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Theoretical and Methodological Aspects of the Study of Vernacular Proverbs

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ABSTRACT. A vernacular proverb is a part of common language in everyday use. It is used or referred to if it lends some additional value to a speech situation. In folklore studies, the approach to proverbs comes from how people understand and use them. This article concentrates on proverbs used in Finnish everyday life in the 20th and 21st centuries.

Finding relevant research material and interpreting proverbs take centre stage in the study of everyday proverbs in common language within their contexts of use. The main questions raised in this article can be summarised as four points. The first point is to decide the definition of a proverb used in everyday practices and common language. The second point is where to find proverbs in everyday use and vernacular language. Connected to this, the third point is how to identify them in the contexts of use. The fourth point, which may be the most demanding task, is to understand how a proverb has been interpreted and to what ends it has been used in different environments and circumstances. The article presents challenges and issues as well as some methodological theoretical solutions relating to how proverbs are used in everyday life. Such challenges, it may be noted, are encountered in any study of micro-folklore focused on everyday life.

KEYWORDS: proverb, everyday life, interpretation, context, possible worlds semantics, vernacular language.

Teoriniai ir metodologiniai šnekamosios kalbos patarlių tyrimų aspektai

SANTRAUKA. Patarlės dažnai vartojamos kasdienėje šnekamojoje kalboje. Patarlė ar bent užuomina į ją suteikia kalbinei situacijai papildomos vertės. Folkloristai patarles analizuoja atsižvelgdami į tai, kaip žmonės jas supranta ir vartoja. Šiame straipsnyje nagrinėjamos patarlės, vartotos ir tebevartojamos kasdieniniame XX ir XXI a. suomių gyvenime.

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Tiriant kasdienes patarles skirtinguose bendrinės kalbos vartojimo kontekstuose, svarbiausia rasti tinkamą tyrimo medžiagą ir būdą joms interpretuoti. Šiame straipsnyje keliami keturi pagrindiniai klausimai. Pirmiausia reikia nuspręsti, kaip apibrėžti patarlę, vartojamą kasdienėje praktikoje ir bendrinėje kalboje. Antrasis klausimas – kur kasdienėje vartosenoje ir šnekamojoje kalboje rasti patarlių. Su šiuo susijęs trečiasis – kaip jas atpažinti vartosenoje. Ketvirtasis, ko gero, pats sudėtingiausias: suprasti, kaip patarlė interpretuojama ir kokiais tikslais ji vartojama skirtingoje aplinkoje ir skirtingomis sąlygomis. Straipsnyje aptariami su tuo susiję sunkumai ir problemos, taip pat pateikiama metodologinių ir teorinių sprendimų, susijusių su patarlių vartojimu kasdiniame gyvenime. Pažymėtina, kad su tokio pobūdžio sunkumais susiduriama visuose su kasdiniu gyvenimu susijusiuose mažųjų folkloro formų tyrimuose.

RAKTAŽODŽIAI: patarlė, kasdienis gyvenimas, interpretacija, kontekstas, galimų pasaulių semantika, šnekamoji kalba.

INTRODUCTION

A proverb is something that has been invented and used and has thus become a part of vernacular language. It can be either an old or a new comment on life, but circumstances render a proverb widespread and well known (Taylor 1994: 3–8).¹ Nowadays, this process is fast and sometimes possible to track. There are many proverbs whose origins were known at some point but were then forgotten over time. The proverb is always invented by somebody who has the idea of putting a notion into a statement.

Proverbs have been and still are difficult to pin down, record and interpret in their natural context of use, which is most often unknown, since it has not been the main focus of either Finnish paremiography (proverb collection) or paremiology (proverb research). In this article I present in brief some significant theories on proverbs, language, context, interpretation and performance. The research articles include studies of theories focusing on language (Vygotski 1967; Frege 2000; Grice 1975) and emic-etic viewpoints (Headland, Pike, Harris 1990), on proverb interpretation using metaphor theory connected with reference point (Hintikka, Sandu 1994), and on performance (Briggs 1985; Badiou 2009). I address the lifecycle of proverbs in line with how Lauri Honko (2013b) and Gerard Rooijakkers (1998) have treated the issue.²

The Finnish language was long used only at lower levels of society. The language came to be linked to social capital because of its history, and proverbs in Finnish were linked to social power as they used to be a part of the language of the underprivileged majority (Granbom-Herranen 2008: 116–117; Granbom-

1 On the specifics and definition of proverbs see further: Norrick 2015: 14–16; Mieder 2015: 28–48.

2 See further the chapter “Theoretical cornerstones” in: Granbom-Herranen 2018: 48–52.

Herranen 2014b: 368). Standard written Finnish was developed for a particular use: in the beginning it was the language of the Bible (17th century). Proverbs were an integral part of the language. In the nineteenth century, written Finnish was needed for official use in statutes, and later, chiefly in the 20th century, it was also used in newspapers (Granbom-Herranen 2024: 39–40). Finnish proverbs as a part of the oral genre have expanded and found a new form in broadening out from oral tradition to colloquial written language.

A proverb is a cultural artefact. A cultural artefact like a proverb requires art and knowledge to be reconciled (*artes et facta*). Artefacts can also be associated with oral tradition (Granbom-Herranen 2018: 59). Proverbs are artefacts connecting thinking with emotions and feelings in the situation where they are used (Bruner 1986: 65). Understanding them requires knowledge of the traditions of the overall context of use.

For Rooijakkers and Honko, the start of the life cycle of a folklore product is in the natural, sometimes almost imperceptible, past. It is a stage characterised by authenticity (Rooijakkers 1998: 183; Honko 2013b: 39). Proverbs are not merely traditional products but also have an individual process behind them. For the speaker, the use of a proverb often has some absolute or instrumental value, residing not in the product (the proverb) but in the process, that is, in the artefact and the innovation of its use (Honko 2013a: 107–108; Granbom-Herranen 2008: 283).

For many Finns, proverbs represent something familiar, domestic and old-fashioned while also reflecting a modern Finnish way of thinking. This may be crystallised in the example below. The following stories deal with one proverb which occurs as a contemporary proverb. The first part of the example talks about a time about 80 years ago, while the other two are from the present.

EXAMPLE 1. ONE PROVERB IN VARIOUS CONTEXTS³

The basic form of the proverbs says: “*Niin metsä vastaa kuin sinne huutaa*” (The forest answers when somebody calls to it). The assumed standard proverbial interpretation is that everybody gives and receives at the same level.

a) Life story: When talking about the neighbours, my parents pointed out that everyone, both those richer than us and those more in need than us, whether duller by nature or more communicative, were in some way all good people. They wanted to find something valuable even in the blameworthy person. Just as a throw-away remark and by using some proper proverb, they often ended with the saying:

– “*Tuumoo kahesti, ennen kun tuomihet*” (Think twice before you judge) or

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³ Granbom-Herranen 2018: 56–58.

– “*Huonokii mehtä vastaa niin ku ite huuval*” (Even a bad forest answers when you call to it; PE85, man, born 1914)

b) SMS message: Anyway, I have got along with the townspeople very well. “*Kummottos mettä huutta, simmot se vasta*” (The way you call to a forest, that’s the way it answers) – a local resident (SSS, sent 19/08/2006)

c) SMS message: It was nice when we got a new school. Every teacher there has their own laptop and many other fine things. Art was bought with 9,000 euros. Now we must save money. – “*sitä saa mitä tilaa*” (you get what you order; SSS, sent 18/08/2006).

In folklore studies the approach to proverbs derives from people’s ways of understanding and using them. The language of Finnish proverbs has above all been the language of the people. While ordinary people spoke Finnish, the power-wielding elite used Swedish or Russian (along with German and French); thus proverb use characterised what, from the perspective of social power, was a minority (Granbom-Herranen 2008: 282).

EXAMPLE 2. VARIOUS INTERPRETATIONS⁴

Proverbs may remain relevant for hundreds of years. It is, for example, possible to trace some Finnish proverbs back to the time when they were used only in speech. The proverb “*Sitä kuusta kuuleminen, jonka juurella asunto*” (You must listen to the spruce you live next to) is one of the oldest-known Finnish proverbs (Haavio 1949: 14–33). The proverb is still in use and has remained unchanged, but the meaning has become different. The next example shows some interpretations of this proverb in various eras:

a) In the 1930s, many elderly people, when they got together, would recall their childhood and youth and how hard the upbringing was for most. Their parents’ word was law and wasn’t argued against, and whoever was brave enough to start doing so would hear, “*Sitä kuusta kuuleminen, jonka juurella asunto*” (PE85, woman, born 1922).

b) Work had to be done so well that you’d get more later. You’d only earn your living when working. [...] The Bible, the book of books, offers that advice; so do old sayings such as “*Sitä kuusta kuuleminen, jonka juurella asunto*” (PE85, man, born 1937).

c) If you’re a worker, you are to side with your employer (Q-2000, man, born 1938).

d) It’s a reminder. We all have roots somewhere and they shouldn’t be forgotten (Q-2000, woman, born 1952).

e) If you want to keep a job and income, it’s better when speaking to have the same opinion as one’s employer: “*Kenen leipää syöt, sen lauluja laulat*”⁵ (Whoever’s bread you eat, it’s their songs you sing; Q-2000, woman, born 1955).

4 Granbom-Herranen 2018: 129–130.

5 The proverb is explained with another proverb.

f) It is wrong to support political parties, perhaps not in a juridical sense but in a moral sense, just as all bribery is wrong. – “*Sitä kuusta kuuleminen [...]*” (SSS, SMS sent 16/06/2009).

The most widely accepted characteristics of the concept and genre of proverb also apply to the Finnish examples: a relatively short and independent statement in a more or less stable form. In addition, the expression is or has been familiar among the public within a given temporal and geographical framework but, in the current case, was most often in Finnish. A proverb can be understood as a generalising expression. In fact, in paremiology the only consensus focuses on the brevity of proverbs, traditionality and the general applicability contained within them.

In my research on proverbs the significance of an utterance has several starting points. First, language is not understood only as an instrument of communication but also as linked to thought, a subject to which Lev Vygotski (1967) has dedicated an entire book. Second, as Gottlob Frege’s principle of context states, the meaning of an expression is always bound to the context in which it is used, and the situational or wider context of a sentence gives meaning to the words (Frege 2000: 84; Granbom-Herranen 2018: 48–49). Third, as the use of proverbs is part of communicative speech and to be understood and interpreted, an utterance should follow Paul Grice’s cooperative principles of quantity, quality, relation and manner (1975: 45–46). These categories can be violated either consciously or subconsciously. A proverb in its use is a violating element, marking a kind of pause or interruption in sensible communication. However, the use of a proverb violates one or more of the categories mentioned above. Actions against the cooperative principle may help us recognise proverbs in everyday life (Granbom-Herranen 2014a: 110–112).

There are two different or parallel ways of seeing proverbs: on the one hand, the emic approach, that is, the definition known within a group that shares common knowledge, and, on the other, researchers’ specific so-called etic language.⁶ My research relies primarily on the emic concept of the proverb.

The concept of contemporarily used proverb includes proverbs that are alive, in other words they are used today, no matter what period they are originally from or if they originate from the Bible. They consist of traditional proverbs, modern proverbs and Bible quotations as well as references to them (that are not proverbs proper; Granbom-Herranen 2018: 82). The concept of proverb also recognises allusions to other proverbs which must be known in order to understand the primary proverb.

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6 For the whole debate between Kenneth Pike and Marvis Harris, see Headland, Pike, Harris 1990.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

As regards records made by others, the collector's task is generally assumed to have been to find the most comprehensive material possible. Yet every era has its own understanding about what 'comprehensive' means, and this applies to proverbs too. The use of materials recorded or collected in earlier periods may add to the questions raised by source criticism. In many cases, it is obvious that the collector's morals and didactic grip are imposed on the text. The impact of previous publications cannot be avoided, either; published collections often include selected material from other publications or collections. This is unavoidable, and in many instances it happens subconsciously. Proverb users, collectors, archivists and researchers all participate in the development of a proverb's lifecycle. A collector's personal interest also has an impact on what is recorded and how it is interpreted (Granbom-Herranen 2018: 219–220; Granbom-Herranen 2023: 74–76). As with all everyday oral expressions, we cannot know what proverbs were used in earlier times, since only those that were recorded are known. We know even less about how and why they were used.

The material considered here consists of articles dealing with the mundane language of proverbs and their use in everyday life, in either spoken or written form (in colloquial Finnish). This study totals over 9,000 proverbs in their contexts of use:

a) The oldest material, from the beginning of the 20th century (PE85 and KE84 in Granbom-Herranen 2008), consists of life stories⁷ with proverbs used in pedagogical speech, i.e. what the folklorist Charles Briggs called "pedagogical discourse", speech between unequal people with the listener the one with lower status (1985: 795).

b) Proverbs used in the 1950s and 1960s are included in the thirteen earliest Finnish family films (the *Pekka Puupää*, Pekka Blockhead, films; Granbom-Herranen 2017).

c) The first study on newspaper material of the early 21st century consists of a regional daily newspaper (SSS) studied over one week in 2012 (Granbom-Herranen 2013).

d) The second study is of a Finnish national daily newspaper, a regional daily newspaper and a local weekly newspaper (HS, SSS and PsL) for the month of May 2013 (Granbom-Herranen 2014b).

e) The most extensive study consists of text messages (SMS) from 2006 to 2010 sent to be published in SSS (Granbom-Herranen 2018).

7 "Life story" is a higher-level concept for life-narrative materials conceived as life history, biography, autobiography, etc. (Vilkko 1988: 19). A life story is a story without an end. It may be told at any point in a life. The narrators do not tell the truth about the past, but neither do they lie; they describe the past as they remember it and as they have experienced it.

Some common features behind proverb use in everyday life become obvious when a proverb is seen as a short unit used in daily life. First, the speaker and the audience must share some common knowledge to be able to connect the message to some ongoing activity. Second, a proverb as a performance or as part of one might be treated as what Alain Badiou calls an “event”. A proverb can change the significance of the situation. It can function as a full stop in communication (ibid.: 76). Proverbs are shared tradition, meaning the performer and the audience must have some common knowledge about the past to be able to connect the message with the activity (Badiou 2009: 178–183). Third, there is an expected and well-recognised foundational meaning connected with the proverb⁸ which leads to the expectation that the use of the proverb is meaningful in a particular context, and that it is used in order to be assertive (Briggs 1985: 798–802).

Proverbs and their meanings rely on a combination of socio-cultural contexts, people, emotions and situational information, as well as on one’s individual life experience (Granbom-Herranen 2018: 156). To understand the mechanism behind interpretations, we need to realise that proverbs are an integral part of everyday speech built on people’s individual social realities; they belong to vernacular speech in the world people are familiar with.

The way one recognises a proverb in speech or text is problematic in the same way as one recognises a metaphor. The meaning is based on the ongoing discourse, and a proverb is at odds with a normal speech act. The use of a proverb as a violating element introduces new aspects into a discourse. It makes a pause in it. The proverb is a fixed part of the situation: something is happening, and proverbs may be signalled with a linking phrase or a marker or introductory remark (Čermák 2005: 57). Sometimes, quotation marks function as a marker. Often some verb is used to frame the proverb. A proverb is used as a helping hand: “as the proverb says”. The proverb is often aimed at hitting an authentic and on-off note by bringing the speech or written text to a conclusion. The successful use of a proverb sums up the kernel of the performance.

Without the context it is not possible to know the meaning of what is said, the speaker’s intention or the listener’s understanding of what is said. The connection between language, context and the conception of the world is reflected both in the use of verbal metaphorical expressions and the use of proverbs. By using the functional similarity of metaphors and proverbs, it is possible to sketch how proverbs are given meaning. A proverb gets its meaning within a particular context. Proverbs can be examined using the models of metaphor theories, as they are both a part of everyday language and tightly bound up with culture. What is more, both proverbs and metaphors facilitate a comprehension of abstract phenomena and

8 Assumed standard proverbial interpretation (Norrick 1985: 109–117).

hence contribute to our understanding of the world. In interpreting the contextual meaning of a proverb, I employ the model of metaphor by Jaakko Hintikka and Gabriel Sandu (1994). The empirical material and the argumentation are linked to theoretical models, thereby forming a basis for the conclusions. By using and illustrating the model of possible worlds semantics (PWS), the study also addresses the challenge of why proverbs receive various interpretations (Granbom-Herranen 2008: 283; Granbom-Herranen 2018: 16).

The situation supplements words, and words supplement the ongoing action. As the references are events, actions and phenomena, a proverb always has a practical role in all environments (Krikmann 2010: 51; Granbom-Herranen 2008: 223). According to Peter Seitel (1994: 123), the meaning (intention and/or interpretation) is the most essential part of a proverb. The meaning of a proverb becomes clear only if thorough information about the social situation is fully understood. The situation where a proverb is used explains the reason for its use and what impact it has on the situation. Interpreting proverbial expressions is commonly based on similarity or continuity that is real, assumed or associated; meaning is constructed by linking interpretation with context (Granbom-Herranen 2018: 51–52). Arvo Krikmann (1987: 122) delineates aspects of proverb use, of which the most important is the meaning potential of a proverb.⁹ What this means is that, in order to understand the meaning of a term, we need to understand the extension of the term's meaning in the current and other circumstances.¹⁰

A speaker and listener participate in the situation with their life experiences, forming the 'micro-context', which is a part of a cultural, social and economic space in a particular era, or the 'macro-context'. This space is termed a 'world'. Around worlds a 'universe' exists one step wider than the macro-context. The most important factor is how a proverb is anchored in these existing worlds (Granbom-Herranen 2018: 164). In everyday life, the interpretation of a proverb is a matter of both situational and individual experience. However, there is no conflict between the individual and the unique experiential world and the possibility of generalising research findings, since individual worlds have been shaped in society.

The main target for the model is to show how proverbs change their meanings. In the PWS model the interpretation of proverbs in the context of use is based on reference points. It is possible to interpret proverbs as having both literal and metaphorical meanings. Also significant is the essential anchor point of the reference in understanding the expression. When the reference changes or gets a new or different emphasis, the meaning of the expression changes as well.

9 The two other aspects deal with the people involved in the situation.

10 See also: Hintikka, Sandu 1994: 152.

Metaphorical expressions and proverbs do not use simile, they do not say that a subject is ‘like something’, but make a direct statement, it ‘is something’. The main thing is the anchor point in different worlds, how the reference points are defined and where the meanings are anchored (Granbom-Herranen 2008: 283; Granbom-Herranen 2018: 31).

The main concepts in PWS are ‘world line’ (reality) and ‘meaning line’ (what is meant), while anchoring means connecting lines and the reference point. In any event, to be understood, the relevant aspects of the reference point of the utterance must be familiar to the listener or reader (Hintikka, Sandu 1994: 155–156; Granbom-Herranen 2018: 51). The meaning line is to be drawn by using the whole sentence. The events, actions and phenomena are the references. The metaphorical aspect is included in the situation, not in the interpretation of a single word. A proverb cannot have a metaphorical meaning without a literal meaning (cf. Hintikka, Sandu 1994: 164; Granbom-Herranen 2018: 147). Context is the space or universe surrounding an individual, including the life experience of a person and an entire society with its culture. The life experience linking an individual and an utterance creates the meaning of an expression. Common knowledge resides inside a socio-cultural frame. Meaning, it should be noted, is not necessarily identical for speaker and listener. As mentioned above, to understand the meaning of a term, one should understand the extension of that term under the current and other circumstances (Hintikka, Sandu 1994: 152; also, Krikmann 1987: 122). Knowing all the contexts is only a theoretical possibility, even if one presumes the existence of micro-universal or macro-universal and common knowledge (Granbom-Herranen 2008: 172–173, 201). When listeners and speakers interpret utterances, inter-cultural, intra-cultural and individual differences act as challenges to the cooperative principle and any possible acts against it. As Grice says, we need “knowledge of the circumstances of the utterance” before we can even begin to move beyond the “understand something” level to what he calls “full understanding” (Grice 1989: 161; Granbom-Herranen 2018: 205).

EXAMPLE 3. ONE PROVERB WITH VARIOUS CONTEXTS AND MEANINGS¹¹

a) I have not seen men going around without a shirt anywhere other than on the beach and it is no-one else’s business there if you are fat or skinny. “*Annetaan kaikkien kukkien kukkia!*” (Let all the flowers bloom!) – autumn lady (SSS, sent 13/08/2010).

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¹¹ Granbom-Herranen 2018: 54.

b) Why did the town trim even the smallest blooming green areas? Around Farnos's plot, the beautiful meadow full of Dutch clovers has disappeared; now it is just mown grass. – "*Annetaan kukkien kukkia!*" (Let the flowers bloom; SSS, sent 31/07/2008).

c) Down with the monopoly of marketplace cafés. Give new entrepreneurs the chance to compete. – "*Annetaan kaikkien kukkien kukkia*" (Let all the flowers bloom; SSS, published 22/04/2015).

As the studies are devoted to context-bound proverbs, some sorting of expressions is needed. In applying contemporary content analysis,¹² I have linked quantitative and qualitative research traditions. I have used a mixture of methods, though the emphasis has been on qualitative research. A contemporary approach offers added value since content analysis is understood as a complete process that begins with a research plan and ends with a report (Granbom-Herranen 2018: 70–72, Fig. 7). The method used in processing life stories begins with reading and sorting of narrative texts: text including proverbs vs. text without proverbs; proverbs used in pedagogical speech vs. proverbs in rhetorical use. This involves using the so-called empathetic method of reading narratives (Vilkko 1997: 185).

DISCUSSION

The proverb is treated as a culture-specific phenomenon, so its definition cannot be universal. Many definitions of the proverb state that it is an old expression. This makes it a challenge to define contemporary proverbs as modern or future proverbs, or to recognise potential proverbs before they become such. The concept of proverb and its definition for academic use differ from everyday usage by ordinary people, where merely having the notion of a proverb is in most cases enough. This may be what Archer Taylor (1994: 6) calls an incommunicable quality that distinguishes between a sentence and a proverb. There are plenty of expressions that narrators called proverbs, but which were something else from the academic point of view.¹³ The difficulty consists in the fact that when collecting these expressions, we cannot know which ones will last. I call this the paradox of proverbs when looking for utterances which might be proverbs in the future rather than today. The paradox

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12 To differentiate between earlier ways of understanding content analysis as a quantitative method and the current use of the method with qualitative materials, Philipp Mayring (2000) uses the term 'classical quantitative content analysis' for the former and Klaus Krippendorff (2004: xvii–xx) uses 'contemporary content analysis' for the latter. Content analysis is commonly used with existing textual material such as texts in newspapers.

13 For example, in Finnish life stories from the early twentieth century, over 60 different concepts were given as synonyms for *sananlasku* (proverb; Granbom-Herranen 2018: 38).

is that old proverbs are recognisable, but modern or future ones are not. The newest proverbs might be so obvious in contemporary language that they may be unnoticeable, and future utterances are still unknown. However, a defect in existing proverb definitions is that they do not allow for the inclusion of potential proverbs (Grzybek 2011).

The challenge of finding relevant research material in everyday language that is verifiable and ethically sourced, becomes prominent in the study of vernacular proverbs in terms of charting how people have used and are using them in their everyday lives. Proverbs as well as proverbial expressions in vernacular Finnish can be found in various archive collections, proverb dictionaries, published proverb collections, newspapers, in both paper and digital form, and a wide variety of internet sites.

CONCLUSION

Proverbs are a part of everyday language and tightly bound to socio-cultural context, people, emotions and situational information. In using proverbs, it is not only the words that matter but also the feelings and emotions that are read into them in each situation. In every case, the processes and challenges are the same, no matter in what language or cultural setting the study is conducted.

Most often paremiographers have followed the given instructions and good habits of their time. However, the problem is that in most cases the context of the use of proverbs is unknown, and their interpretation is even more of a mystery. The challenge comes when trying to explain something that is happening in the 21st century by using expressions that were current and recorded in the 17th century and perhaps interpreted in the 19th century. Deductions made from all kinds of material are possible if the limitations are at least discussed in the conclusions. The purpose of the criticism is to highlight potentially incorrect conclusions in research findings and hence to prevent the accumulation of error.

Proverbs in Finnish still belong to everyday use and communication, although the context of their use has changed over the last century. As a phenomenon, Finnish proverbs seem to have a status that promotes their continued use in the context of modern urban society, new technology and the mass media. Proverbs are alive if they are used or referred to in everyday communication. Proverbs in everyday use, including traditional and modern ones as well as proverbs such as Bible quotations, still have their place in urban and new technology environments. This means that when we look for proverbs in speech and speech-like texts, we must look at proverbs, shortened proverbs and references and allusions to proverbs.

To study proverbs used by ordinary people also creates the possibilities of looking

at proverbs as a tradition of the so-called culture of denial, a part of communication that was not understood by groups wielding power within society. It is also possible that this is the way tacit knowledge manifests itself. The use of proverbs could also be an expression of critical attitudes towards the exercise of power in society.

Proverbs may be collected in different eras, and political and social contexts may differ from those in Finland, but the action of collecting proverbs itself is always influenced by what is going on in the spheres of politics, the economy and society. Small nations such as Finland, Estonia or Ireland, have asserted their cultural independence through their languages and by collecting proverbs, which were part of the spoken vernacular. It is scarcely possible to escape the fact that neither paremiology nor paremiography is unaffected by the values of society or some group within society. The question is whether the collectors or researchers were aware of the evaluations they have made. Depending on what is valued, people see or do not see certain aspects of the context. Nonetheless, small nations and language groups are once again looking for something of their own, such as their own history and culture. Proverbs are a part of this movement.

In conclusion, as mentioned above, we do not know what proverbs have been used in earlier times, or how and why. We know only those that have been collected and recorded. However, the significance and interpretation of a proverb depends on its context.

SOURCES

- HS – *Helsingin Sanomat* (Helsinki Newspaper), a Finnish national daily newspaper.
 KE84 – *Karjalaiset elämäkerrat* (Karelian Biographies) 1983–1984. The life stories involved are of childhood in Finland before the Second World War. In the Archives of the Finnish Literature Society in Helsinki.
 PE85 – *Perinne elämässäni -kilpikirjoitus* (the Tradition in My Life writing collection) 1985. The life stories involved are of childhood in Finland before the Second World War. In the Archives of the Finnish Literature Society in Helsinki.
 PsL – *Perniönseudun Lehti* (Perniö District Newspaper), a Finnish local weekly newspaper.
 Q-2000 – Questionnaire in 2000. Research material, in the possession of the author.
 SMS – SMS messages (i.e. text messages sent using the Short Message Service). Research material, in the possession of the author.
 SSS – *Salon Seudun Sanomat* (Salo District Newspaper), a Finnish regional daily newspaper.

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