

INTRODUCTION

In spite of the fact that scholars of different language backgrounds have frequently proposed incorporating proverbs in second-language education, foreign language teachers seldom use proverbs in the classroom. Even if proverbs are involved in teaching, they are usually introduced unsystematically and randomly selected from dictionaries that contain obsolete proverbs and miss many new ones. Teachers often insert proverbs as a time-filler at the end of a lesson, and merely ask their students to memorize these expressions without integrating them into their context. Such methods ignore the fact that it is essential to learn when and how to apply a proverb appropriately. My experience in over thirty five years as a teacher of English as a second language in Hungary, Slovakia and Poland has shown that even university or college students enter the classroom with almost no prior knowledge of the proverbs current in the language they are studying.

Anyone wishing to communicate or read in American English should have an active knowledge of the most popular American proverbs. First, proverbs are an important part of the American cultural heritage. The person who does not acquire competence in using proverbs will be limited in conversation; will have difficulty comprehending a wide variety of media – printed matter, radio, television, songs, advertisements, comics and cartoons – and will not understand anti-proverbs or proverb transformations, which presuppose a familiarity with a stock proverb. Furthermore, proverbs are easy and fun to learn. Proverbs are relatively pithy, and often contain rhyme (e.g., *East or West, home is best; An apple a day keeps the doctor away*) or word-repetition (e.g., *Easy come, easy go; A penny saved is a penny earned*) which facilitate their recall. Sometimes both word-repetition and rhyme occur: *Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise; A friend in need is a friend indeed*. Alliteration also makes them quite easy to memorize: E.g., *Money makes the man; He who laughs last, laughs best; What is good for the goose is good for the gander; Where there's a will there's a way; It takes two to tango; Live and let live*. Proverbs contain frequently-used vocabulary and exemplify the entire gamut of grammatical and syntactic structures.¹

As John Simpson, one of the reviewers of my book “A Proverb a Day Keeps Boredom Away” (2000) and a former editor-in-chief of the “Oxford English Dictionary” wrote in the

¹ For more, see my previous studies and books in which I have considered various ways in which well-known American proverbs can be employed in the language classroom. The articles “An Analysis of Popular American Proverbs and Their Use in Language Teaching” (Tóthné Litovkina 1998) and “Incorporating of Anglo-American Proverbs into the Language Classroom” (T. Litovkina 2017b) present exercises in which proverbs may be used to enhance the learning of grammar and syntax, phonetics, vocabulary development, culture, reading, speaking, and writing. My articles “Incorporating of Anglo-American Proverbs and Anti-Proverbs into the Language Classroom” (T. Litovkina 2017b), “The Creative Use of Proverbs in Story-Writing in Teaching English as Foreign Language” (T. Litovkina 2019) etc., discuss exercises that employ proverbs to facilitate and promote creative writing skills (e.g., transforming proverbs into parodies; using proverbs in advertisements; writing stories, fables, tales, or dialogues to illustrate proverbs), while my study “Old Proverbs Never Die: Anti-Proverbs in the Language Classroom” (T. Litovkina 2004) focuses on proverb-transformations created by students who have attended my courses on Anglo-American proverbs at JPTE and ELTE. Among my books treating Anglo-American proverbs, there are two collections of Anglo-American anti-proverbs (or proverb alterations), written in cooperation with Wolfgang Mieder: “Twisted Wisdom: Modern Anti-Proverbs” (Mieder and Tóthné Litovkina 1999) and “Old Proverbs Never Die, They Just Diversify: A Collection of Anti-Proverbs” (T. Litovkina and Mieder 2006); and two textbooks: “A Proverb a Day Keeps Boredom Away” (T. Litovkina 2000) and “Teaching Proverbs and Anti-Proverbs” (T. Litovkina 2017a).

Preface of my book: "It is how proverbs are used that can be so difficult to learn, especially if you are not a native speaker of the language. They are idiomatic, and idioms can be puzzling. They have to be learnt, and learnt by use in context. In fact, as far as proverbs are concerned, practice makes perfect" (iv).

Organization and the Aim of the Book

The "Workbook of English and American Proverbs for Students" helps familiarize the reader with more than 450 proverbs frequently used in American English and British English today. Many of the proverbs are of English or American origin, and have appeared for the first time in the works of Geoffrey Chaucer, William Shakespeare, and other British or American authors. Some of them have found their way into the British or American vernacular from Classical Greek or Romance languages, the Bible, as well as medieval and sixteenth-century Europe. There are also a few texts which are loan translations from foreign language proverbs.

The main intent of the book is not merely to provide the language learner with a list of some commonly used proverbs to memorize per se but to provide a series of activities and exercises as well that help the learner discover what each proverb means and how to apply it in particular situations. The book is a condensation of the textbook "A Proverb a Day Keeps Boredom Away" (2000).² The exercises bring the proverbs alive with short illustrative quotations from hundreds of books, newspapers, and magazines as well as from poems, fables, and narratives. The book also focuses on proverb humor: the reader will find a number of jokes, fables, twists and parodies based on familiar proverbs.

The "Workbook of English and American Proverbs for Students" is directed towards the student of English, the teacher, the folklorist, the linguist, and anyone interested in entering the magical world where proverbs, stories and humor overlap.

The book's approach has been thoroughly tested in my courses on *Anglo-American Proverbs; Proverbs in an American Cultural Context* and *Phraseology* in Hungarian and Slovakian colleges and universities³ that have been designed to study American thought, life and philosophy through proverbs.

The book consists of 18 units arranged in three parts, each consisting of six units and a test. It covers the main concerns of proverbs, e.g., money and love, knowledge and wisdom, children and parents, speech and silence, words and deeds, necessity and adversity. Three tests, given at the end of each part, help readers to check their acquisition of the proverbial material. The key supplies the answers to exercises given in both the units and the tests. The proverb-finder index indicates the number of the unit in which the particular proverb is discussed. The selected bibliography contains mainly British and Anglo-American proverb collections, as well as the books and articles most frequently cited throughout the book, primarily concerning anti-proverbs.

² Along with the 450 or so commonly known American proverbs, the book "A Proverb a Day Keeps Boredom Away" contains more than 1000 rarer American proverbs, as well as scores of proverbs from other world cultures.

³ Janus Pannonius Egyetem, or JPTE [Pécs]; Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem, or ELTE [Budapest]; University of Veszprém [Veszprém]; Illyés Gyula Teacher's Training College [Szekszárd], J. Selye University [Komárno].

Order and Structure of Units

All the units share the same structure. Each unit is introduced by proverbs grouped according to one of the topics mentioned above. All proverbs are arranged in alphabetical order. Proverbs are given in two sets. Proverbs in the main set appear in boldface type, sometimes accompanied by their variants. The proverbs from the main set are followed by proverbs from the additional set in the same topic, some of which are discussed in another unit of the book. Many of the additional proverbs, however, might be given in the second set of the proverbs, without being included in main activities afterwards. Although the items indicated in boldface represent the best known and most widely recognized proverbs in the USA, the items in the additional set include proverbs familiar to most Americans today as well as less familiar proverbs.

It should be pointed out that in many cases the placement of a proverb in the book is necessarily arbitrary, since a single proverb may belong to several topics and can easily be used in more than one unit. In such cases a proverb is fully discussed in one unit, but a cross-reference to it may be also provided in other units.

The first three exercises are usually identical in all units:

- Read the following extracts and try to guess the meaning of the italicized proverbs.
- Match the proverb from column A that corresponds to its definition in column B.
- Fill in the blanks with proverbs.

The following exercises may vary from one unit to another:

- What proverbs are being parodied?
- From the following proverbs select the ones best suited to the jokes below.
- Finish the following snatches of conversation with a proverb.
- Recall the proverbs you have learned containing the following words.
- Try to identify the proverbs from the initial letters given below.
- Sum up the fable below by using a proper proverb, etc.

While the goal of the vast majority of exercises is acquiring, understanding and using the proverbs familiar to most Americans (listed in the main set), some exercises also assist in learning and practicing less familiar proverbs as well, e.g.:

- Link the beginnings of proverbs in A with their endings in B.
- Fill in the gaps with the appropriate words from this list.
- Match the two halves of the proverbs.

While the book “A Proverb a Day Keeps Boredom Away” is best suited for work and discussion in the classroom, the present book is developed and designed for independent learning, in particular, for those who want to improve their intermediate and advanced language skills.

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