare the rod and spoil the wife. (Livia Horváth, in Litovkina, 2004: 318).

Spare the rod – and you’ll get struck by lightning. (Esar, 1968: 479).

Spare the rod and you’ll have no fish for dinner. (Loomis, 1949: 357).

Spare the rod but use iron and the child will be as desired. (Brigitta Stalter, in Litovkina, 2004: 318).

Spoil the rod and spare the child. (William Dean Howells, in Esar, 1968: 422).

*The child is father of the man.* (4)

Meaning: The child’s character indicates what sort of person he will be when he grows up.

The child is father of the man...unless the offspring happens to be a girl. (Berman, 1997: 54).

The child is father to the man, but there’s no second manhood for second childhood. (Esar, 1968: 715).

The child is father to the man, except when the child is a girl. (Esar, 1968: 344).

“The child is father to the man.” This was written by Shakespeare. He didn’t often make that kind of mistake. (Brandreth, 1985: 222).

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