

EDN: GFEOVD
УДК 811.111

Humor Devices Used in Anglo-American Anti-Proverbs about Money

Anna T. Litovkina*

*J. Selye University
Komárno, Slovak Republic*

Received 06.12.2024, received in revised form 10.12.2024, accepted 30.12.2024

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. The study first addresses the background of anti-proverb research and terminology. Then it mentions the most frequent themes anti-proverbs treat, with a special focus on proverbs about money, and afterwards it demonstrates 20 Anglo-American proverbs most popular for variation, and lists 13 Anglo-American proverbs containing the word “money” and numbers of their transformations (263). The main focus of the study is on the discussion of various humor devices in the 263 Anglo-American anti-proverbs about money (which are by no means mutually exclusive). The article discusses and demonstrates repetition of identical or phonetically similar words, literalization, word order reversal, mixing of two proverbs, word class change, syllogisms, etc. The analysis puts main emphasis on the formal features of the anti-proverbs and not on the themes emerging in them. The anti-proverbs discussed and analyzed in the present study were taken primarily from written sources.

Keywords: anti-proverb, proverb, transformation, repetition, literalization, word order reversal.

Research area: Social Structure, Social Institutions and Processes; Languages of the Peoples of the Foreign Countries (English).

Citation: Litovkina A. T. Humor Devices Used in Anglo-American Anti-Proverbs about Money. In: *J. Sib. Fed. Univ. Humanit. soc. sci.*, 2025, 18(1), 81–95. EDN: GFEOVD



Юмористические приемы, используемые в англо-американских антипословицах о деньгах

А.Т. Литовкина

Университет имени Яноша Шейе

Словацкая Республика, Комарно

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. После краткого освещения истории исследования антипословиц и терминологии демонстрируются 20 англо-американских пословиц, наиболее популярных для трансформации, а также перечисляются наиболее частые темы, затрагиваемые в антипословицах, с особым акцентом на пословицах о деньгах. Более того, перечисляются пословицы, содержащие слово «деньги», и количество их трансформ (13 пословиц и 263 антипословицы). Объектом рассмотрения в данной статье являются различные юмористические приемы, используемые в 263 англо-американских антипословицах о деньгах (которые ни в коем случае не являются взаимоисключающими). В статье рассматриваются и демонстрируются повторы одинаковых или фонетически сходных слов, буквализация, изменение порядка слов, контаминация двух пословиц, изменение частей речи, силлогизмы и т.д. Основной акцент в анализе делается на формальных особенностях антипословиц, а не на темах, затронутых в них. Источниками антипословиц, рассматриваемых в настоящей статье, являются преимущественно письменные источники.

Ключевые слова: антипословица, пословица, трансформация, повтор, буквализация, изменение порядка слов.

Научная специальность: 5.4.4. Социальная структура, социальные институты и процессы; 5.9.6. Языки народов зарубежных стран (английский).

Цитирование: Литовкина А. Т. Юмористические приемы, используемые в англо-американских антипословицах о деньгах. *Журн. Сиб. федер. ун-та. Гуманитарные науки*, 2025, 18(1), 81–95. EDN: GFEOVD

Introduction¹

The focus of the present study is on humor devices used in Anglo-American anti-proverbs about money in 263 Anglo-American anti-proverbs (or proverb transformations) about money. Although proverb transformations arise

in a variety of forms, several types stand out. The Anglo-American anti-proverbs discussed and analyzed in the present study were taken primarily from American and British written sources². The texts of anti-proverbs were drawn

¹ Some parts of this study (including the texts of anti-proverbs) have appeared in T. Litovkina, 2005, or have been published in Mieder and Tóthné Litovkina, 1999; T. Litovkina and Mieder, 2006; T. Litovkina, 2015, 2024a; T. Litovkina et. al., 2021).

² The vast majority of the examples were found when I was in the USA and Great Britain, being supported by a Fulbright research grant and by a Hungarian State Eötvös Scholarship which enabled me to conduct research at the Department of Anthropology at the University of California at Berkeley (1998–1999) and at Oxford University Press (2003).

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 and Tóthné Litovkina, 1999) and “Old Proverbs Never Die, They Just Diversify: A Collection of Anti-Proverbs” (T. Litovkina and 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: *антимословица* (Russian), *anti-proverb* (English), *anti(-)proverbe* (French) (see the general discussion of the genre of anti-proverbs in T. Litovkina, 2005, 2015, 2024a; T. Litovkina and Mieder, 2006: 1–54; T. Litovkina et al., 2021; Hrisztova et al., 2023).

Although proverb transformations arise in a variety of forms, several types stand out, 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, adding literal interpretations, word order reversal, and reversal of sounds, etc. (see T. Litovkina, 2005, 2015; T. Litovkina et al., 2021).

As Mieder and T. Litovkina pointed it out: “It should be noted that while some anti-proverbs negate the “truth” of the original piece of wisdom completely, the vast majority of them 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. In fact, the

“anti” component in the term “anti-proverb” is not directed against the concept of “proverb” as such.” (T. Litovkina and Mieder, 2006: 5). Although the name introduced by Wolfgang Mieder has been accepted by many proverb scholars worldwide, it is also worth noting the opinion of scholars who have stated that not all anti-proverbs are opposed to proverbs, and have suggested avoiding the prefix *anti-* (“against”), for example, by using the prefix *para-* (“beside”) (for more, see T. Litovkina et al., 2021; Hrisztova et al., 2023).

In the vast majority of proverb transformations, 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 some examples below:

If you must rise early, be sure you are
a bird and not a worm. (Esar, 1968: 250)
{The early bird catches the worm}

A valet’s testimony tells you more
about valets than heroes. (Leo Rosten, in
Berman, 1997: 189) {No man is a hero to
his valet}

As Mieder (1993: 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...” 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 American English should have an active knowledge of the most popular Anglo-American proverbs (see T. Litovkina, 2005: 120–141; T. Litovkina and Mieder, 2006: 36–45).

When translated from one language to another, an anti-proverb more often than not will lose its message: the puns, parodies or word-play 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. Here are some ex-

amples quoted in T. Litovkina, 2005: 22 (for more examples, see also T. Litovkina and Mieder, 2006: 9–11; T. Litovkina, 2015; T. Litovkina et al., 2021: 32–33):

English: Don't do today what you can put off until tomorrow; Never do today what can be done tomorrow. (Mieder et al., 1992: 601) {Never put off till tomorrow what you can do today}

Russian: Не делай сегодня то, что можно сделать завтра. (Walter and Mokienko, 2001: 32) {Не откладывай на завтра то, что можно сделать сегодня}

Hungarian: Amit holnap is megtehetsz, ne tedd meg ma! (T. Litovkina and Vargha, 2005: 4); Amit ma megtehetsz, azt holnap is megteheted. (Rónaky, 1997) {Amit ma megtehetsz, ne halaszd holnapra}

French: Pourquoi remettre à demain ce qu'on peut faire la semaine prochaine (Barta³, 2003) {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. (Barta, 2003) {Il ne faut pas remettre au lendemain ce qu'on peut faire le jour même}

The focus of this study

The focus of this study is on the analysis of various humor devices⁴ used in Anglo-American anti-proverbs about money such as repetition of identical or phonetically similar words, literalization, word order reversal, mixing of two proverbs, word class change, syllogisms.

Methodology

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. Litovki-

³ The texts of French anti-proverbs were supplied by Péter Barta.

⁴ For addition in Anglo-American anti-proverbs about money, see T. Litovkina, 2025a, 2025d; for punning in Anglo-American anti-proverbs about money, see T. Litovkina, 2025b, 2025c; for substitution in Anglo-American anti-proverbs about money, see T. Litovkina, 2025e.

na, 2005, 2018; T. Litovkina and Mieder, 2019, etc.), sexuality (see T. Litovkina, 2005, 2011b, 2018: 149–170; T. Litovkina and Mieder, 2019: 65–79, etc.), professions and occupations (see T. Litovkina, 2005, 2011a, 2013, 2016), marriage and love (T. Litovkina, 2018, 2024b; T. Litovkina and Mieder, 2019, etc.), children (T. Litovkina, 2024a), etc.

There are extremely productive Anglo-American proverbs that have generated over 30 anti-proverbs. The 20 proverbs most frequently transformed are listed below (see T. Litovkina, 2005: 24; T. Litovkina and Mieder, 2006: 12–13). Each proverb is followed by a number in parentheses indicating the number of anti-proverbs that we have been able to locate for it:

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)

Two can live as cheap(ly) as one. (41)

A man is known by the company he keeps. (38)

The meek shall inherit the earth. (38)

Money [The love of money] is the root of all evil. (37)

Behind every great [successful] man there is a woman. (36)

Here today, (and) gone tomorrow. (36)

The early bird catches the worm. (35)

Money can't [doesn't] buy happiness. (34)

Money isn't everything. (34)

Where there's a will, there's a way. (34)

Without any doubt, money is a frequent theme in Anglo-American anti-proverbs. Analysis of the 20 most popular proverbs for transformation from the list above is beyond the scope of this study, although just a brief glance at it tells us that many of the most frequently transformed proverbs are about money. While 5 of them even contain the word “money” (e.g., *Money talks; Money isn’t everything*), two of them (*Two can live as cheap(ly) as one* and *Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise*) contain the words *cheap(ly)* and *wealthy* associated with the word *money*.

If we have a look at the list of 580 Anglo-American proverbs that have provided the template for variation in the corpus of anti-proverbs, we will see the following:

First of all, there are numerous proverbs in our corpus which contain such words as “dollar”, “penny”, “pound”, “mammon”, “free”, etc., for example: *A dollar in the bank is worth two in the hand; A penny saved is a penny earned; Penny-wise, pound-foolish; Take care of your pennies and the pounds [the dollars] will take care of themselves; You can’t serve God and mammon; The best things in life are free.*

Second, 13 proverbs in my corpus contain the word “money”, e.g.: *Money talks; A fool and his money are soon parted.*

Last but not least, there are scores of proverbs that might not contain any of the words listed above but in their transformations, however, these words occur. Let me exemplify this phenomenon by three proverb alterations below, all of which contain the word “money”:

(1) Blondes prefer gentlemen with money. (Safian, 1967: 39) {Gentlemen prefer blondes}

(2) Love makes the world go round, but it’s the lack of money that keeps it flat. (Safian, 1967: 56) {Love makes the world go round}

(3) Money is its own reward. (Weller, 1982) {Virtue is its own reward}

The 13 proverbs containing the word “money” and included in T. Litovkina and

Mieder’s collections of anti-proverbs (see Mieder and Tóthné Litovkina, 1999; T. Litovkina, 2005; T. Litovkina and Mieder, 2006) are listed below. The actual proverbs are given 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. They are followed by a short statement concerning the meaning of the proverb in <> brackets.

Money talks. (66) <Money is the most influential and important thing in the world.> (T. Litovkina and Mieder, 2006: 227–230)

A fool and his money are soon parted. (47) <Foolish people spend their money without consideration and soon find themselves without any money at all.> (T. Litovkina and Mieder, 2006: 61–63)

Money [The love of money] is the root of all evil. (36) <All wrongdoing can be traced to the relentless pursuit of riches.> (T. Litovkina and Mieder, 2006: 223–224)

Money isn’t everything. (35) <Wealth alone does not bring contentment.> (T. Litovkina and Mieder, 2006: 224–226)

Money can’t [doesn’t] buy happiness. (34) <Financial security does not necessarily mean happiness.> (T. Litovkina and Mieder, 2006: 220–222)

Time is money. (15) <Time is as valuable as money.> (T. Litovkina and Mieder, 2006: 309)

Money doesn’t grow on trees. (12) <It is difficult to get money.> (T. Litovkina and Mieder, 2006: 222–223)

Money makes the mare go. (9) <If you have money, you can obtain everything.> (T. Litovkina and Mieder, 2006: 227)

Lend your money and lose your friend. (3) (T. Litovkina and Mieder, 2006: 197)

Money makes a [the] man. (3) <Money is the most influential and important thing in the world.> (T. Litovkina and Mieder, 2006: 226)

Money burns a hole in the pocket. (1) <People with money are likely to spend it.> (T. Litovkina and Mieder, 2006: 220)

He who marries for money sells his freedom. (1) <Entering a relationship be-

cause of money makes a person dependent.> (T. Litovkina and Mieder, 2006: 164)

Money makes money. (1) <Wealth breeds more wealth.> (T. Litovkina and Mieder, 2006: 226)

The study makes an attempt to analyze various humor devices used in Anglo-American anti-proverbs about money (which are by no means mutually exclusive).

Discussion

At first attention will be given to repetition of identical or phonetically similar words (Section 1.). Then, I will address literalization (Section 2.) and word order reversal (Section 3.). Afterwards, I will examine mixing (or blending) of two proverbs (Section 4.) and word class change (Section 5.). Finally, I will treat cases when syllogisms are created (Section 6.).

It has to be pointed out here that in numerous anti-proverbs these humor devices are combined with some other techniques of proverb alteration. Furthermore, while certain types of these devices occur pervasively in anti-proverbs about money, others appear in only a few. For this reason, our discussion might sometimes seem uneven and the treatment of certain categories might seem to be either narrower or broader. Such examples could be discussed in various sections of the present study, under various headings. As a rule, anti-proverbs that embrace more than one type of substitution will be quoted and discussed only once, except in cases in which only a few anti-proverbs have been identified to illustrate a specific category. Last but not least, it has to be specified here that I will put main emphasis on the formal features of the alterations, and only briefly mention themes that emerge in them.

1. Repetition of identical or phonetically similar words

This section demonstrates various types of repetition in our anti-proverbs about money.

Word repetition is very common in proverbs from different languages and has been found in about a quarter of all American

proverbs. My analysis of 5 randomly selected pages from “A Dictionary of American Proverbs” (see Mieder et al., 1992) has shown that 25,5 % of American proverbs contain word repetition (see Tóthné Litovkina, 1994, 1996, 1998; for more on repetition figures in American proverbs, see also Norrick 1991). Repeated words are most frequently nouns (e.g., *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*) and verbs (e.g., *Do as I say, not as I do; He who laughs last laughs best; If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again*).

Neal Norrick stresses:

First off, repetition produces parallelism, which is so frequent in proverbs that it could almost count as a defining property. Second, repetition in sound, wording and sense facilitates memorization, so that we might predict its regular occurrence in proverbs on that basis alone. But repetition in wording seems to do more than make a proverb noticeable and memorable: it suggests conviction and it enhances persuasive power (Norrick, 1991: 121).

In our 13 proverbs about money, however, only one proverb with word repetition (i.e. 7,7 %) has been found: *Money makes money*.

1.1. Repetition of identical words

Let us focus here on the repetition of identical words.

First of all, let us consider simple repetition: a word might appear twice. It normally happens when the proverb text itself doesn’t change, and the word in question appears in an extension (i.e., in a tail), which usually follows the original proverbial text. Short proverbs such as *Money talks* or *Time is money* very frequently employ this type of variation:

Time is money

Time is money, except when it’s on your own time. (Esar, 1968: 813)

Time is money, especially when you’re having the time of your life. (Esar, 1968: 183)

Money talks

Money talks...and a lack of it talks even louder. (Berman, 1997: 290)

Never let capital lie idle; remember that money talks, but it doesn't talk in its sleep. (Esar, 1968: 111) {Money talks}

When money talks, it doesn't always know what it's talking about. (Esar, 1968: 410)

Money talks, but big money doesn't – it hires a staff of lawyers. (Esar, 1968: 465)

Some additional examples:

A fool and his money are soon parted, but seldom by another fool. (Esar, 1968: 318) {A fool and his money are soon parted}

Money is the root of all evil – but it's still number one as the root of all idyls. (Safian, 1967: 54) {Money is the root of all evil}

Word repetition might be combined with employing antonyms to one of the words of original proverb texts in the tail (such as *talks* and *listens*, *talks* and *listening*, or *buy* and *sell* in the anti-proverbs below), helping to add the opposite view to the genuine proverb text:

They say money talks. But smart money listens. (Mieder, 1989: 274) {Money talks}

Money talks and most of us never get bored listening. (Prochnow, 1958: 287) {Money talks}

Money cannot buy happiness, but it certainly can sell it! (Palma, 1990: 8) {Money cannot buy happiness}

Sometimes two or more words are repeated twice, as in the following transformations of the proverb *Money talks* in all of which both the words “money” and “talk” are repeated twice:

Money talks, but the people who want their money talk the loudest. (Esar, 1968: 192)

With most of us money talks, and it usually talks about more money. (Prochnow and Prochnow, 1987: 186)

When a millionaire's money talks, it usually talks about more money. (Esar, 1968: 517)

Some other proverb mutations of this kind:

Time may be money, but it's much easier to persuade a man to give you his time than to lend you his money. (McKenzie, 1980: 51) {Time is money}

Money makes the mare go...and woman makes the money go. Old postcard. (Berman, 1997: 287) {Money makes the mare go}

A fool and his money are soon parted, but you never call him a fool till the money is gone. (Esar, 1968: 718) {A fool and his money are soon parted}

Money cannot buy happiness, but then happiness cannot buy groceries. (Esar, 1968: 106) {Money cannot buy happiness}

1.2. Repetition of homonymous or homophonous words

The repeated words might be homonymous (i.e., having identical graphemic and phonemic representation) or polysemous (i.e., having two meanings):

Money is the root of all evil and a man needs roots. (Kandel, 1976) {Money is the root of all evil}

The anti-proverb above, as well as two examples below might be called repetitive homonymous puns⁵ as well. In repetitive puns punning words are repeated. The popularity of the proverb *Money is the root of all evil* for homonymous repetitive punning may be explained by existence of numerous connotations of the noun “root” (e.g., Webster gives us ten different meanings of it, p. 1574), such as 1. “the part of a plant, usually below the ground, that holds the plant in position, draws water and nourishment from the soil, and stores food.”, 2. “any underground part of a plant, as a rhizome”, 3. “the source or origin of an action, quality, etc.”, etc.

⁵ In our discussion I don't distinguish between polysemous and homonymous words.

Indeed, some proverbs in our corpus have provided good models for exploiting ambiguity through the use of a single word that is polysemous or two words that are homonymous, thus creating comic surprise with unforeseen links between words or ideas.

Let us view the two transformations below both of which also play on two different meanings of the noun “root”.

In the first anti-proverb added words (or tail) are introduced by conjunction “but”, very frequently employed in our anti-proverbs in order to juxtapose the truth of the proverbs (for more, see Section 2). Moreover, in this example word repetition also takes place, and in the addition a phrasal verb “root for” appears, helping to connect the tail added to the original proverb with the meaning of the original proverb:

Money is the root of all evil...but that's one evil I'm rooting for. (W. L. Deandra, Killed in Ratings, in Simpson 1993: 173)

Our next example repeats the entire proverb text: *Money is the root of all evil*. Moreover, in this anti-proverb the word “root” is employed three times; however, when it is used the third time, there is a conversion (a noun “root” from the original text of the proverb is changed into a phrasal verb “root for” of its transformation):

Remember – Money is the root of all evil. If money is the root of all evil, why does everyone root for it? (Mieder, 1989: 274)

Furthermore, anti-proverb coiners succeed in finding a word phonologically paralleling a word from the original proverb, tying together two different strings of thoughts and thus bridge domains which at first glance seem unrelated. To illuminate it, let us view two transformations of the proverb *Money is the root of all evil*, in both of which the word “root” is substituted in addition by the word sounding identically (“route”), i.e. homophone. Puns of this nature can be also called homophonous puns:

Philanthropy proves that though money is the root of all evil, it is also the route of much good. (Esar, 1968: 595) {Money is the root of all evil}

Money is the root of all evil – but has anyone ever discovered a better route? (Safian, 1967: 54)

Homonymous and homophonous puns can be also referred to as “perfect” (Hockett, 1972: 157) puns.

1.3. Repetition of phonetically similar words

Repetition in anti-proverbs is not limited to duplication or triplication of homonymous or homophonous words discussed in Section 1.1. and Section 1.2. Sometimes our mutations might play upon the resemblances of similar-sounding words (such as “mare” and “nightmare”, “money” and “monkey”, “money” and “matrimony” in the following examples):

Money doesn't grow on trees. And it's a good thing it doesn't. It would make monkeys out of lots of people. (Safian, 1967: 57) {Money doesn't grow on trees}

Money makes the mare go – but not the nightmare. (Mieder, 1993: 185) {Money makes the mare go}

Money isn't the root of all evil – matrimony is. (Esar, 1968: 504) {Money is the root of all evil}

Or our transformations might repeat only identical parts of words, or morphemes (such as roots in the words “root” and “uproot”):

Money is the root of all evil – but nobody has ever cared to uproot it! (Palma, 1990: 8) {Money is the root of all evil}

In all the anti-proverbs above repetition of phonologically similar words is combined with word addition. The four transformations above could be called repetitive paronomastic puns. Paronomastic puns – i.e., puns involving two similar but not identical strings of sounds and graphemes might be called “imperfect” puns (non-identical in sound, i.e., based on paronymy, see Hockett, 1972: 157).

2. Literalization

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 (along with personification, hyperbole, etc.) which helps to achieve figurativeness in proverbs.

The metaphor plays an extensive role in proverbs, so that the definitions of proverbs often contain the word “metaphor,” such as the folk definition that Wolfgang Mieder gives as follows: “A proverb is a short, generally known sentence that expresses common, traditional and didactic views in a metaphorical and fixed form and which is easily remembered and repeated” (Mieder, 1985: 118). Mieder stresses elsewhere, “By translating a realistic situation into a metaphorical proverb, we can generalize the unique problem and express it as a common phenomenon of life” (Mieder, 1989: 20). As Mieder points out, “metaphors comprise an important marker for many proverbs, and it is exactly this vivid imagery of most proverbs which makes them so appealing to us” (Mieder, 1989: 20). Thus, metaphorical proverbs are remarkably common.

As far as the metaphor is concerned, several scholars have discussed the matters of distinguishing metaphorical expressions from non-metaphorical ones, and have regarded metaphoricalness as an indispensable trait of the proverb, e.g., G.L. Permyakov (1979: 12–14) distinguished proverbs from folk aphorisms, or aphorisms, Nigel Barley – from maxims (1972: 738–739); Archer Taylor (1962: 5–15) – metaphorical proverbs from proverbial apothegms.

My analysis of 5 randomly selected pages from “A Dictionary of American Proverbs” (see Mieder et al., 1992) has shown that 49 % of American proverbs lend themselves to metaphorical interpretation, while 51 % of them are to be understood literally (see Tóthné Litovkina, 1994, 1996, 1998). My research on 40 American subjects has shown that figurativeness has proved to be one of the most powerful markers of proverbiality (see Tóthné Litovkina, 1994, 1996, 1998).

Metaphorical proverbs are typically used metaphorically. In numerous anti-proverbs in our material, however, the meaning of a met-

aphorical 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. The authors of anti-proverbs frequently literalize a proverb, while citing it in its original wording and then adding a statement which puts its wisdom into question or negates it completely:

Money doesn't grow on trees...unless you happen to be a successful orchardist. (Berman, 1997: 283) {Money doesn't grow on trees}

In numerous cases the added elements are introduced by the conjunction *but*, which emphasizes the contradiction to the wisdom in the proverb. The most popular proverb containing the noun “money” and conjunction “but” for this kind of variation in our corpus is without any doubt the proverb *Money makes the mare go*:

Money makes the mare go, but horses make the money go. (Anonymous, 1908: 25)

Money makes the mare go...but it's credit that runs the automobile. (Berman, 1997: 287)

Money makes the mare go, but not if it's bet on her. (Esar, 1968: 396)

Let us view the two transformations the proverb *Money is the root of all evil* below both of which play on two different meanings of the noun “root” (see also Section 1.2. for some additional examples). By seeing such words as “grow some mighty fine plants” or “dig it up” put into the context of the mutations one has to reinterpret the meaning of the word “root” of the original proverb and switch it to other connotations of it, as has been discussed above:

Money is the root of all evil – but it does seem to grow some mighty fine plants. (Safian, 1967: 54)

Money is the root of all evil – but it doesn't make it any easier to dig it up. (Safian, 1967: 54)

The anti-proverbs below – each an alteration of the proverb *Money talks* – are also

built on bisociation of metaphorical with literal meaning. Just observe with what ease new verbs (*whispers*, *listen* and *hear*) are added to the proverb text in the first example, each associated with the verb “talk” from the original proverb:

Money talks...Even when it whispers, people listen and hear it. (Berman, 1997: 290)

Furthermore, such verbs as to *speak*, to *swear*, to *tell*, or to *say* each of which is also associated with the word “talk” from the proverb) are introduced in the context of additions:

Money talks, but it doesn't always tell the truth. (Esar, 1968: 474)

Money talks – and mostly it says “good-bye.” (Safian, 1967: 55)

Money talks, but it doesn't say when it's coming back. (McLellan, 1996: 159)

Money doesn't talk, it swears! (Kilroy, 1985: 59)

United States money not only talks – it has learned – to speak every foreign language. (Adams, 1959: 154)

In the last mutation above, as well as in the two transformations below the word “language” (preceding by such words as “sign”, “foreign” or “international”) is introduced into the context of additions:

Money talks, but a credit card uses sign language. (Esar, 1968: 735)

The only international language seems to be the one in which money talks. (Prochnow, 1958: 245)

The following two mutations even employ the word *grammar* that money might “use” or “pay attention to” while talking. As we can see, both the transformations below point out than when money talks, it is not important at all what kind of grammar it uses, or how correctly it talks:

Money talks but nobody notices what kind of grammar it uses. (Anonymous, 1908: 10)

When money talks, no one pays attention to the grammar. (Prochnow, 1985: 19)

3. Word order reversal

There exists a tradition of modifying individual proverbs by word-order reversal (frequently called metathesis or spoonerism), which questions, or even rejects, their wisdom.

Word-order reversal is also a relatively common technique of proverb transformation in our corpus. Nouns and verbs are reversed most frequently. Two nouns are interchanged subsequently in the following proverb alterations (*happiness* and *money* in the first example; as well as *money* and *evil* in the second one):

Happiness can't buy money. (Kandel, 1976) {Money can't buy happiness}

The love of evil is the root of all money. (Esar, 1952: 85) {The love of money is the root of all evil}

A common feature of word-order reversal in our money proverbs is that, contrarily to the two anti-proverb above, it almost always occurs with some other techniques of proverb transformation (e.g., word addition, word substitution, word repetition, etc.).

Addition of new words at the beginning and the end of a proverb, word repetition in the tail, as well as word order reversal in the tail (*money* and *evil*) are braided together for greater effect in both the transformations of the proverb *Money is the root of all evil* below. What is also common for the two examples below, negating disappears from the original proverb in both the tails, thus, in their second parts the negative form of the verb “to be” (i.e. “isn't”) is turned into the positive form (“is”); and consequently the proverb *Money is the root of all evil* is turned into the “evil is the root of all money”, which carries a message very different from the one contained in the original proverb text:

To the cynic, money isn't the root of all evil – evil is the root of all money. (Esar, 1968: 276)

In the underworld, money isn't the root of all evil, but evil is the root of all money. (Esar, 1968: 193)

Word order reversal in the tail combined with addition of new words at the beginning and the end of a proverb, as well word repetition in the tail are employed in the following transformation of the proverb *Money isn't everything*:

The man to whom money isn't everything, should marry the woman to whom everything isn't money. (Esar, 1968: 162)

Similarly to the previous example, in the following anti-proverbs word reversal is combined with word repetition and word addition. Furthermore, similarly to numerous examples quoted in the study, in both of them additions (or tails) are introduced by the conjunction *but*:

Money doesn't grow on trees – but trees don't grow on money either! (Palma, 1990) {Money doesn't grow on trees}

Money doesn't mean everything in this world, but somehow everything in this world seems to mean money. (Muller, 1932: 68) {Money doesn't mean everything in this world⁶}

In the following variation of the proverb *Time is money*, all the three words constituting the original text of the proverb are repeated. While the words “time” and “money” are repeated thrice, the word *is* is repeated twice. Furthermore, word reversal also takes place here (“money is time” in the anti-proverb vs. “time is money” in the proverb):

Time is money and money is time – so get all the money you can without getting time. (Esar, 1968: 631) {Time is money}

4. Mixing of two proverbs

The mixing of two proverbs (i.e., contamination, or blending) is also a very popular technique in Anglo-American anti-proverbs.

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 (for more, see T. Litovkina et al., 2021.). However, none of the blended proverbs below contains the word “money”:

A penny saved gathers no moss. (Henry Youngman, in Berman, 1997: 320) {A penny saved is a penny earned; A rolling stone gathers no moss}

A stitch in time gathers no moss. (Anonymous, 1961: 200) {A stitch in time saves nine; A rolling stone gathers no moss}

Better late than sorry. (Mieder et al., 1992: 361) {Better late than never; Better safe than sorry}

Necessity is the mother of strange bedfellows. (Berman, 1997: 298) {Necessity is the mother of invention; Politics makes strange bedfellows}

It's never too late to say die. (Berman, 1997: 91) {It's never too late to learn [mend]; Never say die}

In the following example the second halves of two proverbs are blended, one of which contains the word “money”. It is quite a rare phenomenon, according to T. Litovkina et al. (2021):

Two in a bush is the root of all evil. (Hubbard, 1973: 79) {A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush; Money is the root of all evil}

Sometimes the two proverbs combined contain a common component or have the same structure. The transformation below is a very rare example of blending in which the entire proverb text (*Money doesn't grow on trees*) is blended with a part of another one (only one word from another proverb (*root*) introduced by the words “because the Bible tells us it's a” is added. As we can see, the word *root* adopts a meaning different from the one of original proverb. This parody also employs homonymous pun. Another interesting feature of this example is that both the proverbs combined contain a common component (*money*):

⁶ The variant of the proverb *Money isn't everything*.

Money doesn't grow on trees because the Bible tells us it's a root. (Esar, 1968: 692) {Money doesn't grow on trees; Money is the root of all evil}

5. Word class change

English has many examples of words with the same form used in both nominal and verbal functions. The twisting of proverbs may cause a change in the word classes. As the word class changes, the written and/or phonetic form of the words may undergo some modification.

Extension of the use of some noun to a verbal capacity is shown in the following transformations of the proverb *Money is the root of all evil*:

Money roots out all evil. (Rosten, 1972: 30)

Remember – Money is the root of all evil. If money is the root of all evil, why does everyone root for it? (Mieder, 1989: 274)

Or vice versa, the verb *talks* in the addition is changed into the noun *talk*:

Money talks – but it also stops talk. (Safian, 1967: 55)

6. Syllogism

Some coiners of anti-proverbs enfold proverbs into the structure of a syllogism, which magnifies the contradictory qualities of proverbs by pushing their received wisdom to illogical extremes. Just observe with what ease the proverb *Money doesn't grow on trees* is changed into its opposite (*Money grows on trees*) and used twice in this form in the syllogism below, at the very beginning and at the very end of the syllogism. Furthermore, this syllogism plays on the resemblance of paronymous words “monkey” and “money”. While the word “money” is employed three times in the text below, the word “monkey” appears twice. Finally, another paronym, a word “monk”, similarly to the word “monkey”, is also introduced twice into the context:

The Long-Sought-After Proof that Money Grows on Trees

1. Money is what people get when they sell.

2. Sell sounds the same as cell.

3. A cell is a tiny room.

4. One kind of person who lives in a tiny room is a monk.

5. Monk is a short form of monkey.

6. Monkeys eat bananas.

7. Bananas grow on trees.

Therefore, money grows on trees.

(Louis Phillips, in Rosen, 1995: 51)

Last but not least, many more types of humor devices could be addressed in the study but I must come to a conclusion now

Conclusion

The present study, while continuing T. Litovkina's research of the most frequent types of proverb alteration and humor devices in anti-proverbs (i.e. deliberate proverb innovations, alterations, parodies, transformations, variations, wisecracks, fractured proverbs) (see T. Litovkina, 2005, 2015, 2024a, 2025a-2025d; T. Litovkina et al., 2021, etc.), has focused on various humor devices in 263 transformations of 13 Anglo-American proverbs about money.

At the beginning of the study, I have addressed the background of anti-proverb research and terminology. Then I have mentioned the most frequent themes anti-proverbs address (such as women, profession and occupation, love, marriage, children, etc.) with a special focus on proverbs about money. Afterwards I have demonstrated 20 Anglo-American proverbs most popular for variation from Mieder and T. Litovkina's anti-proverb collections. Furthermore, I have listed 13 Anglo-American proverbs containing the word “money” and numbers of their transformations.

The main part of the study has been devoted to the discussion of various humor devices and their subtypes in 263 Anglo-American anti-proverbs about money. Repetition of identical or phonetically similar words (including homonyms, homophones, paronyms), literalization, word order reversal, mixing of two proverbs, word class change, syllogisms, etc. have been

discussed and demonstrated here. It is important to point out that the humor devices of proverb mutations analyzed and exemplified in the study are very often combined, and in a variety of ways. In my analysis I have put main emphasis on the formal features of the anti-proverbs and not on the themes emerging in them.

We have witnessed that some proverb variations question the truth of a proverb by posing a naive question – thus, once more, presenting a single situation in which the proverb may sound wrong, or doesn't fit:

If a fool and his money are soon parted, why are there so many rich fools? (Berman, 1997: 141) {A fool and his money are soon parted}

When a person perceives that the “truth” of a proverb does not fit his or her own observations on life, he or she will simply transform the proverb into its opposite. Since proverbs tend to express wisdom in an authoritative way, the coiners of anti-proverbs undermine that authority to express changing attitudes towards proverbial wisdom today. In some cases a positive proverb statement may be changed into a negative:

Money is not the root of all evil – no money is. (Esar, 1968: 528) {Money is the root of all evil}

References

- Adams J. *It Takes One to Know One*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1959.
- Anonymous. *Toasts and Maxims. A Book of Humour to Pass the Time*. New York: R. F. Fenno & Company, 1908.
- Anonymous. Perverted Proverbs. *Western Folklore*, 1961, (20), 200.
- Arora Sh.L. The perception of proverbiality. In: *Proverbium: Yearbook of International Proverb Scholarship*, 1984, 1, 1–38.
- Barley N. A structural approach to the proverb and maxim with special reference to the Anglo-Saxon corpus. In *Proverbium*, 1972, 20, 737–750.
- Berman L. A. *Proverb Wit & Wisdom: A Treasury of Proverbs, Parodies, Quips, Quotes, Clichés, Catchwords, Epigrams and Aphorisms*. Berkeley: A Perigee Book, 1997.
- Esar E. *20,000 Quips and Quotes*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1968.
- Hockett Ch. F. Jokes. In: *Studies in Linguistics in Honor of George L. Trager*, ed. By M. Estellie Smith. The Hague: Mouton, 1972, 153–178.
- HRISZTOVA-GOTTHARDT, H., K. VARGHA, & P. BARTA. *Deliberate proverb innovations: Terms, definitions, and concepts*. In HRISZTOVA-GOTTHARDT, H., M. ALEKSA VARGA, W. MIEDER (Eds.), *DILIGENCE BRINGS DELIGHT: A Festschrift in honour of Anna T. Litovkina on the occasion of her 60th birthday*. Online Supplement

Money doesn't talk – it just goes without saying. (Esar, 1968: 758) {Money talks}

Doubts about the truthfulness of a proverb may be also expressed by adding “may be” to a positive statement, or “may not” to a negative statement, in the original proverb, followed by a commentary (usually introduced by the conjunction “but”) questioning the truth of the proverb:

Time may be money, but it's much easier to persuade a man to give you his time than to lend you his money. (McKenzie, 1980: 51) {Time is money}

Furthermore, coiners of anti-proverbs often introduce the traditional form of a proverb with such words or phrases as “used to,” “in the (good) old days,” “there was a time,” and then use the words “nowadays,” “then” or “now” to describe a single situation in which the proverb may sound wrong (for anti-proverbs about children, see T. Litovkina, 2024a):

Our parents used to tell us that money isn't everything. Now we tell our kids that money isn't anything. (Metcalf, 1993: 118) {Money isn't everything}

ment Series of Proverbium Yearbook of International Proverb Scholarship Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, 2023, 175–196.

<https://naklada.ffos.hr/knjige/index.php/ff/catalog/view/14/17/37>

Accessed January 21, 2024.

Hubbard E. *A Thousand & One Epigrams and The Roycroft Spop: A History*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1973.

Kandel H. *The Power of Positive Pessimism: Proverbs for Our Time*. Los Angeles: Price/Stern/ Sloan Publisher (without pages), 1976 (ninth printing).

Kilroy R. *Graffiti 6*. London: Corgi Books, 1985.

Lieberman G. F. *3,500 good quotes for speakers*. Wellingborough: Thorsons, 1984.

Litovkina A. T. *Old Proverbs Cannot Die: They Just Fade into ParODY: Anglo-American Anti-Proverbs*. Habilitációs dolgozat. (manuscript), 2005.

Litovkina A. T. “Where there’s a will there’s a lawyer’s bill”: Lawyers in Anglo-American anti-proverbs. In *Acta Juridica Hungarica*, 2011a, 52(1), 82–96.

Litovkina A. T. Sexuality in Anglo-American anti-proverbs. In: *The pragmatics of humour across discourse domain, pragmatics and beyond*, ed. M. Dynel, Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2011b, 191–213.

Litovkina A. T. Politicians in Anglo-American anti-proverbs. In: *International issues from wars to robots*. Eds. Grodzki, E., Rehman, Sh., Calma, C., & Colombo, K. Linus Publications, 2013, 95–109.

Litovkina A. T. Anti-proverbs. In: Hrisztova-Gotthardt, H. & M. Aleksa Varga (eds.), *Introduction to Paremiology: A Comprehensive Guide to Proverb Studies*. Warsaw–Berlin: De Gruyter Open, 2015, 326–352.

Litovkina A. T. “Do you serve lawyers and politicians here?”: Stereotyped lawyers and politicians in Anglo-American jokes and anti-proverbs. Komárno: J. Selye University Faculty of Education, 2016.

Litovkina A. T. *Women through anti-proverbs*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

Litovkina A. T. Main Mechanisms of Proverb Variation in Anglo-American Anti-Proverbs about Children. *Journal of Siberian Federal University. Humanities & Social Sciences*, 17(5), 2024a, 870–881.

Litovkina A. T. Metaphors of Love Before and After Marriage in Proverbs and Anti-Proverbs. *Proverbs within Cognitive Linguistics: State of the Art*. Ed. Belkhir, S., Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2024b, 88–111.

Litovkina A. T. “Money Is Not the Root of All Evil – No Money Is”. Do Proverbs Always Tell the Truth? *Linguistische Treffen in Wrocław*, 2025a. (submitted in August 2024)

Litovkina A. T. “The Best Things in Life Are Fee”. Some Aspects of Punning in Anglo-American Anti-Proverbs. *European Journal of Humour Research*, 2025b. (submitted in October 2024)

Litovkina A. T. “Dime Is Money”. Types of Punning in Anglo-American Anti-Proverbs about Money. *HUMOR. International Journal of Humor Research*, 2025c. (submitted in October 2024)

Litovkina A. T. “Money Makes a Man Laugh”. Addition in Anglo-American Anti-Proverbs about Money. *Yearbook of Phraseology*, 2025d. (submitted in October 2024)

Litovkina A. T. “A fool and his money are soon parted”. Substitution in Anglo-American anti-proverbs about money. *Proverbium: Yearbook of International Proverb Scholarship*, 2025e (submitted in November 2024)

Litovkina A. T., Hrisztova-Gotthardt H., Barta P., Vargha K. & Mieder W. *Anti-proverbs in five languages: Structural features and verbal humor devices*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021.

Litovkina A. T. & Mieder W. *Old Proverbs Never Die, They Just Diversify: A Collection of Anti-Proverbs*. Burlington: The University of Vermont – Veszprém: The Pannonian University of Veszprém, 2006.

Litovkina A. T. & Mieder W. *Marriage seen through proverbs and anti-proverbs*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019.

Litovkina A. T. & Vargha K. „Viccében él a nemzet”. *Magyar közmondás-paródiák*, Budapest: privately published, 2005.

- McKenzie E. C. *Mac's Giant Book of Quips & Quotes*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1980.
- McLellan V. *The Complete Practical Proverbs & Wacky Wit*. Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1996.
- Metcalfe F. *The Penguin dictionary of jokes, wisecracks, quips and quotes*. London: Viking, 1993.
- Mieder W. Popular views of the proverb. *Proverbium: Yearbook of International Proverb Scholarship*, 1985, 2, 109–143.
- Mieder W. *American Proverbs: A Study of Texts and Contexts*. Bern: Peter Lang, 1989.
- Mieder W. *Proverbs are never out of season: Popular wisdom in the modern age*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Mieder W., Kingsbury S. A. & Harder K. B. (Eds.) *A dictionary of American proverbs*. New York. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- Mieder W. & Tóthné Litovkina, A. *Twisted Wisdom: Modern Anti-Proverbs*. Burlington: The University of Vermont, 1999.
- Muller H. M. *Still More Toast: Jokes, Stories and Quotations*. New York: The T.W.Wilson Company, 1932.
- Norrick N. R. 'One is None': Remarks on Repetition in Proverbs. In: *Proverbium: Yearbook of International Proverb Scholarship*, 8, 1991, 121–128.
- Palma A. *A book of wit*. Excalibur Press of London, 1990.
- Permyakov G.L. *Proverbs and sayings of peoples of the East. Systematized collection of proverbs and sayings of two-hundred peoples*. M., Nauka, 1979.
- Prochnow H. V. *The New Speaker's Treasury of Wit and Wisdom*. New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1958.
- Prochnow H. V. *1,497 jokes, stories & anecdotes: A speaker's handbook*. New York: Sterling Publishing Co., Inc., 1985.
- Prochnow H. V. and Prochnow H. V. Jr. *Jokes, Quotes and One-liners for Public Speakers*. Wellingborough, Northamptonshire: Thorsons Publishers Limited, 1987.
- Rónaky E. *Hogyan beszél a mai ifjúság? Avagy: Hogy hadováznak a skacok? (III. Kifejezések)*, 1997 http://mnytud.arts.klte.hu/szleng/ronaky/re_kif.htm (accessed December 20, 2003)
- Rosen M. *Walking the Bridge of Your Nose*. London: Kingfisher, 1995.
- Rosten L. *Rome wasn't burned in a day: The mischief of language*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1972.
- Safian L.A. *The Book of Updated Proverbs*. New York: Abelard-Schuman, 1967.
- Simpson J. A. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 3d ed., 1993
- Taylor A. *The Proverb*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, [1931] 1962.
- Tóthné Litovkina, A. The most powerful markers of proverbiality. Perception of proverbiality and familiarity with them among 40 Americans. *Semiotische Berichte*, 1994, 1–4, 327–353.
- Tóthné Litovkina, A. A Few Aspects of a Semiotic Approach to Proverbs, with Special Reference to Two Important American Publications. *Semiotica*, 1996, 108–3/4, 307–380.
- Tóthné Litovkina, A. An analysis of popular American proverbs and their use in language teaching. In Heissig, W., & Schott, R. (Eds.), *Die heutige bedeutung oraler traditionen – Ihre archivierung, publikation und index-erschließung [The Present-Day Importance of Oral Traditions: Their Preservation, Publication and Indexing]*. Opladen: Wetdeutscher Verlag, 1998, 131–158.
- Walter. Greifswald: Ernst-Moritz-Arndt-Universität für Slawistik, 2nd expanded edition, 2001.
- Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary*. Dorset & Baber, Deluxe second edition, 1983.
- Weller T. *Minims or, Man is the only Animal that Wears Bow Ties*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. (without pages), 1982.