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SEMANTICS AND PRAGMATICS OF ANTI-PROVERBS

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INTRODUCTION

A proverb is a short and simple saying which is widely known and which condenses common sense, experience, expectations and wisdom of mankind. An innovative alteration of a standard proverb, often used for humorous effect, is called an anti-proverb. For instance, by changing a single word, the well-known proverb *Virtue is its own reward* has transformed into anti-proverb *Virtue is its own punishment.* Such intentional transformations of traditional proverbs are gaining popularity in today's world. Writers often use them for humorous or satirical purposes, in advertising, mass media and social networks.

The aim of this research is to explore and identify the linguistic mechanisms which lead to creation of anti-proverbs. We will compare structural features of a number of anti-proverbs found in various sources with their traditional proverb counterparts. By means of such analysis we hope to identify underlying grammatical, semantic and contextual arrangements of anti-proverbs. This research will also include an analysis of reasons which cause linguistic innovation in the phenomenon of anti-proverbs, based on their utilization for advertising, journalistic or humorous purposes.

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF PROVERBS

This chapter provides the theoretical framework used for interpreting the research presented in this paper on anti-proverbs. The research in this paper falls within the field of semantics and pragmatics, the branches of linguistics which are concerned with meaning and the ways in which context contributes to meaning.

The chapter has two main sections. The first section looks into proverb theory while the second section considers anti-proverbs. This chapter will serve as the starting point for the semantic and pragmatic analysis of anti-proverbs in the second chapter.

1.1. PROVERBS

Most people think a proverb is a simple saying which conveys some folk wisdom. But proverbs are actually a complex linguistic phenomenon, as it is often the case with many of the language related concepts. Wolfgang Mieder, one of the leading paremiology scholars, states that various attempts at defining proverbs have been made over the centuries, ranging from philosophical considerations of Aristotle to contemporary lexicographical definitions (Mieder 1993: 4).

Aristotle gave what is thought to be the earliest definition of proverbs. Many of his original works are no longer extant, but ancient thinkers such as Synesius preserved some of them through their own works:

> Really, the proverb is a type of wisdom. How could it not be when, as Aristotle says of them, they are remains of ancient philosophy lost in the greatest calamities of mankind, preserved thanks to their concision and cleverness?
>
> (Paroimiai: Proverbs from Ancient Greece to Star Trek, 2016)

However, all of the efforts to precisely define proverbs have been merely attempts. Mieder points out that scholars have had much trouble with establishing a single and precise definition which would be applicable to all proverbs. This has much to do with the formulaic and metaphorical aspects of proverbs that make them an ambiguous text whose function, use

and meaning ought to be studied in different contexts. This is precisely why scholars have tried to be more inclusive and descriptive in their definitions (Mieder 1993: 4).

Mieder is no exception when it comes to problematic definitions of proverbs as he intentionally offers quite an ambiguous definition himself:

> Proverbs [are] concise traditional statements of apparent truths with currency among the folk. More elaborately stated, proverbs are short, generally known sentences of the folk that contain wisdom, truths, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed, and memorizable form and that are handed down from generation to generation. (Mieder 2008: 11)

Mieder argues that "not even the most complex definition will be able to identify all proverbs because of the concept of traditionality that includes both aspects of age and currency" ("Proverbs" 4). In this sense, a sentence may sound like a proverb because it follows a proverbial pattern and still not be one. In Mieder's example one might utter a sentence such as "Where there are stars, there are scandals." This is both based on a common proverb pattern and expresses some perceived generalizations. But it is not a proverb. In other words, for a statement to be recognized as a proverb it needs to gain traditionality. Specifically, it needs to be registered many times over time in written and spoken communication in order to gain proverbial status. This often results in different variants that attest to oral currency, and it also makes it hard to decide what new statements have gained proverbial status (Mieder 2004: 5).

1.1.1. Proverbial markers

Given that a sentence meets the requirements of traditionality, we identify it as a proverb based on the different *proverbial markers* - "the phonological, semantic, and syntactic devices that occur frequently in proverbs across languages" (Mac Coinnigh 2014: 112). In such way, "the thousands of proverbs of any language can be reduced to certain structures or patterns" some of the most common are:

- Better X than Y (*Better poor with honor than rich with shame*),
- Like X, like Y (*Like father like son*),
- No X without Y (*No work, no pay*),
- One X doesn't make a Y (*One robin doesn't make a spring*),

- If X, then Y (*If at first you don't succeed, then try, try again*) etc. (Mieder 2004: 6-7)

Another common feature of proverbs is an oppositional or non-oppositional structure, such as *Man proposes but God disposes* or *Where there's a will, there's a way*, as well as the shortness with the average length of a proverb being about seven words (Mieder 2004: 6-7). Speakers often shorten proverbs to mere allusions that bring the whole sentence to mind automatically. This is why proverbs are often manipulated by the means of their crucial recognizable phrases. For instance, if one of the two English speakers who are familiar with proverbs cites *Like father...* without ending it, because it is a generally recognizable proverb, it will automatically bring the rest of the text, i.e. *like son*, to the mind of the other person. This is also one of the features exploited by anti-proverbs for the purposes of their humorous effect. The second chapter will deal with this.

Furthermore, proverbs show certain stylistic features such as alliteration, parallelism, rhyme, ellipsis, hyperbole, paradox and personification. Most proverbs also contain a metaphor. The preference for metaphorical proverbs lies in the fact that they can be employed in a figurative or indirect way (Mieder 2004: 8). That is the reason why metaphor is one of the most effective indicators of proverbiality and one of the most common devices which helps to achieve figurativeness in proverbs (Litovkina 2014: 335). Hence, "by associating an actual situation with a metaphorical proverb, the particular matter is generalized into a common occurrence of life" (Mielder 2004: 8). In many anti-proverbs the meaning of a metaphorical proverb is narrowed by putting it in a context in which it is to be interpreted literally (Litovkina 2014: 335).

Proverbs refer to social situations. This social context gives proverbs their meaning. Their meaning is thus very much dependent on the contexts in which they appear. Because of this *'semantic indefiniteness'* of proverbs that results from their *heterosituativity*, *poly-functionality*, and *poly-semanticity*, as Mieder points out, "the meaning of any proverb must therefore be analyzed in its unique context, be it social, literary, rhetorical, journalistic, or whatever" (Mieder 2008: 11). Mieder's point will be the cornerstone of the pragmatic research in the second chapter.

1.2. ANTI-PROVERBS

Proverbs often appear in many different variations due to their repetition over time. This includes anti-proverbs as well. Writers have perverted and parodied proverbs so extensively in the last few decades that the variations have been sometimes heard more often than the original forms (Litovkina 2014: 326). People understand that proverbs can be manipulated, and they know that such 'perversions' come about without much conscious thought, but rather spontaneously, and actually lead to new insights (Mieder 2008: 90).

Mieder defines anti-proverbs as "parodied, twisted, or fractured proverbs that reveal humorous or satirical speech play with traditional proverbial wisdom" (Mieder 2004: 28). For instance, one of the variations of a well-known proverb *A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush* is *A bird in the hand is a dangerous thing*. It is important to note that, while anti-proverbs may be based on mere wordplay or puns and often be generated to derive play forms (Litovkina 2014: 327). They "also often express serious sociopolitical satire in the form of slogans and graffiti". Because of this, "there is a well-established tradition of intentionally rephrased anti-proverbs in all types of modern communication, from books of witticisms to T-shirt inscriptions and on to advertising slogans" (Mieder 2004: 150). As a result, such anti-proverbs often make the jump from innovative wordplay to new folk proverbs, such as *Money can't buy you love* alternation of *Money can't (won't) buy happiness*, or a more elaborated version *Money won't buy happiness, but it will go a long way in helping you* (Mieder 2008: 87- 88).

1.2.1. Mechanisms of proverb variation

It seems there is no sphere of life where anti-proverbs are not used. They are not a new genre born in the era of mass media and the Internet. We can trace them back to the distant past. According to Litovkina, "in the eighteenth century the traditional wisdom of many proverbial gems was questioned by a number of philosophers, writers and poets (to name just a few: G. C. Lichtenberg, I. Kant, F. Schiller, Goethe, Voltaire), who created and inspired many proverb transformations" (Litovkina 2014: 328). What is more important, "an anti-proverb" as Litovkina puts it, "will elicit humor 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" (Litovkina 2014: 329). Allusions are important in humor because

they involve extra-linguistic knowledge or reference to a saying or quotation. If the listener does not share the same awareness of this, he does not recognize the ambiguity (Ross 2005: 11).

What follows below is a list of anti-proverbs in which the traditional proverb is juxtaposed with the innovative variation that plays both with humor and social commentary:

- Absence makes the heart grow fonder.

  Absence makes the heart go wander.

- Too many cooks spoil the broth.

  Too many legislators spoil reform.

- Experience is the best teacher.

  Expedience is the best teacher.

- A miss is as good as a mile.

  A Ms. is as good as a male.

- Nobody is perfect.

  No body is perfect. (Mieder 2004: 151)

The listed anti-proverbs are constructed without changing the syntactic structure, which means they follow the same structure as the original proverbs while changing some of the individual words. Mac Coinnigh defines this as "a method by which new life can be breathed into older structures so that they may enjoy another period of currency" (Mac Coinnigh 2014: 121). An element of an existing proverb can be replaced with another item from the same grammatical category (e.g. a noun, an adjective, a verb, etc.) which may be a homonym or homophone. Since these pairs are limited, it is more likely that a word which phonologically resembles the original will be used. These alternations often simply involve the substitution of one letter for another, the addition of an extra letter, or the substitution of a word (Mac Coinnigh 2014: 121), such as *Slaughter is the best medicine* (*Laughter is the best medicine*). As Litovkina points out, this is often the case because even slight verbal changes can introduce dramatically new images and ideas (Litovkina 2014: 333).

There are a number of mechanisms of proverb variation other than replacing a single word. Some of them are substituting two or more words (*One man's drive is another man's*

funeral), changing the second part of the proverb (*If at first you don't succeed – you are fired*), adding a tail to the original text (*Half the world doesn't know how the other half lives – and it's none of its business*), adding literal interpretations (*When one door shuts, another opens...which means that you live in a drafty house*), punning (*Where there's a will, there's an inheritance tax*), word-repetition *(There's no fool like an old fool who marries a young fool*), melding two proverbs (*Two in a bush is the root of all evil*), word-order reversal (*Better never than late*) etc. (Litovkina 2014: 332-334). One more way for an anti-proverb to put the wisdom of the original proverb into question is by adding a contradictory phrase that begins with 'but': e.g. *There was a time when a fool and his money were soon parted, but now it happens to everybody* (Mieder 2004: 28). Many of the proverb alterations simultaneously employ several of these methods of variation. While the old proverb acts as a preconceived rule, the modern anti-proverb is intended to activate us into overcoming the naive acceptance of traditional wisdom (Litovkina 2014: 329-337).

1.2.2. Anti-proverbs and mass media

Another thing worth mentioning in light of this paper is the importance of anti-proverbs as a contemporary linguistic topic because of their mass appearance "in modern literature, the mass media, and the popular culture of television, film, and music" (Mieder 2004: 150-151). The fact that they are so popular is also why anti-proverb research has been experiencing a boom in the last three decades. But there is still a lack of serious field research, both regarding traditional proverbs and creative anti-proverbs (Mieder 2008: 89).

One of the largest areas of use of anti-proverbs is the advertisements that employ them to get the attention of consumers. The same is true for journalists that use proverbs or anti-proverbs in newspaper and magazine headlines (Mieder 2004: 162). In fact,

> in a culture where the mass media have a constant presence, advertisements play an incredible communicative role [and] they certainly represent a fertile ground for the traditional and innovative use of proverbs and are ample proof that proverbs and twisted anti-proverbs are part of modern communication. (Mieder 2004: 245)

It seems that the mass media more than any other vehicle helps to spread anti-proverbs and makes people aware that they are needed for effective communication, perhaps as much as the

traditional proverbs (Mieder 2008: 90). The currency of this proverbial variation is also one of the reasons that anti-proverbs were taken as the topic of this research.

2. SEMANTIC AND PRAGMATIC ELEMENTS OF ANTI-PROVERBS

This chapter looks into the semantic and pragmatic approach to the study of proverbs. It is organized in two main sections; the first one looks into the semantic theory, while the second one explores the pragmatic theory in the field of paremiology. The background literature adopts an eclectic approach in arriving at a synthesized framework which provides the methodology for the study of twenty-two anti-proverbs that is conducted within this chapter. The complete list of the considered anti-proverbs is enclosed at the end of the paper.

The considered (anti) proverbs are limited to Anglo-American collections of proverbs. The foundation of this research is the assumption that standard proverb meanings are accessible to normal adult members of the English language community.

The concluding section of this paper will outline how semantic and pragmatic theories combined can be used to make sense of the meaning and formation of anti-proverbs.

2.1. SEMANTICS OF ANTI-PROVERBS

Semantics should be understood in terms of the study of meaning, a discipline of studying the object. Since the object in this case is a linguistic expression, the anti-proverb, this asks for a description and study of the process of generating meaning. Any attempt to explain or to interpret a proverb could thus be classified as being semantic, and any description of proverb meaning falls into the field of proverb semantics (Grzybek 2014: 76). While standard semantic features of proverbs serve as a model of basic types of meaning relations which should be familiar to all members of a culture, semantic features of individual proverbs are interesting because they may suggest an approach to proverbiality (Norrick 2014: 17). This subchapter will combine the traditional semantic approaches to meaning with a cognitive linguistics outlook on meaning in order to come up with an understanding of the process of generating meaning in the considered anti-proverbs.

2.1.1. Polysemanticity

One of the defining characteristics of proverbs is their figurativeness. The semantic definitions of proverbs often refer to literal or non-literal meaning that they convey. But it is questionable whether such a categorization is possible after all, since any word can be used metaphorically. Literal meaning of an utterance derives from interpretation of each word using its common lexical meaning, but it is possible for new meanings to arise if we assign figurative or metaphorical meaning to each word (Grzybek 2014: 80). The proverb as a genre seems to be specifically characterized by a number of factors responsible for what is termed as *semantic indefiniteness*. Because of this, it is simply impossible to define a proverb's meaning exactly, rather its mere semantic potential (Grzybek 2014: 77). This semantic feature of proverbs is often referred to as *polysemanticity*, meaning "the phenomenon of words having various, related meanings" (Ross 2005: 17).

For instance, the sentence *A rolling stone gathers no moss* can be interpreted in multiple ways. Firstly, it has a literal and objective interpretation by using the common lexical meaning of its constituent parts. Secondly, it has a metaphorical interpretation as a proverb. In that instance, the common lexical meaning of the constituent words is irrelevant, and the words are instead creatively interpreted and their meaning is extended in a non-literal way. *Stone* is analogous to a person or a machine. The interpretation of *rolling* might include work, activity or diligence. *Moss* can be understood as something desirable to obtain, or perhaps something to be shunned. Polysemanticity in proverbs is not only restricted to the word level. We see it on a sentence level as well. In the example sentence *A rolling stone gathers no moss* there are two standard interpretations which co-exist; a person on the move always remains young and a person on the move always remains poor. The hearers interpret it interactionally to mean either that they should or should not roll, depending on their beliefs (Norrick 2014: 17).

Similarly, the anti-proverb *Absence speaks louder than words* also has many interpretations. Derived from the equally ambiguous proverb *Silence speaks louder than words*, the analogy made seems quite logical because the term silence can be defined as an absence of sound. The initial word 'absence' reminds of the proverb *Absence makes the heart grow fonder*. Taking all this into account, perhaps this absence of sound indicates that there is no communication between two people, or a couple whose relationship is falling apart. It could also mean that this couple is not in the same place so this absence tests their relationship and

whether they truly love each other by means of their actions, not words. On the other hand, one might assume a totally different meaning which shows that somebody is absent due to some mental or emotional issues, and their absence speaks for them by resembling the state in which they are. A literal understanding includes a certain state of being away from something or someone which conveys more information than the words are able to. This information is more accurate, reliable and true than the one that can be conveyed by utterances.

The interpretation of this anti-proverb depends on the individual experience and extra-linguistic knowledge of the reader. It seems reasonable to speak of literal reading, rather than literal meaning of the proverb, which emphasizes "the recipient's active role and makes it clear that the distinction outlined may be a cognitive, rather than an exclusively text-based phenomenon" (Grzybek 2014: 80).

Perhaps this explains the case with the weather proverbs which are normally literal proverbs. As Mieder states, "while normal folk proverbs can be used in multiple contexts, many weather proverbs are prognostic signs and do not exhibit any metaphorical character" (Mieder 2004: 26). For instance *When swallows fly high, the weather will be dry* or *Low flies the swallow, rain to follow* are seen as restricted to the observation of swallows' behavior and predictions derived from it, allowing, or at least not asking for any semantically extended interpretation (Grzybek 2014: 85). In contrast, the thematically similar proverb *One swallow does not make a summer* also refers to situations which have nothing to do with swallows or with any other kind of birds, seasons of the year, etc., but rather to more general situations in which the (first) appearance of a certain phenomenon should not be (mis)interpreted as an obligatory index of the appearance of circumstances that usually go with it (Grzybek 2014: 86).

However, "irrespective of the fact that the whole approach is highly problematic, from a theoretical point of view, it turns out that proverbs which contain some kind of trope on the lexical level are classified as figurative, all others as literal" (Grzybek 2014: 84). It seems that this kind of trope in a proverbial structure is an important part of generating its meaning. Scholars note that anti-proverbs effectively make use of the possibilities for ambiguity in the words of a language. Such possibilities often become the basis of anti-proverbs' formation and humorous effect. This is usually achieved by a procedure called punning.

Pun

According to the componential analysis approach, a proverb text is seen to be not principally different from any other verbal text, except for the indirectness of the speech act of its utterance, which will be addressed in the pragmatic section of this chapter, and for the eventual inclusion of lexical tropes (Grzybek 2014: 82). A common source of puns is thus the vast lexicon of English, which has borrowed from many language sources, such as Celtic, Germanic languages, Latin, French, Greek etc. (Ross 2005: 16).

A pun is the humorous use of a word, or of words which are formed or sound alike but have different meaning, in such a way as to play on two or more of the possible applications" (McKenna, 141). For instance, Charles Dickens often played with the wording and the structure of standard proverbs to create innovative variations and allusions. He entertained his readers with humorous or satirical puns, such as *Procrastination is the thief of time* (Mieder 2004: 195).

McKenna points out that there are four subcategories of puns: paronyms, homonyms, homographs and homophones. Homonyms and homophones are usually called 'perfect' puns for they are identical in sound. Homographs and paronyms are often referred to as 'imperfect' puns (McKenna 2009: 142). Under these conditions, a proverb is submitted to semantic analyses in a linguistic framework. For approaches along the lines of componential analysis, literal meanings of the proverb and/or its components are a pre-condition of analysis (Grzybek 2014: 82).

Homonyms are considered to be the perfect puns because they are "pronounced the same and have the same spelling, but are two different words, which originate from different sources and so have a separate entry in the dictionary" (Ross 2005: 16-17). For instance, the word *will* in the proverb *Where there's a will, there's a way* refers to wish or desire. But the word *will* has several other meanings. It can refer to a legal document with the instructions as to what should be done with one's property and money after one's death. An anti-proverb *Where there's a will, there's a lawsuit* uses this lexical ambiguity and interprets the word in a new way, thus producing a humorous proverbial variation with a new meaning.

This type of humor has the following elements:

- there is a conflict between what is expected and what actually occurs in the joke,
- the conflict is caused by an ambiguity at some level of language

- the punchline is surprising, as it is not the expected interpretation, but it resolves the conflict: 'Have you got a light, Mac?' 'No, but I've got a dark brown overcoat.' (Ross 2005: 8)

Being familiar with the proverb *Where there's a will, there's a way*, an English speaker does not expect the beginning part *Where there's a will* to end with *there's a lawsuit*. He/she is left surprised because of the conflict between what is expected and what actually occurs in the joke, which results in laughter.

These lexical relations where the polysemy of a word allows for more interpretations are the basis of a lot of word play, usually for humorous purposes (Yule 2010: 121). There are many types of punning in Anglo-American anti-proverbs, such as splitting of one word in two, merging of two words in one, linking puns, puns playing upon personal names, bilingual puns, story puns, double and triple puns, repetitive puns. A punning element might also extend to a group of words (McKenna 2009: 143), e.g. *A bird in the hand is a dangerous thing* which is a parody of the proverb *A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.* The humor of this anti-proverb relies on the conflict between what is expected and what actually occurs in the joke, and on the literal interpretation of the original text.

One word can simply be split in two in order to construct a pun, such as *No body is perfect* or *Beauty is in the eye of the beer holder*, just like the two words can be merged into one, e.g. *Suicide is despise of life* (McKenna 2009: 143). The manipulations of words at the phonological level whereby a clear manipulation of two distinct but similar phonological interpretations is made, does not depend on a lexically ambiguous element (Seewoester 2009: 7). The pun constructed in the *Hair today, gone tomorrow (Here today, gone tomorrow)* depends on a manipulation of a slightly distinct pronunciation of the word 'hair' and 'here'. While such phonological puns play with paronyms, lexical jokes discussed above depend on homonymy, homophony or polysemy (Seewoester 2009: 8).

Puns can also be based on the intermixture of two languages (bilingual puns), such as *One man's meat is another man's poisson*, where the phonetically similar word *poisson* means fish in French (McKenna, 144). The phonologically ambiguous element causes the humor with underlying lexical distinctions based on which sound choice is made (Seewoester 2009: 8). The following transformation or the double punning is common too, such as in; *As it snows, so shall ye sweep*, but triple puns almost always occur in story puns, e.g. *An 'aye' for an 'I', muttered the candidate as he voted for himself*. There are also repetitive puns that rely on the repetition

of words, e.g. *If at first you don't succeed, just keep sucking till you do suck seed* (McKenna 2009: 151), or *There's no fool like an old fool who marries a young fool.*

We see that anti-proverbs that are based on puns often come off as silly statements which parody the wisdom of the original proverb. "The dictionary definition of parody emphasizes the fact that it is a 'humorous imitation' of a style" (Ross 2005: 47). Since anti-proverbs usually parody original proverbs for the purposes of comic exaggeration, it could be said that the parody is the very cornerstone of anti-proverbs. Proverbs are also polyfunctional because the purpose of the parody ranges from a playful imitation to harsh satire (Ross 2005: 49). Understanding the more complex semantic mechanisms behind proverbs and anti-proverbs requires a more holistic approach to their analysis. The following subsections will outline such an approach.

2.1.2. Semantic incongruities

Ross points out that "sometimes we are caused to laugh by combinations of words and meanings that seem odd, or incongruous, in some way. Why is it that some combinations of words make sense together and others do not?" (Ross 2005: 30). She gives an example of three sentences;

1. My uncle always sleeps in the day

2. My uncle always sleeps awake

3. My uncle always sleeps standing on one toe (Ross 2005: 30)

The oddness of these sentences does not come from their syntactic structure, because it is good, rather they are semantically odd (Yule 2010: 114). The second sentence contradicts what we know about language and meaning (contradiction between 'sleep' and 'awake'). The third contradicts what we know about the world (it is not physically possible to sleep on one toe) (Ross 2005: 31). What is common to both of them is that they set forth a type of semantic incongruity. The next section looks into the ways in which unusual semantic connections in apparent contradictions result in humorous anti-proverbs.

Apparent contradictions

Proverbial folk wisdom is particularly marked by contradictions. For every proverb there is an anti-proverb to be found. This type of wisdom only stems from experience. It does not contain a logical system (Mieder 2004: 207). But, "the strange thing is that, rather than rejecting such odd examples of language, the human mind often reacts by trying to make sense of them". These new combinations extend the range of possible meanings and cause a sudden shift in perception (Ross 2005: 31).

For instance, *The pen is father to the thought* is an anti-proverb with apparent contradiction. It is constructed by combining two sequences that relate to different spheres of life; *The pen is mightier than the sword* and *The wish is father to the thought.* What this melding generates is a proverb that is logically incompatible. It contradicts what we know about the world. That is because it is not possible that the pen comes before the thought as it was the very thinking that led people to produce a pen, and thinking was present before both speaking and writing. The sentence does not make sense, or rather, it appears as a non-sense.

The literal meaning can be widened to include metaphorical senses (Ross 2005: 31). It could be interpreted as the belief that the best thinking is done by those who write a lot, or that those who cannot write cannot think. This is obviously false. If we think about the fact that in the American slang language the word 'pen' is also used as an abbreviation for penitentiary, we can say the proverb is used to indicate that there is a lot of thinking done in the prison, which is somewhat also true. Because English speakers usually use the literal meaning of the word 'pen', it is logical to conclude that the metaphorical sense is not the first to be understood when reading this anti-proverb out of context.

The sentence *Too many cooks are better than one* is an anti-proverb formed by melding of *Too many cooks spoil the broth* and *Two heads are better than one*. It shows a similar contradiction. The original proverbs are in an oppositional relationship, because the first claims that more people should not work on the same thing, while the other claims the opposite. We can say that this anti-proverb tests the wisdom of the original proverbs by combining their sequences with contrasting meanings in order to create a ridiculous sentence with no meaning. If the number of cooks is too many, it is logical to conclude there should be less of them. So, how can too many of them be better than one? Perhaps the logical explanation is to consider it according to principle of lesser evil. This means that even though there are too many cooks, which is a bad situation, it is still a better option than one cook, which is therefore a disastrous

option. But, the principle of lesser evil is contradictory itself, so the logic behind this explanation is faulted. It does not make sense.

Paradox

Norrick points out that many proverbs in English are paradoxical and set forth preposterous claims such as *The pen is mightier than the sword* for which a non-contradictory meaning still can be derived, unlike others like *Nothing is permanent but change* which shows true logical contradiction by mixing logical levels and leading to vicious circles (Norrick 2014: 18).

Anti-proverbs make good use of such paradoxical claims, frequently with a humorous effect. For instance, an anti-proverb *Everything comes to him who waits for no man* is constructed out of paradoxical combination of proverbs *Everything comes to him who waits* and *Time and tide wait for no man*. It is done by supplementing the original proverb with a sequence with contrasting meaning. In cases where a proverb employs paradox, it somehow reinforces its generalizing, didactic tendencies (Norrick 2014: 18). As a result, the anti-proverb *Everything comes to him who waits for no man* establishes a new meaning which is quite ironic. Perhaps the function of this anti-proverb, along with its superficially comic effect of a non-sense statement, is to imply that those who do not rely on other people but on themselves achieve the most. This parodying simultaneously exhibits a strong critical force. In fact, when humor is used as critical force the term satire is used (Ross 2005: 49), thus both satire and irony can be considered the purpose of this anti-proverb.

Ross defines *irony* as a form vulnerable to misunderstanding because it is an expression of meaning, often humorous or sarcastic, by the use of language of a different or opposite tendency (Ross 2005: 50). Contrary to Norrick's claim that "irony is much commoner in proverbial phrases such as *A fine kettle of fish* and *As clear as mud*" (Norrick 2014: 18), this kind of parody is pretty common among anti-proverbs. Ross further emphasizes that "understanding the force of irony involves awareness of the language used and knowledge about the world". To perceive the contradiction, the reader needs non-linguistic knowledge about the society (Ross 2005: 50). Because of the non-linguistic knowledge about society, tax systems and generally money, it is not hard to perceive the irony of the statement *A penny saved is a penny taxed*, an anti-proverb based on *A penny saved is a penny earned*.

In his 1985 publication entitled Semantic Mechanisms of Humor, Victor Raskin introduced a Script-based Semantic Theory of Humor (SSTH), which he later further developed into the General Theory of Verbal Humor. Raskin defined the necessary non-linguistic knowledge about the world as a script which encodes semantic information surrounding the word – "The script is defined as a cognitive structure internalized by the native speaker that represents the native speaker's knowledge of a small part of the world" (Raskin, 81). Thus, The Semantic Script Theory of Humor is hinged on the presentation of a joke as a text which is compatible, at least partly, with two opposing semantic scripts (Dynel 2011: 2)

The Theory of Humor is anchored in semantic, pragmatic and cognitive theory, thereby delineating the multidisciplinary orientation of humor research. The following subsection concentrates on understanding the anti-proverbs from a cognitive linguistic approach to meaning and humor, followed up by the pragmatic section which develops the analysis further.

2.1.3. Cognitive Semantics

One of the crucial questions in the semantic approach to the study of proverbs is whether understanding a proverb's literal meaning is a pre-condition for the decoding of its figurative meaning. It has generally been assumed that distinctions which can be made from text-oriented studies are relevant for by cognitive processes, or paralleled by them. A speaker means what he says on the literal level, but he can mean something more in context, particularly if one takes into account the fact that the (potential) literal meaning can be activated, but does not have to be of any importance in the actual use of language (Grzybek 2014: 80).

It is important to examine the relation of proverbs to the field of lexical semantics. Mieder points out that one typical and recurrent trait of most proverbs is the use of metaphore (Mieder 1993: 24-25). As a rule when using proverbs, the utterer of a proverbial sentence usually does not want to communicate a literal meaning, but rather an indirect or figurative meaning. Figurative meaning consequently constitutes an important marker in many proverbs. The meaning of syntactic entities such as phrases, clauses or sentences, generally cannot be determined without insight into lexical meaning of its constituents. Since proverbial sentences are predominantly based on metaphor, their meaning might not be simply derived from the meanings of their components. A proverbial sentence is usually embedded into a situational context and its meaning is likely to transcend lexical meanings. For instance, the proverbial

sentence *A rolling stone gathers no moss*, might be interpreted in a number of creative, extended and figurative ways. It can possibly indicate a machine which keeps running incessantly without any breaking or encountering any mechanical problems. It might indicate a person of a restless spirit, a free and independent individual, or perhaps someone who is hardworking and laborious. In this proverbial sentence the meaning of each individual component (*rolling*, *stone*, and *moss*) turns out to be used figuratively. *Stone* may signify a person or a machine. The interpretation of *rolling* might include desirable flexibility and diligence, or hyperactivity. *Moss* can be understood to be something like material wealth desirable to be obtained, or something that should rather be avoided. The meaning of a proverb does not depend on the lexical meaning. It depends on the overall paremic meaning and the proverb's overall relation to the denoted (extra-linguistic) segment of reality, which plays the crucial role in this respect (Gryzbek 2014: 89). Raymond Gibbs correctly summarizes that figurative interpretations cannot be determined through an analysis of individual word meanings (Gibbs 1994: 91).

From a cognitive linguistic point of view, "there is no separation of linguistic knowledge from general thinking or cognition", so "semantics is necessarily a part of the inquiry into cognition". According to cognitive linguists, metaphor is the basic conceptual structure and an essential element in our categorization of the world and our thinking processes (Saeed 2003: 344). Metaphors serve as the foundation for much of everyday thinking and reasoning. They also provide much of the foundation for our understanding of culture. Many facets of everyday thought and language are metaphorical, enough so that we should recognize metaphor as a primary mode of thought. Metaphoric language is prominent in many kinds of discourse and plays a significant role in individual speaker's behavior. (Gibbs 1994: 122-123). In the words of Lakoff and Johnson, metaphors serve to structure a conceptual system of our culture, which is in turn reflected in everyday language. Metaphors are also imaginative and creative, capable of giving us a new understanding of our experience and experience of others. They can give new meaning to our present and past activities and make us reinterpret what we know and believe. (Lakoff and Johnson 2003: 140).

The cognitivist approach is based on the assumption that the metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, the terms in which we think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature (Lewandowska 2014: 162). Metaphors are no longer seen as purely linguistic phenomena, but as a basic rational instrument of orientation and world interpretation (Lewandowska 2014: 163). Since proverbs are highly metaphorical and figurative texts, it seems logical to understand them from the

outlined cognitive point of view. Correctly interpreting a proverb requires information from the context. When uttering a proverb, a speaker generally does not want to convey the literal and objective meaning, but figurative meaning instead. Lakoff and Johnson point out that the understanding and interpretation of an utterance depend on the recipient's ability to distinguish from literal objective meaning and so-called indirect meaning (Lakoff, and Johnson 2003: 208). In addition to recognizing the context the recipients have to use their experience along with their knowledge about the world and language in order to decipher the intended meaning of an utterance.

The fact that we were able to come up with different interpretations for many of the previously considered anti-proverbs is precisely due to the extension of meaning with metaphorical senses. Just like a stand-up comedian is capable of creating impossible situations and flights of fantasy in the mind, we too are able to make sense of non-sense proverbial variations because of such conceptual shifts (Ross 2005: 35).

Metaphor is irreplaceable in the communication of new thoughts or new semantic contents. It serves as a link between the known and the unknown, the specific and the abstract, as well as a link between language and cognition (Lewandowska 2014: 163). What often makes anti-proverbs humorous is a strange analogy made between the original proverb and the variation, which results in a bizarre or awkwardly incongruous image (Ross 2005: 34).

> Even the traditional proverbs frequently mix metaphors, combining images from separate source domains into complex, sometimes incompatible collages. Thus, *Every cloud has a silver lining* first draws on the metaphoric domain of weather phenomena standing for human experience and emotion, then switches to a scalar domain where silver represents something precious and desirable. The lining is mysterious, fitting, as it does, neither with clouds nor with silver. We try to imagine the cloud as a garment with a precious lining, but then the bad weather aspect of the cloud disappears. The result is a jumble of incongruous metaphors from unrelated domains, which cannot really resolve itself at all. (Norrick 2014: 19).

After such an exhaustive dissection of the original proverb, the analysis of the anti-proverb variation *Every dog has a silver lining* appears suffice, but also necessary considering that the reader will still be able to metaphorically understand both versions of proverbs, despite their incongruous imagery. This kind of metaphorical reading is possible because, according to

cognitive semantics, the "meaning is based on conventionalized conceptual structures", and thus "semantic structure reflects the mental categories which people have formed from their experience of growing up and acting in the world" (Saeed 2003: 344). The proverb *Every cloud has a silver lining* is rarely interpreted in a literal way, even though it can make sense. The reader will usually associate it with the experience and concepts related to difficult time or a period of life. In contrast, the interpretation of this anti-proverb is quite an odd one. The reader knows that the sun does not shine behind the dog, and it does not create a silver lining around the edges of the animal. It may appear as a non-sense at first, but the reader will later be able to metaphorically interpret it and understand it through another concept. Perhaps it means that even an ill-mannered or aggressive dog has something good in him. It is just one of the possible interpretations. Metaphors enable the identification of resemblances and cause the transference of properties from one concept to another (Saeed, 346). Many proverbs and metaphors share similar or identical cognitive structures. They can be "perceived as stereotyped speech-forms that are based on socially efficient cognitive concepts." (Lewandowska 2014: 167).

The status of individual tropes in the proverb is not independent of the status of the proverbial whole, but the components' status does not determine the status of the whole. It is the status of the whole which determines the components' status, and can then be understood to stand in specific intra-proverbial interrelation. (Grzybek 2014: 89)

Taking into account the overall research done so far in this chapter, it seems that the semantic analysis presented constantly returns to the notion of context and experience as the crucial factors in determining the exact meaning behind (anti) proverbs. The attention has to be paid to the important interdependence of three basic categories: polyfunctionality (the same text may serve different functions), polysemanticity (the same text may represent different meanings), and heterosituativity (a proverb can convey different meanings, depending on the situation in which it is used) (Grzybek 2014: 106). Grzybek points out that none of these three categories, which condition each other in one way or another, can be interpreted in isolation, and concludes that "it seems to be for this specific interrelation that no ultimate meaning can ever be described to a particular proverb text" (Grzybek 2014: 106).

The following subchapter will look into the influences of context and different conversational situations on the meaning of (anti) proverbs, as well as the use of such proverbial features for the purposes of communication, discourse and mass media.

2.2. PRAGMATICS OF ANTI-PROVERBS

The simplest definition of pragmatics is "the study of language use" (Levinson, "Pragmatics" 5). Pragmatics studies meaning as communicated by the speaker and interpreted by the listener. Jesenšek claims that pragmatics commonly refers to the study of language use and theory of speech acts in concrete communicative situations. The point of the pragmatic theory is to explain how context is needed in the interpretation of utterance (Jesenšek 2014: 144). "We use the term speech act to describe actions such as 'requesting', 'commanding', 'questioning' or 'informing', thus "we can define a speech act as the action performed by a speaker with an utterance" (Yule 2010: 133). This concept goes back to the philosophy of language. It can be tracked to J.L. Austin's well-known work *How to do things with words* (Austin 1962: 21). Because of his contribution to pragmatics, Austin has been wildly acclaimed as the "father of pragmatics". He moved away from asking 'what do sentences mean?' to 'what sort of act do we perform in uttering a sentence?' This concept is referred to as the speech act theory (Ross 2005: 39).

2.2.1. Speech act

According to Ross, the possibilities for ambiguity arise when there is a gap between sense and force of an utterance. Misunderstandings are likely to happen when a person concentrates on the structural form of the utterance, rather than being aware of various functions it can have (Ross 2005: 39). A speaker may utter a sentence and mean exactly and literally what he/she says. But the use of devices like metaphor and other figurative levels of meaning, transfers such lexical meaning in part to pragmatic meaning, as we have noted previously. A speaker may utter a sentence and mean something more or different instead of what he/she says. It is an indirect speech act when "the speaker communicates to the hearer more than he actually says by way of relying on their mutually shared background information, both linguistic and nonlinguistic, together with the general powers of rationality and inference on the part of the hearer" (Grzybek 2014: 78-79).

For instance, the anti-proverb *Give a man a match, and he'll be warm for a minute, but set him on fire, and he'll be warm for the rest of his life* is a variation of *Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime*. It would probably

not be the appropriate thing to say in the company of a victim of fire. If the speaker and hearer lack the mutual background knowledge, they will probably form wrong assumptions. The victim of fire will not be sure about the performance of the speakers' act and might feel offended, whereas the speaker might simply be giving a love advice to a friend.

One of the key concepts for the analysis of meaning of language in use is the concept of *'presupposition'*. Presupposition is an assumption on which the meaning of the utterance largely depends.

> "We design our linguistic messages on the basis of large-scale assumptions about what our listeners already know. Some of these assumptions may be mistaken, of course, but mostly they're appropriate. What a speaker (or writer) assumes is true or known by a listener (or reader) can be described as a presupposition. (Yule 2010: 133)

If someone tells you *Your brother is waiting outside*, there is an obvious presupposition that you have a brother (Yule 2010: 133). In the speech act context, such an assumption is the minimal unit of human communication, not a sentence or other expression, but rather the performance of certain acts like making statements, asking questions, describing, apologizing, promising, thanking somebody, congratulating, offering, etc. Presuppositions are background competencies which language users activate to interpret speech acts, and precisely such assumptions will allow the analysis of the (anti) proverbs in the following unit.

If a speech act is perceived as an intention-driven and goal-oriented act of writing or talking, then the central aspects of the so-called phraseopragmatics are aspects of function. Proverbs possess many textual functions and they can also function as expressions of speech acts in concrete communicative situations (Jesenšek 2014: 144). "In such cases, we speak about the contextual (pragmatic) function of proverbs" (Jesenšek 2014: 135). Pragmatics builds upon the premise that the functionality of proverbs can only be identified and described in detail in textual and discourse contexts.

In the next section we will focus our attention on the speech act potential of (anti) proverbs. We will look into their various functions and purposes in specific communicative situations, and analyze their meaning depending on different contexts.

2.2.2. (Anti) proverbs as a form of speech act

Speech act theory distinguishes between representative (assertive), directive, commissive, expressive and declarative speech acts. This means that the proverbs can function as assessments, demands, advice, warnings, threats etc. (Jesenšek 2014: 149-150). When speakers use certain syntactic structures with the appropriate functions, the result is a *direct speech act*. But when one of the structures is used to perform a function other than the one as listed in the table below, the result is an *indirect speech act* (Yule, 134):

	Structures	**Functions**
Did you eat the pizza?	Interrogative	Question
Eat the pizza (please)!	Imperative	Command (Request)
You ate the pizza.	Declarative	Statement

In Austin's philosophy an indirect speech act is termed as illocutionary act, which is the intended meaning of the locutionary act, or simply that what is being said. The consequences or the effect of a speech act are termed as perlocutionary act (Jesenšek 2014: 136). From a pragmatic point of view it might be appropriate to classify a proverb as an indirect speech act (Grzybek 2014: 78) because rarely does a proverb fulfil the function of a declarative sentence that is either true or false. This is not always the case with anti-proverbs that reinterpret the proverbs literally for the purposes of humor, critique, etc. We must take into account anti-proverbs as representative (assertive), directive, commissive and expressive speech acts. (Jesenšek 2014: 150-151).

- *Representative (assertive) speech acts* express the commitment of the speaker/writer to stating the truth (to declare, to ascertain, to claim, to report, to describe, to notify, to inform, to predict, to classify etc.)
- *directive speech acts* are used as demands directed to the recipient/reader in order to convince them to take a particular action or to refrain from taking a particular action (to demand, to assign, to request, to order, to threaten, to advise, to allow, to forbid, to force; as well as other imperative verbs)

- *commissive speech acts* commit a speaker to (voluntarily) do or refrain from doing something in the future; a speaker uses it to express intent (to promise, to assure, to threaten, to guarantee, to comply etc.)
- *expressive speech acts* express the speaker's current state of emotion (to apologize, to praise, to criticize, to congratulate, to complain, to reprimand, to console)

For instance, the proverb *It's the early bird that catches the worm* is usually used as a directive speech act, more precisely an advice. The parody *It's the early bird that makes the most noise* has no such a function. Instead, it reinterprets the original proverb in a literal way and changes the second part of it which results in a representative speech act and therefore a descriptive sentence.

The proverb *When in Rome, do as the Romans do* usually expresses directive speech of convicting a recipient to take a particular action. But the anti-proverb *When in Rome, do it yourself* is also a directive speech act. It expresses the opposite by convincing the recipient to refrain from taking a particular action. This anti-proverb advises us that we should not follow the local customs of the country we are visiting, rather we should behave the way we usually do or simply as ourselves.

Similarly, the anti-proverb *Don't count your chickens in midstream* is a commissive speech act that can be interpreted as a warning. The original proverbs *Don't count your chickens before they hatch* and *Don't change horses in midstream* are both commissive speech acts as well. All of the three proverbs can be interpreted as a warning not to make major changes or decisions in an inappropriate time or when it is already too late.

We can interpret the anti-proverb *Beauty is the best policy* as an expressive speech act, a critique of society. The original version *Honesty is the best policy* is usually a directive speech act intended to advise someone. In this case the anti-proverb can be understood as a critique of the original statement and the wisdom it proposes.

Anti-proverbs flourish from doubts and skepticism against the wisdom and values of the folk proverbs. With their growing popularity over time and widespread use today, they have also contributed largely to the loss of the argumentative potential of proverbs.

Jesenšek points out that proverbs are particularly relevant in argumentative contexts. They do not explain the concrete or the particular, but the general and the abstract. This is why

they function as a generalized advice, instructions on how to act, justifications of actions, or explanations of actions (Jesenšek 2014: 145).

Such generalizations are often questioned by the anti-proverbs that doubt the validity of the original proverbs. "The traditional proverbs and their value system provide some basic structure, and if their worldview does not fit a particular situation, they are quickly changed into revealing and liberating anti-proverbs" (Mieder 2004: 153). For instance, let us take the proverb *Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise.* The proverb implies that some or many people who get enough sleep and start work early in the day are successful. As Mieder puts it, the proverb "instructs people to adhere to solid work ethics" (Mieder 2004: 161). It is simultaneously valid on both individual and social level. On the other hand, *Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy and likely to talk about it* questions the validity of the original statement by replacing it with another generalization valid on both individual and social level, which is that those who are wealthy are likely to brag about themselves.

Mieder spends a great deal talking about the variants of this proverb in his book *Proverbs: A Handbook* where he notes the change in the function of the proverb from Benjamin Franklin's economic advice *Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise*, its later commonsense medical advice in variation *Early to bed, early to rise, moderate exercise,* onto proverb *Early to bed and early to rise is no good unless you advertise* that encourages merchants to advertise their products (Mieder 2004: 174-177). Some of the other thought-provoking parodies of the proverb that the author mentions are: *Late to bed and early to rise, and your head will feel five times its size, Early to bed and early to rise will make you miss all the regular guys*, *Early to rise and early to bed makes a man healthy and wealthy and dead, Late to bed, late to rise, who in the hell wants to be wise?*, etc. Mieder emphasizes that the "frequent quotation of this proverb has led people to react with humor or satire to its solid-work-ethics ideal, and these proverb parodies, or anti-proverbs, clearly express some sort of wisdom as well" (Mieder 2004: 178).

The possible doubt in the validity or the negation of the proverb-specific universal statement stems from the argumentative function of proverbs. It is not stable or absolutely given, but it can only be carried out and understood in an interpretative and concrete contextual frame (Jesenšek 2014: 147). The important term is *inference* or the "additional information used by the listener to create a connection between what is said and what must be meant" (Yule

2010: 132). Inference is a process whereby active previous knowledge enables the recipient to draw conclusions and derive meaning from the context. Such inferences can also emanate from doubts and negations of a generalized statement (Jesenšek 2014: 146).

In an argumentative context, the anti-proverbs can be used to provoke such inferences or conclusions. *He who laughs last is lost* can be used to counter the validity of the statement *He who laughs last laughs best* by the means of implying that it is not always the person in the end that prevails or that is in control, and referring to those who laugh last because they do not get the joke. The anti-proverb doubts the original proverb by substituting its generalization and reducing its meaning.

Anti-proverbs frequently combine multiple proverbs to draw such conclusions that will question the wisdom of the original statements. For example, the anti-proverb *Talk is money* can be related to three proverbs:

Talk is cheap – which implies that it is easier to say something than actually do it,

Money talks - which implies that those who are wealthy have more power or influence,

Time is money – which implies that time is a valuable and thus one should not waste it while one could be using it to earn money,

All of these proverbs revolve around the terms 'money' and 'talk', with the proverb *Money talks* linking the proverbs *Talk is cheap* and *Time is money* through terms 'money' and 'talk'. If we take the premises *Talk is cheap, Money talks* and *Time is money* into logical considerations, we can derive the following conclusions:

If *Talk is cheap* and *Money talks*, then *Money is cheap*;

If *Money is cheap* and *Time is money*, then *Time is cheap*;

If *Time is cheap* and *Money is cheap* then *Talk is time* and *Talk is money*.

Anti-proverbs often logically manipulate the proverbs in order to show that they are neither true nor false statements and therefore prove that they are invalid. If one deals with proverbs only as a concept of a cultural fact or truism, contradictions are easily found in any proverb repertoire. The reason why contradictory proverbs like *Birds of a feather flock together*" and *Opposites attract* exists is primarily because people ignore their social context (Mieder 2008: 20).

Anti-proverbs are important because they clearly show that the structure and wording of proverbs are by no means sacred, and that the fixity of proverbs is not as rigid as it once was believed to be (Mieder 2008: 28). Until the period of enlightenment, proverbs were perceived as universally applicable expressions of folk wisdom with a convincing effect. The authority of the argumentative proverbial saying was highly regarded, whereas later they were degraded as stereotypical sayings (Jesenšek 2014: 149). Both proverbs and anti-proverbs function effectively in social situations because the meaning of any proverb is actually evident only after it has been contextualized. This is why proverbs are not contradictory at all in a normal discourse, because they make perfect sense to the speaker and listener (Mieder 2008: 20). Various potential meanings of regular proverbs may predominate in any particular discourse context. *No news is good news* means either that news is never positive or the absence of new information leaves hope that nothing bad has happened; similarly, the phrase *get up with the fleas* in the proverb *Lie down with the dogs and get up with the fleas* may mean either arise when the fleas do or arise infested with them (Norrick 2014: 17).

An important function of anti-proverbs is to show the negative side of proverbs. If proverbs are applied as universal rules in an excessive fashion, even a health proverb can lead to illness (Mieder 2004: 176). We may say that there was a shift in the function of proverbs. They partially lost their argumentative function, although they still reflect important structures of argumentative thinking in a speech community (Jesenšek 2014: 149).

2.2.3. Anti-proverbs in context

Mieder claims that "unintentional variants have always existed in as much as proverbs are part of folklore, but intentional variations have also been part of the use and function of proverbs, both oral and written" (Mieder 2004: 28). The argumentative thinking in a speech community is often reflected and doubted by many of anti-proverbs used "in opinion-based, persuasive types of text, such as journals, commentaries, advertising texts etc., where the literal and idiomatic way of reading a proverb is simultaneously activated, and where text-type-related use of proverbs reflects their polyfunctional character (Jesenšek 2014: 136). Journalist often use proverbs or anti-proverbs to get the attention of consumer: This is also true for advertisements, grafitti, bumper stickers or T-shirts that exhibit (un)altered proverbs as old or new messages of modern age (Mieder 2004: 162).

Proverbs are often used as a way of organizing and structuring text which refers to their location in a text, and Jesenšek distinguishes between the functions of proverbs based on their location in the text - at the beginning of the text, at the end of a text, and proverbs in the function of a text framing elements (Jesenšek 2014: 156).

> Proverbs featured in headlines enable short, concise and opinion-based (expressive) introductions of the topic and thus perform an attention-directing pragmatic stylistic function, acting as "retainers". They are supposed to establish contact with the reader, facilitate and possibly evoke their attention, and provide an incentive for reading (all in the function to emotionalise), while establishing coherence with the content of the respective text at the same time. (Jesenšek 2014: 154)

Mieder agrees with this by claiming that proverbs placed at the beginning of an article in large and bold print summarize the content of an article into an interpretive and emotionalized image (Mieder 2014: 41). Jesenšek explains that the attention-directing effects of such proverbs come from slight modifications or deviations from the anticipated norm in particular situation-related communicative context, or simply their adaptation to the content of a text (Jesenšek 2014: 154). For instance, the proverb *It never rains but it pours,* was used by the Morton Salt Company in 1914. It was a part of their slogan *When it rains, it pours*, and appeared in newspapers to advertise the fact they had developed a salt that would pour out of a package even in humid weather (Mieder 2004: 250).

Mieder points out that journalists enjoy 'playing' with proverbs and creating revealing anti-proverbs. That is a tactic used in order to get the attention of the readers who then want to read the entire article (Mieder 2004: 250). A good example is a 2008 article from New York Times which reads *Once bitten, twice bankrupt*. The semantic alteration in the form of replacing the word 'shy' in the usual proverb *Once bitten, twice shy* with the word 'bankrupt' introduces the central topic of the text which are financial difficulties of a company. The generalizing content of the proverb that calls for caution after an unpleasant experience of doing something is projected to a concrete situation. It introduces what is to follow in the text, a description of unreasonable actions that facilitated the bankrupt of Steve & Barry's clothing chain. The repetition of the word bankruptcy in the proceeding text leads to semantic correlation on the surface of text and establishes cohesion and coherence. Such thematic progression in this

coherence-inducing frame includes the expressive, argumentative, emphasizing and accentuating stylistic-pragmatic functions of phraseological expressions (Jesenšek 2014: 156).

> Such proverbial headlines can be found in all sections of newspapers and magazines, from politics and economics to sports and entertainment. This play with proverbial language can go so far that up to three headlines based on proverbs and proverbial expressions can be found on just one page, including sophisticated newspapers like the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal. (Mieder 2004: 250)

A proverb may be located at the end of the text too. "The most important function of a proverb, which is located at the end of a text or text segment respectively, is to summarize what has been stated before" (Jesenšek 2014: 156). A good example is an article entitled *An Apple a Day Does Not Keep the Doctor Away After All,* which is about a survey on apple eaters and their health. The concluding sentence includes a parody *An apple a day keeps the pharmacist away.* The use of this phraseological unit at the end of the text represent the focal 'point' of a text, in this case article that disproves the wisdom of the traditional proverb *An apple a day keeps the doctor away.* What turned out in this not so serious study, is that regular apple eaters apparently spend less money on prescription medicine. The anti-proverb at the end of this article acts like a punchline of a joke.

Proverbial variations are also a form of a revolt against the rationality, conformity, and moral standards of the traditional proverbial rules and the social mores that they represent (Mieder 2004: 251). This type of variation is particularly used in opinion-based journalistic texts (Jesenšek 2014: 156). One such article is *One man's meat is another's person,* an article on human diet and controversial aspect of consumption of human meat. An alternation of *One man's meat is another man's poison*, the anti-proverb's concept of meat, precisely human, reoccurs in a contextual frame. The main statement can be interpreted as expressive and argumentative. It is used to show people repelled by cannibalism as hypocrites who make their cannibalistic acts in a so-called civilization as well.

From a historical point of view, proverbs have fulfilled various functions. From instructions within the confines of monastic education, quick-witted responses in accordance with the rules of conversation at a royal court, all the way to comments emanating from the humanist intellectual discourse regarding the experiential content of the proverb, and the focus of observation in such contexts is the holistic pragmatic action-function-and-effect potential of

proverbs (Jesenšek 2014: 134-135). Jesenšek argues that for all functions of proverbs it can be applied that

> (1) they can be identified only in specific contexts;
>
> (2) a proverb can, in principle, be assigned various functions (polyfunctionality);
>
> (3) a specifically and intentionally applied proverb can fulfill many functions at the s ame time (functional cluster). (Jesenšek 2014: 136)

"An important realization is implied that proverbs cannot be attributed any functions per se without being inserted in a specific context" and "the functions of proverbs can only be identified through a context-and-situation-based interpretative analysis" (Jesenšek, 136). Proverbs and their variations do not represent a logical philosophical system. When the proper proverb is chosen for a particular situation, it is bound to fit perfectly and it becomes an effective formulaic strategy of communication (Mieder 2004: 1). References of reinterpretations of the classical proverbs can be found in newspapers and magazines throughout the world. Some of them are extremely satirical and cynical, and others full of irony or even humor. Just like the reactions of modern people who would like to liberate humankind from its basic and unfortunate truth about human nature (Mieder 2004: 42-43).

CONCLUSION

We can conclude that semantic or pragmatic analysis alone cannot lead to a complete understanding of meaning and use of anti-proverbs. Only the interdependence of these linguistic disciplines has shown as a pre-condition for such analysis. The reason for this lies in the fact that proverbs can be read in both literal and metaphorical way. The way of interpreting them also depends on the different situations in which they appear, as well as on the linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge of both speaker and hearer.

This research on anti-proverbs was able to differentiate between different mechanism such as polysemanticity, homonymy, semantic incongruities etc. on which anti-proverbs and their humorous effect rely. We have shown that anti-proverbs have an underlying meaning apart from what is suggested. This emphasizes the importance of the pragmatic aspect. All the proverbs in this work rely largely on context and could be subjected to meaningful analysis only when put in contextual situations, whether it is a text, a conversational situation or a cognitive context. This is particularly evident in the final analysis of anti-proverbs in mass media. That is where their expressive and argumentative functions are the most prominent. The presence of proverbs and anti-proverbs indicates that they have a crucial role in the society. The questioning and the negations of the proverbial wisdom in form of anti-proverbs is built upon the mutual linguistic and extra-linguistic ground that the English speaking community shares, and which is a reflection of the current trends in the society, just like it is a confirmation of a never ceasing force and importance of folk sayings.

It is only with an interdisciplinary approach to the problem that we were able to explain the anti-proverbs in our analysis, more precisely what they mean, why and how they mean, what is behind their humorous effect, the reason why they have been used and the effect their uttering makes on the hearer. A much deeper and more detailed analysis is necessary to come up with more precise conclusions about semantic and pragmatic rules behind occurrences of anti-proverbs in certain types of texts or conversational situations, as well as their dependence on the background knowledge of English speakers.

In conclusion, hopefully this paper was able to provide a glimpse into the problematic and complex interdisciplinary linguistic phenomenon of anti-proverbs which lacks serious study in the linguistic field, as well as provide some useful insights to be more developed in further research on this topic.

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Appendix A

Analyzed anti-proverbs:

1. A bird in the hand is a dangerous thing.
2. Absence speaks louder than words.
3. An apple a day keeps the pharmacist away.
4. A penny saved is a penny taxed.
5. Beauty is the best policy.
6. Don't count your chickens in midstream.
7. Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy, and likely to talk about it.
8. Everything comes to him who waits for no man.
9. Every dog has a silver lining.
10. Give a man a match, and he'll be warm for a minute, but set him on fire, and he'll be warm for the rest of his life.
11. Hair today, gone tomorrow.
12. He who laughs last is lost.
13. It's the early bird that makes the most noise.
14. There’s no fool like an old fool who marries a young fool.
15. Once bitten, twice bankrupt.
16. One man’s meat is another's person.
17. Talk is money.
18. The pen is father to the thought.
19. There’s no fool like an old fool who marries a young fool.
20. Too many cooks are better than one.
21. When in Rome, do it yourself.
22. Where there's a will, there's a lawsuit.