

## **AMERICAN PROVERBS AS AN INTERNATIONAL, NATIONAL AND GLOBAL PHENOMENON**

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Proverbs as one of the smallest ubiquitous folklore genres have been collected and studied since the beginning of written records. Both paremiographers and paremiologists have been hard at work at publishing collections and treatises throughout the world. In fact, proverb scholarship has reached such a phenomenal level of accomplishment that it is difficult for the fledgling proverb scholar to deal with the plethora of valuable information (see Moll 1958; Mieder 1982, 1990, 1993, 2001). And yet, as is true for most intellectual endeavors, there still remains much work to be done in both areas of proverb studies. The varied use and function of proverbs as cultural signs and strategically placed rhetorical devices need to be investigated in much more detail by paying attention to different historical periods (Burke 1941; Seitel 1969; Obelkevich 1987; Profantová 1998). Much can also still be learned by socio- and psycholinguistic approaches that look at proverbs from the point of view of cognition, comprehension, and communication (Mieder 2003a). Above all, much more attention should be paid to the continued employment of proverbs in the modern age of technology, the mass media, the internet, and general globalization (Mieder 1993). But additional proverb collections based on serious lexicographical principles are also a definite desideratum, including regional, national, and international compilations. While much is known about common European proverbs, it is high time to assemble comprehensive and comparative African as well as Near and Far Eastern proverb collections. Such compendia will eventually enable paremiographers to isolate fundamental proverb types that connect peoples through common wisdom all over the world (Mieder 1990; Grigas 1996, 2000a).

### **The International Base of American Proverbs**

The sub-field of comparative paremiography can indeed look back on a strong tradition with several hundred polyglot collections having been assembled during

the past centuries. This is especially the case for European proverbs with their common classical, Biblical, and medieval Latin origins. However, many of these collections are mere enumerations of texts without any scholarly apparatus revealing the origin and historical dissemination of such common proverbs. It is for this reason that the Lithuanian paremiographer and paremiologist Kazys Grigas some thirty years ago was justified to begin the introduction to his significant comparative proverb collection *Lietuvių patarlės* (1976) with the statement that “the correlation between national and international elements in proverbs of different nations has received very little attention” (Grigas 1976, 294). And the following paragraph from these introductory remarks holds as true today as when they were composed by Kazys Grigas:

What are the laws of interrelation between the linguistic and extralinguistic factors which govern the origin, evolution, dissemination, longevity and death of proverbs and, finally, the penetration of their imagery into different languages? What are the levers which direct the movement of proverbs into one or another channel? What is the correlation of qualitative linguistic differences and similarities in proverbial texts? What elements reflect individual cultures – ethnic traditions and the mode of spiritual life, – and what has to be ascribed to phenomena typical of many cultures? What facts of language, linguistic stylistics and history of culture must be summoned up to investigate the national sources of proverbs and proverbial phrases of one’s own people? And, finally, what is the ratio of internationally disseminated proverbs to proverbs of restricted distribution within the lore of one nation?

Grigas 1976: 295

These questions occupied Kazys Grigas throughout his long and active life, and he has provided many answers regarding especially the national corpus of Lithuanian proverbs and its relationship to European proverbs in such superb publications as his comparative proverb collection *Patarlių paralelės* (1987), his magisterial national collection of *Lietuvių patarlės ir priežodžiai* (2000b) that will eventually comprise five massive volumes, as well as numerous essays tracing the origin and international distribution of individual proverbs (Grigas 1995, 1998).

Cognizant of the importance of the English language and culture, Kazys Grigas has, of course, included many English equivalents or variants in his polyglot collections. The same is true for the many other modern paremiographers with comparative interests, as can be seen from such invaluable collections as Jerzy Gluski’s *Proverbs: A Comparative Book of English, French, German, Italian, Spanish and Russian Proverbs with a Latin Appendix* (1971), Jens Aa. Stabell Bilgrav’s *20.000 Proverbs and Their Equivalents in German, French, Swedish, Danish* (1985), Matti Kuusi’s *Proverbia septentrionalia. 900 Balto-Finnic Proverb Types with Russian, Baltic, German and Scandinavian Parallels* (1985), Emanuel Strauss’ *Dictionary of European Proverbs* (1994), Luis Iscla’s *English Proverbs and Their Near Equivalents in Spanish, French, Italian and Latin* (1995), and Teodor Flonta’s *A Dictionary of English and Romance Languages Equivalent Proverbs* (2001). In fact, these comparative collections are based on the English language as a recognized world language, and this is also the case with Gyula Paczolay’s unrivaled polyglot collection of *European Proverbs in 55 Languages with Equivalents in Arabic*,

*Persian, Sanskrit, Chinese and Japanese* (1997), one of the finest paremiographical accomplishments of all times.

The proverbs listed as “English” in these collections are indeed current in Great Britain, but for the most part they are also very much in use in the other parts of the world where English is spoken. After all, these polyglot collections with their limited number of entries deal with the most common European proverbs, with almost all of them having classical, Biblical, or medieval Latin origins, i.e., they are to a considerable degree not really indigenous to Great Britain at all. And there is another problem with these polyglot compendia, useful as they are for comparative purposes and for translators as well as students of foreign languages. They basically contain a certain European paremiological minimum shared by most European languages or at least by such linguistically related languages as the Baltic, Germanic, Romance, or Slavic languages (Mieder 2000b; Voigt 2000). What they include to a much lesser extent are nationally distinct variants or various degrees of equivalents. And regarding the English language, no distinction is being made to proverbs particular to Canadian, American, Australian and any of the other “Englishes” spoken on the globe. In addition, modern English-language proverbs, no matter what their origin might be, are not listed, even though some of them have entered other languages through loan translations.

But in any case, there is no doubt that the English-language proverbs in use in the world in general and in great Britain as well as the United States in particular are a proverbial mixed bag and certainly represent quite an international phenomenon. Such proverbs as “One swallow does not make a summer”, “One hand washes the other”, “Big fish eat little fish” (Mieder 1987: 178–228, 2003b), and “Love is blind” go back to classical times and were loan translated into English. Biblical proverbs like “He who digs a pit for another, will fall into it himself” (Proverbs 26: 27), “Man does not live by bread alone” (Deuteronomy 8: 3 and Matthew 4,4), “As you sow, so will you reap” (Galatians 6: 7–8), and “He that will not work, shall not eat” (2 Thessalonians 3: 10) have entered the English language through skillful Bible translations, and many medieval Latin proverbs have also been anglicized, among them “The pitcher goes so long to the well until at last it breaks”, “Strike while the iron is hot”, “All that glitters is not gold”, and “New Brooms sweep clean” (Taylor 1931: 43–65; Röhrich / Mieder 1977: 37–40). Nevertheless, the English language of Great Britain has its own rich proverb tradition with thousands of well-known texts, as for example “Beauty is only skin-deep”, “A penny saved is a penny earned”, “A friend in need is a friend indeed”, and “The proof of the pudding is in the eating”. British settlers brought this international and national proverb repertoire with them to the United States, and other immigrant groups carried their foreign language proverbs with them as well, of which some have been translated into English as well. A couple of German proverbs that were translated into English and which have become very popular in the United States over time are “Don’t throw the baby out with the bath water” and “The apple does not fall far from the tree” (Mieder 1993: 193–224, 2000a: 109–144). But proverbs from immigrants of other nationalities have also been translated, notably from Italian and ever more from Spanish because

of the millions of bilingual Spanish / English speakers. The rich Yiddish proverb tradition has also had a considerable influence on proverbs current in American English, but paremiologists need to investigate more individual proverbs to illustrate these fascinating linguistic and cultural processes. Most collections and studies of proverbs have looked only at the texts in their native languages without paying any attention to their loan translations gaining currency in the United States (de Caro and McNeil 1971; Mieder 1989a: 47–70). Much important work still needs to be done to study the proverb lore that has become part of the American language by means of translating foreign language proverbs of the thousands of immigrants.

It also needs to be pointed out that Native Americans have had a minuscule influence on the American proverb corpus. This is not due to the terrible treatment that the Indian tribes received from the immigrants and the eliminationist policies of various government agencies. The reason lies in the yet unsolved conundrum of the incredible dearth of proverbs among the Native Americans. Anthropologists have recorded only very few proverbs from a number of tribes, and the total of recorded indigenous Indian proverbs is at best two hundred! This is a truly astonishing phenomenon when one considers, for example, the wealth of African proverbs that have been collected from oral tradition. It appears that Indians have less metaphorical language, and wisdom was handed down orally more through folk narratives than such proverbs as “The deer, though toothless, may accomplish something” (don’t judge by appearances), “When the fox walks lame, old rabbit jumps”, and “The moon is not shamed by the barking of dogs” (Mieder 1989a: 99–110; Gossen 1973). Basically then, the majority of proverbs in general use in America was imported, and just as this large country represents an international melting pot, so the proverbs, with a preponderance of British texts, are a smorgasbord of traditional wisdom. This also includes African proverbs brought to America with the unfortunate slaves and resulting in a very rich African American proverb tradition (Daniel 1973; Mieder 1989a: 111–128). And yet, this international basis of proverbs also contains national American proverbs that were coined in the United States and which spread regionally as well as throughout the entire land.

Turning to the specific case of American proverbs, i.e., proverbs that can be proven to have originated in the United States, matters become quite complex if not chaotic. Actually, some comparative paremiographers have paid some lip-service to the obvious importance of American proverbs in the modern world. Thus Selwyn Gurney Champion in his still valuable collection of *Racial Proverbs. A Selection of the World’s Proverbs arranged Linguistically* (1938) did in fact include a small list of 73 “American – USA” proverbs, among them “Don’t sell America short”, “Put up or shut up”, “Life is just one damned thing after another”, and “Every man must skin his own skunk” (613–614). Other examples, however, can be traced back at least to British origins, pointing clearly to the difficulty of establishing the national American identity of a particular proverb. The same is the case for the section of 56 proverbs from the “United States” in Gerd de Ley’s *International Dictionary of Proverbs* (1998), where one finds proverbs like “Ignorance is bliss” and “Love laughs at locksmiths” that are determinately not of American origin. My own *Encyclopedia*

of *World Proverbs* (1986a) and Harold V. Cordry's *The Multicultural Dictionary of Proverbs* (1997) list considerably more American proverbs throughout their many pages. However, both Cordry and I have clearly made errors in labelling some proverbs as "American". Upon closer scrutiny one quite often finds that such texts had been in use in Great Britain before they became established in the United States.

### **American Proverbs as a Distinct National Corpus**

Fortunately, however, paremiographers have at least several excellent historical proverb dictionaries at their disposal that help to establish the origin and distribution of English language proverbs in Great Britain and the United States (in part also Canada). There is no need to review the long and impressive history of British paremiography here. Suffice it to mention F. P. Wilson's third edition of *The Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs* (1970) and the third edition of John Simpson's and Jennifer Speake's *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs* (1998). Regarding the issue of American proverbs at hand, four major historical dictionaries based on sound scholarly practices are available to the paremiographer, including thousands of proverbs and variants recorded from written sources that span all four centuries of the development of the United States: Bartlett Jere Whiting, *Early American Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases* (1977), Archer Taylor and Bartlett Jere Whiting *A Dictionary of American Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases, 1820–1880* (1958), Bartlett Jere Whiting, *Modern Proverbs and Proverbial Sayings* (1989, and Wolfgang Mieder, Stewart A. Kingsbury, and Kelsie B. Harder, *A Dictionary of American Proverbs* (1992). There is, however, one major problem with these collections in that they are an international hodgepodge of proverbs from many sources and only in part comprised of national American texts. Their titles are thus somewhat misleading in that the word "American" merely signifies that the registered proverbs in these volumes are in common use in North America. They are "American" proverbs in that the general population makes use of them frequently as concisely expressed traditional bits of wisdom. As such, they certainly belong in a general dictionary of so-called American proverbs, albeit that many of them are not of American origin.

The complexity of all of this was demonstrated by the American paremiologist Richard Jente in the early 1930s. He was able to show that of a collection of 199 supposedly American proverbs only 10 or a mere 5% were in fact coined in the United States, among them "Don't kick a fellow when he is down", "It pays to advertise", and "Great minds run in the same channels" (Jente 1931–1932; Mieder 1989a: 29–45). About the same time, the American poet Carl Sandburg (1878–1967) with his ear close to the ground of proverbial folk speech, composed his long poem *Good Morning, America* (1928) as well as his epic poem *The People, Yes* (1936) (Mieder 1971, 1973). They are replete with hundreds of proverbs and proverbial expressions from all walks of life and ethnic minorities of the United States. He saw himself as the voice of the cross section of American life, being very well aware of the fact that proverbs, despite their conciseness and simplicity, make up the worldview or mentality of practical life (Dundes 1972; Lau 1996; Nussbaum

1998; Hakamies 2002). As he put it in section eleven of *Good Morning, America*, it behooves lay-people and scholars alike to “behold the proverbs of a people, a nation”, for they are verbal and cultural signs of their mores and attitudes:

A code arrives; language; lingo; slang;  
behold the proverbs of a people, a nation:  
Give’em the works. Fix it, there’s always  
a way. Be hard boiled. The good die young.

<...>

Business is business.  
What you don’t know won’t hurt you.  
Courtesy pays.  
Fair enough.  
The voice with a smile.  
Say it with flowers.  
Let one hand wash the other.  
The customer is always right.

<...>

There are lies, damn lies and statistics.  
Figures don’t lie but liars can figure.  
There’s more truth than poetry in that.  
You don’t know the half of it, dearie.

It’s the roving bee that gathers the honey.  
A big man is a big man whether he’s a president or a prizefighter.

<...>

It pays to look well.  
Be yourself.  
Speak softly and carry a big stick.  
War is hell.  
Honesty is the best policy.  
It’s all in the way you look at it.  
Get the money – honestly if you can.  
It’s hell to be poor.  
Well, money isn’t everything.  
Well, life is what you make it.

<...>

There must be pioneers and some of them get killed.  
The grass is longer in the backyard.

<...>

Can you unscramble eggs?  
Early to bed and early to rise and you never meet any prominent people.  
Let’s go. Watch our smoke. Excuse our dust.  
Keep your shirt on.

Sandburg 1970: 328–330 (section eleven)

This is a revealing composite of slang and proverbial speech to characterize American society, integrating phrasal elements almost at random from all segments of the American people. What a daunting task it would be to trace the origin of each



expression of this collage, be they from other lands or actually of American coinage (Bryan and Mieder 2003). While it is difficult to prove a general American origin, the problem of establishing what proverbs might have been coined in a particular state or region of the United States is an even more vexing proposition. In fact, the question of the origin of any particular proverb becomes a major research project in itself. It is thus extremely difficult to speak of American proverbs, New England proverbs (Mieder 1989b), or even Vermont proverbs (Mieder 1986b). Such designations are to a large degree mere constructs. However, the issue is, in any case, not so much one of origin but rather the fact that a particular proverb or a set of proverbs have been in use or are presently in common employment somewhere in the United States in general or in certain regions.

But there is no reason to despair, even though it is high time that paremiographers put together a scholarly collection of *bona fide* American proverbs. The four hybrid collections contain, after all, numerous proverbs that have been proven to be of a purely American origin. They do represent a national stock of American proverbs, expressing to a certain degree also the American worldview that has developed over a period of four centuries. Benjamin Franklin, who for the most part copied the proverbs for his *Poor Richard's Almanacks* during the first half of the eighteenth century out of British proverb collections, was nevertheless the originator of a number of proverbs: “Three removes is (are) as bad as a fire”, “Laziness travels so slowly, that poverty soon overtakes him”, “Industry pays debts, while despair increases them”, and “There will be sleeping enough in the grave” (Gallacher 1949; Mieder 1989a: 129–142). They certainly helped to establish the American ideal of Puritan ethics that included the idea of the “self-made man”, giving hope to thousands of immigrants as they looked forward to make their fortune in this thriving country (Dundes 1969). The pragmatically oriented transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson added the ever-popular proverb “Hitch your wagon to a star” in 1870 as an expression of high hopes for a good life to the optimistic American worldview (see La Rosa 1969; Mieder 1989a: 143–169). But Emerson was also an early American paremiologist, reflecting deeply on the purpose of proverbs in the expanding American society. In his first lecture on “Shakspear” [*sic*] (1835) he speaks of proverbs as “pictures” and of “the value of their analogical import”. These comments foreshadow the modern theoretical interpretation of proverbs as signs (Grzybek 1987; Tóthné Litovkina 1996). One could indeed speak of Emerson as a precursor to paremiological semiotics:

The memorable words of history and the proverbs of nations consist usually of a natural fact selected as a picture or parable of moral truth. Thus, “A rolling stone gathers no moss”; “A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush”; “A cripple in the right way will beat a racer in the wrong”; “Tis hard to carry a full cup even”; “Vinegar is the son of wine”; “The last ounce broke the camel’s back”; “Long lived trees make roots first”; and the like. In their primary sense these are trivial facts but we repeat them for the value of their analogical import.

December 10, 1835; Whicher / Spiller / Williams 1964, I, 290

With the addition of the proverb “Make hay whilst the sun shines”, Emerson also included this paragraph in his significant chapter on “Language” in his book

*Nature* (1836), explaining that “the world is emblematic. Parts of speech are metaphors because the whole of nature is a metaphor of the human mind” (1836; Ferguson / Slater 1971, I: 21–22). Clearly then Emerson looks at proverbs as emblematic or analogic signs for nature in general and humanity in particular.

It is also a known fact that at the beginning of the twentieth century President Theodore Roosevelt declared that American international politics ought to follow the wisdom of “Speak softly and carry a big stick” (1901), and this utterance has long since become an often quoted American proverb. But most of the American proverbs are, of course, anonymous, or nobody thinks of their individual originators any longer, as can be seen from such proverbs as “Paddle your own canoe” (expressing the spirit of independence), “The best defense is a good offense” (being proactive), “You can’t unscramble eggs” (impossibilities), “Figures don’t lie” (reliance on facts), “Banks have no heart” (economics), “What is good for General Motors, is good for America” (big business), “Life begins at forty” (youthfulness), “Garbage in, garbage out” (world of computers), and even the scatological “Shit happens” (acceptance of fate). Some of these examples clearly show that proverbs are still being coined today, while others drop out since they do not fit modern attitudes and mores any longer. Older English proverbs like “A woman’s tongue wags like a lamb’s tail” or “Spare the rod and spoil the child” have disappeared or are on their way out, while such proverbs as “A woman without a man is like a fish without a bicycle” or “There is no free lunch” are steadily gaining in currency and popularity.

Other modern truly American proverbs originated among the Black population and have entered general American folk speech, for example “What goes around comes around” and, of course, the truly liberating and quintessential American proverb “Different strokes for different folks” from the 1950s (Mieder 1989a: 317–332; McKenzie 1996). But just as certain ethnic groups have their own proverbs, the different professions have also formulated proverbs that fit their interests. Proverbs like “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” and “An apple a day keeps the doctor away” are old British health rules that continue to be in frequent use in America, while “If you hear hoofbeats, think horses, not zebras” is a modern American piece of advice to young physicians who might be looking too hard for rare diseases rather than common ailments (Dundes / Streiff / Dundes 1999). Just as medical doctors have their proverbial maxims, so lawyers possess legal rules to fall back on that have been in use in Latin and the vernacular since the Middle Ages, such as “A man’s home is his castle” and “First come, first served”. But there is also that infamous proverbial statement “If the glove doesn’t fit, you must acquit” that was coined by the defense lawyer Johnnie Cochran during the O. J. Simpson murder trial in 1995. Other indigenous American proverbs that have gained general currency especially during the twentieth century are among many others “The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence” (Mieder 1994: 515–542), “Hindsight is twenty-twenty”, “Life is just a bowl of cherries”, “Shit or get off the pot”, “It takes two to tango”, and “You’re only young once”. Popular culture, films, and the entire mass media play a major role in spreading such new proverbs. While proverbs continue to be cited in their standard wording in the modern age, they quite often get changed into so-



called anti-proverbs that intentionally vary the wisdom of the traditional wording, as for example “No body is perfect” (Nobody is perfect) or “Home is where the computer is” (Home is where the heart is). In fact, these two anti-proverbs are presently well on their way of becoming new American proverbs in their own right (Mieder / Tóthné Litovkina 1999). They reflect Americans’ preoccupation with the appearance and health of their bodies, and Americans certainly feel the need to be connected to a computer and the internet most of the time.

But here are a few additional relatively new American proverbs that have gained much popularity throughout the country during the past half century. While many are contained in *A Dictionary of American Proverbs* (1992), others are part of a fascinating annotated list that the American paremiologist Charles C. Doyle has put together after detailed analysis as to their origin. He entitled his list quite appropriately “On ‘New’ Proverbs and the Conservativeness of Proverb Dictionaries” (1996), thereby pointing out that paremiographers everywhere must pay much more attention to modern proverbs (Rees 1984). Not doing this gives people the absolutely false impression that proverbs are not created any longer, while actually quite the opposite is true. Modern people, even of a highly technological society as that of the United States, are still very much in need to couch their observations and experiences into concise proverbs expressing the wisdom of their age in modern metaphors, as for example:

Been there, done that.  
The buck stops here.  
The camera doesn’t lie.  
You can’t beat (fight) city hall.  
Crime doesn’t pay.  
Another day, another dollar.  
No guts, no glory.  
Nice guys finish last.  
Last hired, first fired.  
You only live once.  
It’s better to be pissed off than to be pissed on.  
If you can’t say something nice (good), don’t say anything at all.  
You can prove anything with statistics.  
Three strikes and you’re out.  
Don’t sweat the small stuff.  
It takes one to know one.  
If you want to talk the talk, you got to walk the walk.  
Things are tough all over.  
It’s the thought that counts.  
Two can live as cheaply as one.  
That’s the way the ball bounces.  
Winning isn’t everything.

The various American oriented proverb collections mentioned earlier contain hundreds more proverbs that were coined in the United States, indicating clearly that this immigrant nation has had and continues to have its own history of proverb making.

## American Proverbs as a Global Phenomenon

These texts are but a small sample of American proverbs that are in common usage in the United States and that have been spread to a large degree also throughout the rest of the English-speaking world. They express modern thoughts regarding individuals in their relationship with social issues, ranging from a claim of personal freedom to the submission to outside forces, from optimism to pessimism, and from the humorous to the sublime (White 1987). Many of them are not particularly metaphorical, stating their proverbial wisdom instead in rather direct language and thus reflecting a rather matter-of-fact attitude towards modern mass society. As such they are easily transferable from one English-speaking culture to another, except for such proverbs as “Three strikes and you’re out” or “Another day, another dollar” with their specifically American references to the game of baseball and the standard currency.

But this constantly increasing global influence of American as well as earlier British proverbs is by no means limited to those countries where English is the national language. While much more research is needed to illustrate the acceptance of American proverbs either in their English wording or as loan translations in other national languages and cultures, I have been able to show by some detailed studies that this is most certainly the case in Germany, a country where the population perhaps has been too quick at times to take over thousands of American words and to a lesser degree also phraseologisms (Carstensen / Busse 1993–1996). The take-over of proverbs is by no means always positive, as in the case of the American stereotypical proverb “The only good Indian is a dead Indian” that gained currency in the United States after the Civil War. It is a terribly prejudicial invective against Native Americans, summarizing the inhumane view and brutal treatment of these indigenous peoples. Regrettably, the proverb can still be heard today, and its applicability has been expanded by replacing the “Indians” by any despised group of people. Variants like “The only good German (Jew, Nigger, Serb, etc.) is a dead German (Jew, Nigger, Serb, etc.)” have all been recorded (Mieder 1997b: 138–159). But while it is a national shame that this negative proverb continues to linger in American rhetoric, it is indeed highly suspect that the loan translation “Nur ein toter Indianer ist ein guter Indianer” has gained currency in Germany, once again including variants dehumanizing other ethnic and national groups (Mieder 1995: 165–174).

While this is a disturbing example of the powerful influence of American culture as expressed in proverbs, there is also a rather innocuous but surprising development taking place with the English proverb “The early bird catches the worm” that has long been very popular in the United States as well. The German proverb “Morgenstunde hat Gold im Munde”, according to empirical paremiological research the most popular German proverb, has been considered the perfect equivalent for the English text by native speakers and translators, although the metaphors of both texts are strikingly different (Mieder 1997a). Since the sixteenth century both proverbs have lived side by side, without one or the other having been loan translated into the other language. But this has now changed during the past two decades due to the tremendous influence of the American mass media and popular culture. Translators of books, magazine articles, film scripts, comic strips, etc. have repeatedly rendered the proverb in German as

“Der frühe Vogel fängt den Wurm” rather than replacing it by the customary “Morgenstunde hat Gold im Munde”. There are occasions where this literal translation of the English metaphor does in fact make sense in a particular context, but more often than not the “Morgenstunde” proverb would have been a perfectly meaningful rendering. And yet, my international proverb archive contains numerous references to the new loan translation, and a computer search of large electronic data bases brought to light so many additional texts that there can be no doubt that “Der frühe Vogel fängt den Wurm” is a new loan proverb in the German language (Mieder 2004a). It has not and will not replace the “Morgenstunde” proverb, but it certainly has entered the German language and culture and is bound to gain even more in popularity.

If this new “Vogel” loan proverb can give the “Morgenstunde” proverb a bit of competition, as it were, it should not be surprising that some old as well as new American proverbs for which no German equivalents exist are gaining acceptance in Germany. At times they are cited in the English language to add a certain worldly appeal to a statement. When such proverbs begin to be quoted as loan translations, they are usually introduced by such formulas as “an English proverb says” or “according to an English proverb” to draw attention to the unusual piece of wisdom. Once in a while the designation “American” is used, but for the most part the generic term “English” appears, perhaps because people are simply not aware whether a proverb is of British or American origin. In any case, once a loan translation has gained some familiarity because of frequent use, the new “German” proverb begins to stand alone and loses its American identity. In a number of individual studies I have been able to illustrate this phenomenon by means of numerous contextualized examples for the following American / German proverb pairs:

It takes two to tango.

Zum Tango gehören zwei.

Mieder 1985: 151–154 (with George B. Bryan)

A (one) picture is worth a thousand words.

Ein Bild sagt mehr als tausend Worte.

Mieder 1992: 191–201, 1993: 135–151

An apple a day keeps the doctor away.

Ein Apfel pro Tag hält den Arzt fern.

Mieder 2004b

Good fences make good neighbors.

Gute Zäune machen gute Nachbarn.

Mieder 2003c, 2004b

The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence.

Das Gras auf der anderen Seite des Zaunes ist immer grüner.

Mieder 2004b

Don't put all your eggs into one basket.

Man soll nicht alle Eier in einen Korb legen.

Mieder 2004c

“Don’t put all your eggs into one basket” is actually of British origin, dating back to the seventeenth century. However, it never jumped across the Channel to Germany. This only happened in the early 1980s by way of the incredible American influence on the German language. The German “Eier” proverb is thus technically speaking a loan translation of an Angloamerican rather than an American proverb *per se*. But there is no need to split hairs over the matter. There is no doubt that English language proverbs are entering the German linguistic and cultural scene both in their original language or as loan translations primarily by way of the United States. This phenomenon has taken place especially since the 1950s with America’s influential role in Germany in particular. Since the 1980s a number of American proverbs have become new German proverbs through loan translations, but obviously this fascinating development is by no means as widespread as with individual words and idioms. Proverbs are structurally too rigid and metaphorically too demanding to be accepted in large quantities, but the process might well intensify and accelerate in the future.

It also remains to be shown whether such loan translations are occurring in other countries of the world as well. The global influence of American proverbs in English speaking countries is certainly considerable with American English playing a dominant role in all spheres of international communication. But the distribution of American proverbs by way of loan translations is definitely part of this intriguing process. It is a modern phenomenon reminiscent of the role that the Latin language once played as a *lingua franca*, and it definitely merits the close attention of paremiographers and paremiologists everywhere.

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## AMERIKIEČIŲ PATARLĖS KAIP TARPTAUTINIS, NACIONALINIS IR PASAULINIS REIŠKINYS

WOLFGANG MIEDER

### Santrauka

Nors senieji Amerikos gyventojai dėl iki šiol nepaaiškinamų priežasčių labai stokojo patarlių, milijonai į Šiaurės Ameriką atvykusių imigrantų atsigabeno bei iki šiol tebegabena ir savas patarles. Kadangi anglų kalba yra pagrindinė Jungtinių Valstijų kalba, tai nenuostabu, jog dauguma šioje šalyje vartojamų patarlių kildintinos iš anglų tradicijos. Tiesa, daugelis jų yra verstiniai skoliniai iš klasikinių kalbų, biblinių ar vidurinių amžių lotyniškų tekstų, bet nemažai esama ir britiškos kilmės patarlių. Kitų imigrantų grupių patarlės dažnai ir toliau vartojamos originalo kalba, nors kai kurios buvo išverstos

ir pasiskolintos, tad prigijo angliškai šnekančių amerikiečių vartosenoje. Visa tai sudaro turtingą tarptautinį dabartinės Amerikos patarlių lobyną, tačiau per pastaruosius ketvirtą amžių amerikiečių nacija susikūrė ir savą angliško patarlių arsenalą, atspindintį nacijos, sudarytos iš gausybės įvairių tautų, pasaulėžiūrą ir papročius. Vienos iš šių patarlių žinomos tik kai kuriuose regionuose, kitos paplito po visas Jungtines Valstijas.

Taigi neabejotinai esama didžiulio nacionalinio angliško patarlių, atsiradusių Jungtinėse Valstijose, klodo, kurį nuolatos papildo nauji tekstai, atspindintys naujųjų laikų išmintį. Dėl vyraujančios anglų kalbos savotiško *lingua franca* vaidmens ir globalinės amerikiečių kultūros, politikos ir ekonomikos įtakos amerikiečių patarlės dabar labiau nei bet kada anksčiau plinta po pasaulį – tiek angliškai, tiek verstiniu ar skolintu pavidalu.

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