

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Anti-Proverbs – Sayings That Result from The Transformation of Proverbs

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Abstract

This article examines the phenomenon of anti-proverbs as a result of the lingua-creative transformation of traditional paremiological resources. It analyzes the mechanisms by which folk sayings are reinterpreted in modern discourse, identifying the main methods of their deformation: lexical substitution, context expansion, and structural truncation. Particular attention is paid to the functional specificity of anti-proverbs – their ability to create a comic effect, irony, and express the current values of modern society.

KEY WORDS

Anti-proverbs, paremiology, proverb transformation, language play, intertextuality, phraseological units, cultural linguistics, speech creativity, deconstruction, modern discourse.

INTRODUCTION

Proverbs have long been considered a fundamental part of linguistic and cultural heritage, reflecting the collective wisdom and values of a society. They are typically fixed expressions with stable meanings and structures. However, in modern language use, proverbs are often creatively modified, giving rise to what are known as anti-proverbs. These are transformed versions of traditional proverbs that introduce new meanings, humorous effects, or critical perspectives.

Anti-proverbs have become increasingly popular in contemporary discourse, especially in media, advertising, and everyday communication. They demonstrate the dynamic nature of language and highlight the interplay between tradition and innovation.

Definition and Characteristics of Anti-Proverbs

Anti-proverbs are modified or parodied versions of traditional proverbs. They retain some elements of the original proverb

but introduce structural or semantic changes that alter the meaning.

Key characteristics include:

- Transformation of form: changes in wording or structure
- Semantic shift: alteration of the original meaning
- Humor and irony: creation of comic or satirical effects
- Intertextuality: reliance on the audience's knowledge of the original proverb

For example:

- Traditional proverb: "The early bird catches the worm."
- Anti-proverb: "The early bird catches the worm, but the second mouse gets the cheese."

This transformation introduces a new perspective and humorous twist.

Types of Transformations

Anti-proverbs can be classified based on the type of transformation applied:

1. Lexical substitution

Replacing key words in the original proverb:

- "Time is money" → "Time is honey"

2. Addition or extension

Adding new elements to change the meaning:

- "Money talks" → "Money talks... but it usually says goodbye."

3. Structural modification

Changing the grammatical structure:

- "No pain, no gain" → "No brain, no gain"

4. Semantic inversion

Reversing the meaning:

- "Honesty is the best policy" → "Dishonesty is the best policy (sometimes)"

Anti-proverbs are rich in stylistic devices. They often employ:

- Wordplay
- Allusion
- Irony and satire
- Ambiguity

These features make anti-proverbs expressive and memorable. They also require a certain level of linguistic competence from the audience to be fully understood.

Cognitive and Pragmatic Aspects

From a cognitive perspective, anti-proverbs rely on the recognition of the original proverb. The audience must first recall the traditional form and then process the transformation.

This involves:

- pattern recognition
- expectation and violation
- reinterpretation of meaning

Pragmatically, anti-proverbs serve various communicative purposes:

- expressing criticism
- creating humor
- challenging traditional beliefs
- attracting attention in media and advertising

Cultural and Social Significance

Anti-proverbs reflect changes in social values and attitudes. While traditional proverbs often convey moral lessons, anti-proverbs may question or reinterpret these lessons.

For example, modern society's emphasis on individuality and skepticism is often reflected in anti-proverbs that challenge conventional wisdom.

They are widely used in:

- advertising slogans
- political discourse
- social media
- popular culture

Role in Language Teaching

Anti-proverbs can be effectively used in language teaching to:

- develop learners' understanding of idiomatic expressions
- enhance creativity and critical thinking
- improve vocabulary and linguistic awareness

By comparing proverbs and anti-proverbs, learners can better understand how meaning is constructed and transformed.

Proverbs have always been considered the "golden treasure" of folk wisdom. However, the modern pace of life and ironic worldview have given rise to a curious linguistic phenomenon: anti-proverbs. These are sayings that arise from the transformation of classical proverbs, inverting their meaning or adapting them to current realities.

The term "anti-proverb" (or paroemic mockery) was introduced into academic use by folklorist Wolfgang Mieder. It is not just a joke, but a mechanism for deconstructing stereotypes. If a classic proverb teaches us stability and morality ("Slow and steady wins the race"), then an anti-proverb reflects the spirit of the times, where speed or irony

are important ("Slow and steady wins the race").[1]

Let's consider the methods of transformation.

Folk (and original) creativity alters canonical texts in several ways:

- Substitution of one word: "One in the field does not understand" instead of "not a warrior." The slightest shift in pronunciation completely changes the context.
- Adding an unexpected ending: "Once the job is done, enjoy your time with a clear conscience, but not for long." The moralizing tone is maintained, but a comical pragmatism is added.
- Contamination: "The woman off the cart is the time for fun." This creates an absurd, surreal effect.
- Literal reading: "Don't put off until tomorrow what you can eat today."[2]

This raises the question: why are they popular?

Anti-proverbs play an important psychological role. Traditional proverbs often seem too didactic and "correct." By transforming them, a person:

Initially, it relieves stress: humor is the best way to cope with the pressure of social norms.

Second, it demonstrates creativity: reworking a well-known phrase is a language game.

And third, it adapts experience: many old truths simply don't apply today. "Work is not a wolf - it won't run away into the forest" becomes an ironic acknowledgement of the inevitability of labor under deadline pressure.

Creating a counter-proverb is a delicate philological "surgery." For a joke to work, the original text must remain recognizable, but at the same time acquire a new, often opposite, meaning.

Here are the main linguistic techniques that transform a classic into a counter-proverb:

1. Lexical substitution (component replacement)

This is the most popular method. One or more words in the proverb's structure are replaced. Words that sound similar (paronyms) or have opposite meanings (antonyms) are often chosen. For example:

"An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" → "An eye for an eye, gas for gas" (updated to a political or economic agenda). The result is a sharp contrast between the expected and the heard.

2. Context Expansion (Addition)

A well-known proverb is given a "tail," which completely negates its pathos or imbues it with a mundane, everyday quality. For example:

"Love knows no age... but the consequences are different." We see the destruction of the lofty image and a return to harsh reality.

3. Contamination (Crossing)

Mixing parts of two different proverbs or a proverb and a set expression. In linguistics, this is called "hybridization." For example: "The early bird catches the worm" (a fusion of a proverb about hard work and criminal slang). Here, an absurd, comical image is created through the clash of different lexical layers.

4. Literalization of Metaphor

Proverbs are usually allegorical. A counter-proverb, on the other hand, takes the image literally, elevating it to the point of absurdity. For example:

"Truth is not found in the feet... it is somewhere higher." The comic effect arises from ignoring the figurative meaning.

5. Breaking Phraseological Unity

A change in grammatical structure or word order that disrupts the usual rhythm. For example:

"One head is good, but two is ugly" (instead of "better"). The expectation of a logical conclusion ("and with a body, it's better") is interrupted by an unexpected assessment.

6. Stylistic Dissonance

Using the high style of the original in combination with a low, colloquial, or slang word. For example:

"Don't spit in a well - it will fly out and you won't catch it" (here, contamination is also present). Effect: A reduction in pathos, transforming the "wisdom of the ancestors" into an ironic remark from a contemporary.[4]

An analysis of these techniques clearly shows that an anti-proverb is not simply a mistake, but a deliberate language play.

Anti-proverbs are not the destruction of language, but its development. They demonstrate that folklore is alive as long as it can change. As long as the original exists, its ironic reflection will also exist, because every joke contains only a

grain of truth, while the rest is updated folk wisdom.

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