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HRISZTOVA-GOTTHARDT, Hrisztalina – T. LITOVKINA, Anna – BARTA, Péter – VARGHA, Katalin: *A közmondásferdítések ma: öt nyelv antiproverbiumainak nyelvészeti vizsgálata*. [Proverb Alterations Today: A Linguistic Investigation of Anti-proverbs in Five Languages]. 2018, Budapest: Tinta Könyvkiadó. 158. ISBN 978-963-409-149-3

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Peter Zolczer

J. Selye University, Department of English Language and Literature, Komárno

This volume forms part of the series “Reference Books for the Study of Linguistics” [Segédkönyvek a nyelvészet tanulmányozásához] (published by the Hungarian publishing house Tinta Könyvkiadó in Budapest), and despite the fact that it deals with a very specific area of linguistics, it is aimed at both a professional and a general readership who are interested not only in linguistics, but also in folklore studies, especially in relation to the variability of the (con)text. The book does exactly what the title promises: it provides a comprehensive overview of proverb alterations through numerous up-to-date examples from five languages. The front cover of the book features a picture of a computer monitor, and its simple and clean design is an ideal choice, subtly directing the viewer’s attention to what is displayed on the monitor screen: “With a computer, one can be wrong far more precisely” [Számítógéppel az ember sokkal pontosabban téved]. In this way, the front cover not only piques your curiosity, but also provides a specific example of a recent anti-proverb. Importantly, the title also includes the word ‘today,’ highlighting one of the main reasons the book was written. As we learn from the back cover, the speed at which information travels nowadays means that anti-proverbs are spreading at an unprecedented pace. Fascinated by this process, the authors decided that the current situation with respect to anti-proverbs merited a detailed description in the form of a book. I believe it is safe to say they were right, and my hope is that the following few paragraphs will provide adequate justification for my conviction.

The volume starts with a brief but important introduction divided into four sections, which provides essential background information about the research and its terminology. One section offers a brief history of anti-proverbs, and two further sections list the most commonly altered proverbs and the most widely spread anti-proverbs respectively. The book comprises two main parts. The first focuses on formal modifications to proverbs—that is, the alteration of proverbs by means of expansion, narrowing, and exchange. The second part deals with linguistic humor, describing how wordplay, polysemy, rhyme, and metaphor create humor in anti-proverbs. In the conclusion, the authors provide an overview of the topics addressed in the book, highlighting the obvious tendencies in each case. They also identify possible directions for future research. The book ends with three appendices, each containing fascinating visual examples. The wellerism featuring the hedgehog (“*Everyone makes mistakes,*” *said the hedgehog after trying to mount the hairbrush*; see p. 156) is particularly entertaining, partly because it has alternative versions in all five languages, and partly because there are multiple alterations in each. In the case of the English alterations, we see three pictures of a hedgehog trying to mount, touch, and lick a hairbrush, with the following three captions respectively: *Why hedgehogs are becoming extinct...*, *Brother?*, and *Hey baby, so you come here often?*

The first part of the volume is divided into four subchapters, each containing numerous sections. The structure would be very difficult to navigate, were it not for the very transparent, systematically arranged table of contents. There are about 10 different types of alterations listed under each type of formal change in the proverbs (expansion, narrowing, exchange), and one subchapter is dedicated to the merging of proverbs. Where there is a logical connection between these alterations, the authors ensure its visibility by arranging the alterations in sections in an order that clearly reflects the connection. For example, the first subchapter of the first part of the book deals with the expansion of proverbs, and the first five sections under this subchapter are arranged according to the degree of expansion in the proverbs, starting from the smallest: “Addition of one sound” [Egy hang hozzáadása], “Addition of two or three sounds” [Két vagy három hang hozzáadása], “Addition of one word” [Egy szó hozzáadása], “Addition of an element longer than a word but shorter than a clause” [Egy szónál hosszabb, de egy tagmondatnál rövidebb elem hozzáadása], “Addition of a comment one or more clauses in length” [Egy vagy több tagmondat terjedelmű megjegyzés hozzáfűzése] (see pp. 22–29).

At the beginning of each section there is a brief but comprehensive description of the category dealt with in the given section. This is followed by examples that are listed starting with Hungarian (the language of the book), then English, German, French, and finally Russian. After each example, the original proverb is indicated in curly brackets, and the particular element of interest is underlined. Thus, in the case of the addition of one word, the English example is “It is more blessed to give than to receive... advice. {It is more blessed to give than to receive}” (see p. 23). The source of each anti-proverb is provided in a footnote, which is the only aspect of the book that somewhat disrupts the flow of reading, since – due to the large number of anti-proverbs per page – the footnotes take up about one-quarter to one-third of the page (on each page of the book between the introduction and the conclusion). Although the footnotes are less aesthetically pleasing, the reader very quickly gets used to (seeing) them, and anyone who is particularly interested in exploring external sources will certainly appreciate them.

As one browses through the different types of proverb alterations, it becomes fairly automatic to make a mental note of (at least some of) them, since they can vary to extremes. I believe it is possible to explain the reason for this by comparing two examples of proverb alterations, one from the category of expansion and the other from the category of narrowing. When the proverb is expanded both “front and back,” the proverb alteration is referred to as a *sandwich* (ESAR, Evan: *The Humor of Humor*. New York: Horizon Press, 1952, p. 202)—for example, “Many men are slow but sure. Others are just slow. {Slow but sure}” (p. 35). Here, the alteration is way longer than the original proverb. In the case of narrowing by one sound, the original proverb gains a new meaning by the omission of a single sound—for example, “The best things in life are fee. {The best things in life are free}” (p. 38). These two examples feel like absolute opposites on the spectrum of modification (i.e. alteration) and clearly demonstrate how proverb alterations can be made in all kinds of ways. Due to this distinctive contrast, such examples very easily find a comfortable place in our long-term memory.

The second part of the volume focuses on the inclusion of linguistic humor in anti-proverbs. It is divided into two subchapters, the first of which (the longest in the whole book) deals with numerous aspects of wordplay in the context of (anti-)proverbs. For example, there is a section on paronomasia in anti-proverbs, which, under the subsection

“Exchange of one word” [Egy szó cseréje], includes the following English example: “Familiarity breeds consent. {Familiarity breeds contempt}” (see p. 82). A particularly amusing subsection, “Playing with foreign languages” [Játék az idegen nyelvekkel] (see p. 90), shows how anti-proverbs are created by mixing a foreign language into a proverb. For example: “News item: Pope rules that whale meat is fish, for fast-day purposes. One man’s meat is another man’s poisson. {One man’s meat is another man’s poison}” (see p. 92). The descriptions and explanations of how the different categories of humor are present in anti-proverbs at the beginnings of the sections are essential in the second part of the book (too), mostly because without them the reader would probably become frequently lost in the sometimes seemingly minor differences between certain categories. Such is the case, for example, with linking puns, the English example of which is: “It’s better to have loved a short girl than never to have loved a tall. {It’s better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all}” (see p. 97). The description makes it clear that we can talk about linking puns (as proposed by ESAR, 1952) when the word borders are replaced or when their number is changed, but not when it comes to replacing or changing whole words, as those belong to different categories.

In the conclusion to the volume, the authors point out that, rather than identifying explicit rules in connection with their original questions (e.g. What specific elements of proverbs are changed to create anti-proverbs? How many elements are changed exactly?), they were able to reveal strong tendencies (e.g. expansion occurs far more often than narrowing; and when expanding a proverb, the most common alteration is the addition of one or more clauses). The analyses of humor in anti-proverbs in the second part of the book reveals, for example, that different languages use largely the same procedures in the case of paronomasia: the exchange of one word; the exchange, addition, or omission of one or more sounds; the exchange of one sound with two, or vice versa.

The conclusion to the volume is not only summative: it is also very informative. Among many other details concerning the function of (anti-)proverbs in communication, we learn that the reason a native speaker is capable of understanding anti-proverbs so efficiently, is that each anti-proverb contains the recognizable core of the original proverb as an essential element. In order for the anti-proverb to achieve the desired (humorous) effect, this core is the minimum unit of the original that needs to remain present in the altered version of the proverb (NORRICK, Neal R.: *How Proverbs Mean. Semantic Studies in English Proverbs*. Amsterdam: Mouton. 1985, p. 45). Quoting Wolfgang Mieder (*American Proverbs: A Study of Texts and Contexts*. Bern: Peter Lang. 1989), the authors explain how, in the course of their research, it became clear that (anti-)proverbs are still used as effective communication tools. This is an important reason, although only one of many, why the volume can be recommended both to professionals working mainly (but not exclusively) in the fields of linguistics and folklore studies, and to all those interested in a comprehensive collection and analysis of anti-proverbs.