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The Concepts of TRUTH and LIE in Lithuanian, Polish and English Proverbs: A Comparative Analysis

IRENA SNUKIŠKIENĖ

Vilnius University

<https://ror.org/03nadee84>

irena.snukiskiene@flf.vu.lt

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0228-9955>

ABSTRACT. In cultural linguistics, proverbs and proverbial sayings serve as textual data, offering a diachronic view: being old, popular among various layers of society and repetitive, they reflect and shape a nation's culture, stereotypes and axiological system, and are thus considered a great tool for the analysis of a society's linguo-cultural worldview. This article aims to compare the conceptualisation of TRUTH and LIE in Lithuanian, English and Polish proverbs. The data consist of proverbs with the keywords *truth* and *lie*, selected from the main Lithuanian, English and Polish proverbial collections: the Card Index of Lithuanian Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases kept at the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, *The Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs*, *A Dictionary of American Proverbs*, and *Nowa Księga przysłów polskich* (A New Book of Polish Proverbs). The analysis was carried out by applying the qualitative methodology of the Ethnolinguistic School of Lublin by extracting semantic aspects of the concepts analysed, seen from specific interpretative perspectives, and grouping them into semantic profiles. The study reveals the semantic and axiological content of the concepts analysed in all three languages and concentrates mainly on comparison.

KEYWORDS: proverbs and proverbial sayings, concepts, truth, lie, ethnolinguistic analysis.

TIESOS ir MELO konceptai lietuvių, lenkų ir anglų patarlėse: lyginamoji analizė

SANTRAUKA. Kultūrinėje lingvistikoje patarlės ir priežodžiai analizuojami kaip diachroninę perspektyvą perteikiantys tekstiniai duomenys. Būdami seni, vartojami įvairių visuomenės sluoksnių bei pasikartojantys, jie atspindi ir formuoja tautos kultūrą, stereotipus ir aksiologinę sistemą, todėl yra laikomi puikia priemone kalbinei kultūrinei pasaulėžiūrai analizuoti. Šio

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straipsnio tikslas – palyginti TIESOS ir MELO konceptualizavimą lietuvių, anglų ir lenkų patarlėse. Duomenis sudaro patarlės ir priežodžiai su raktažodžiais *tiesa* ir *melas*, išrinkti iš pagrindinių lietuvių, anglų ir lenkų patarlių rinkinių: Lietuvių literatūros ir tautosakos instituto saugomos Lietuvių patarlių ir priežodžių kartotekos, *The Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs* („Oksfordo anglų patarlių žodyno“), *A Dictionary of American Proverbs* („Amerikos patarlių žodyno“) ir *Nowa Księga przysłów polskich* („Naujos lenkų patarlių knygos“). Analizė atlikta taikant Liublino etnolingvistikos mokyklos kokybinę metodologiją, pagal kurią išskiriami semantiniai analizuojamų konceptų aspektai, matomi iš konkrečių interpretacinių perspektyvų, ir sugrupuojami į semantinius profilius. Tyrime atskleidžiamas analizuojamų konceptų semantinis ir aksiologinis turinys, daugiausia dėmesio skiriama jų palyginimui.

RAKTAŽODŽIAI: patarlės ir priežodžiai, konceptai, *tiesa*, *melas*, etnolingvistinė analizė.

INTRODUCTION

Proverbs emerge in a language as a result of observing life and drawing on the everyday experiences of ordinary people. They convey truths related to a culture's life philosophy as well as the factors and circumstances influencing it. Constituting a distinct genre between literary and colloquial language, they are well suited to reflect the cultural and linguistic worldview of a certain nation. According to Geoffrey M. White, proverbs are fixed, repetitive and passed down from generation to generation, therefore they express collective social opinion and generalised knowledge, especially on moral norms and values, and their analysis can be viewed as “cultural archeology”, providing information on cultural models of experience (1987: 152). Lithuanian paremiologist Kazys Grigas mentions similar characteristics for proverbs, additionally highlighting their didactic function: “proverbs are fixed expressions of a generalising nature that are passed down through tradition. They are often characterised by vivid imagery and elements of versification, and always form a syntactically complete sentence. Proverbs serve to teach, advise, warn, summarise various phenomena, or draw conclusions” (Grigas 1968, as cited in: Grigas 2024: 39). Even the Lithuanian term for proverb – *patarlė* – is semantically related to the verb *patarti*, meaning ‘to advise’ (ibid.: 40). In turn, proverbial sayings (Lith. *priežodžiai*) are considered fixed expressions that vividly describe specific objects, phenomena or situations. They differ from proverbs primarily in that they do not seek to generalise or convey a lesson. Additionally, proverbial sayings often do not form a complete sentence but are used as part of one (ibid.: 39). This article is based on the study of both proverbs and proverbial sayings, collectively referred to as *paremia* (gr. *παροιμία*, ‘proverb’ or ‘maxim’). However, the words *paremia* and *proverb* are also used interchangeably, as synonyms.

Wolfgang Mieder distinguishes the proverb's traditionality (i.e. its age and popularity) as one of its main features (2004). Being old, popular among various layers of society and repetitive, proverbs and proverbial sayings reflect and shape a

nation's culture, stereotypes and axiological system, and are thus considered a great tool for the analysis of a society's linguo-cultural worldview. In ethnolinguistic analysis, traditional paremia serve as textual data offering a diachronic view (Niebrzegowska-Bartmińska 2017).

This article builds upon the author's PhD research (Snukiškienė 2022), which offers an in-depth analysis of the concepts of TRUTH¹ and LIE in Lithuanian and English, employing the worldview reconstruction methodology developed by the Ethnolinguistic School of Lublin (Bartmiński 2007). The present study extends the analysis by incorporating Polish proverbial data, further enriching the comparative perspective. The article aims to reconstruct the conceptual structure of TRUTH and LIE in the proverbs of all three languages, which belong to different linguistic families (Baltic, Germanic and Slavic), by examining the concepts not only as linguistic units with their denotative meaning but, more importantly, as linguistic-cultural categories, also reflecting their cultural shades and emphasising semantic and axiological dimensions as reflected in proverbs and proverbial sayings. The context of proverbs often reveals these peripheral meanings of the lexical units, which remain hidden in other linguistic contexts.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH

The research presented in the paper is based on an analysis of proverbs and proverbial sayings in three languages (Lithuanian, Polish and English), applying the cognitive approach and methodology developed by the Ethnolinguistic School of Lublin.

The data consist of proverbs with the keywords *truth* and *lie*, selected from the most comprehensive Lithuanian, Polish and English proverbial collections. Lithuanian proverbs have been sourced from the Card Index of Lithuanian Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases.² The examples preserved in the index mainly come from the Lithuanian Folklore Archives (*Lietuvių tautosakos archyvas*, LTR), the Manuscripts of the Lithuanian Scientific Society (*Lietuvos mokslo draugijos rankraščiai*, LMD), the *Smulkioji tautosaka: patarlės, priežodžiai, posakiai* (Minor

1 Uppercase is used when truth and lie are understood as concepts, lowercase is applied for their general sense and italics are used when they are referred to as lexemes.

2 The compilation of the index was initiated by Kazys Grigas, the most prominent figure in Lithuanian paremiology. Compiled between 1970 and 1990, the index contains more than 200,000 recordings of paremia (Zaikauskienė 2024: 31) and, as the most comprehensive source of Lithuanian proverbs and proverbial sayings, has served as the foundation for the publication *Lietuvių patarlės ir priežodžiai* (Lithuanian Proverbs and Proverbial Sayings), which has been issued since 2000, with four volumes published to date (Grigas et al. 2000; Buftenė et al. 2008; Džekčioritė et al. 2019, 2021).

Folklore: Proverbs, Proverbial Phrases, Sayings) collection, collected and recorded by Jonas Mingirdas (MST), and the 1958 compilation of proverbs and proverbial phrases *Patarlės ir Priežodžiai* (PP). English proverbs have been sourced from *The Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs* (ODEP; 1970, ed. F. P. Wilson) and *A Dictionary of American Proverbs* (DAP; 1992, ed. Wolfgang Mieder). British and American proverbs have been analysed together as no separate US cultural area for paremia has been distinguished. According to Outi Lauhakangas,

the language and cultural areas that form together the global brand are: Africa (Sub-Saharan), Islamic, European, Orient (old Eastern cultural area), Pacific. American cultures are not seen as being apart from European influence (2014: 62).

Polish paremia have been selected from the most comprehensive Polish source, the three-volume compilation *Nowa Księga przysłów polskich* (Ad-Krz; A New Book of Polish Proverbs, 1969, ed. J. Krzyżanowski), a collection of proverbial texts compiled from the work of Samuel Adalberg (the author of the first lexicographic work devoted to Polish proverbs). The data collection resulted in a similar number of proverbs in all three languages – about 300, which makes a total of almost 900 paremiological units analysed. Lithuanian is used as the starting point of the analysis, with Polish and English proverbs analysed subsequently. The study is strictly qualitative, it reveals the semantic and axiological content of the concepts analysed in all three languages, and mainly concentrates on comparison. The frequency and salience of proverbs is not analysed. The paremia of all three cultures are analysed by applying the aspectual analysis methodology, which is explained further here.

The study is a reconstruction of part of the paremiological linguistic worldview in Lithuanian, Polish and English, and was carried out by using traditional qualitative methods of analysis, description and comparison, along with the methodology developed by the Ethnolinguistic School of Lublin, which serves as *tertium comparationis* for translingual analysis. The methodology employs semantic categories (referred to as aspects) in order to analyse and compare the semantic structure of the concepts of TRUTH and LIE. Aspects are defined as sets of features that correspond to some common characteristics, viewed from interpretative perspectives (Niebrzegowska-Bartmińska 2015; Bartmiński 2007). There is no final or strict set of semantic aspects, they are distinguished using a bottom-up approach by first selecting the concept and then carrying out specific observations on how its denotative and connotative meaning is revealed in certain linguistic data, in this case paremia. The most common aspects distinguished by the Ethnolinguistic School of Lublin are the following: [collection],³ i.e., the relationship of the object

3 In cognitive linguistics, aspects are traditionally provided in square brackets.

analysed with other lexical objects; [quantification], i.e., the quantity of the object (singular or plural); [partitivity], i.e., the divisibility of the object; [gradation], i.e., the degree of the object; [opposition], i.e., what the object is contrasted with; [duration], i.e., how long the object lasts; [origin], i.e., what the origin of the object is; [appearance], i.e., the physical appearance of the object; [agentivity], i.e., how the object behaves; [perception], i.e., how the object is felt or perceived; [reason], i.e., what causes the object; [subject], i.e., who causes the object; [object], i.e., who is affected the object of study; [localization], i.e., where the object of study is located or where it manifests, et al. It should be noted that the list includes only the most common aspects, and it is neither finite nor precise. Moreover, no absolutely objective method for distinguishing aspects exists, it depends on the object of study (Niebrzegowska-Bartmińska 2020; Snukiškienė 2022; Rutkovska, Snukiškienė 2025).

Aspects are subsequently grouped into semantic profiles, i.e., certain variants of an object's view, formed by the selection of aspects and their arrangement (Niebrzegowska-Bartmińska 2020). A profile in ethnolinguistics is understood as a particular way of perceiving an object that is shaped by the factors influencing that perception (knowledge of the world, rationality, a system of values and a subjective perspective). Thus, different profiles do not constitute different meanings, but rather different ways of organising the semantic content of a concept analysed (Bartmiński 2007). Each concept profile is characterised by the dominance of a specific aspect or set of aspects. Combining aspects into profiles is still a debatable issue in ethnolinguistics. Sometimes, the same aspect can be assigned to several profiles, while in other cases the profiles coincide with the aspects distinguished from a particular point of view (Żywicka 2007). Jerzy Bartmiński initially proposed distinguishing aspects on the basis of Aristotle's ontological categories (such as substance, quantity, relation, etc.), however, it was later argued that such a mode of explication might exclude the cultural and subjective anthropological perspective (including experience, emotion, and intuition). Given the fundamental aim of ethnolinguistics to investigate the concepts embedded in the consciousness of language users the subjective anthropological perspective cannot be disregarded (Bartmiński 2007). Therefore, today a relatively flexible approach to profiling is adopted: there is no single definitive rule, and both aspects and profiles are explicated depending on the semantics of the concept under study.

ANALYSIS OF THE CONCEPTS OF TRUTH AND LIE IN LITHUANIAN, POLISH AND ENGLISH PROVERBS

One of the most salient perspectives observed in the proverbs of all three languages is the axiological one, in which truth and lie are conceptualised as a value and anti-value

respectively. In all three languages, the aspects of [collection], [appearance] and [perception] can be seen, expressed through metaphors and epithets, when truth is compared to some tangible and intangible values. For instance, Lithuanian paremia characterise truth as sacred: “*Šventa teisybė*” (Sacred truth,⁴ LTR 200/484/, 4260/321/, etc.) and present it as something very precious, employing the metaphor of gold: “*Tiesa už auksą brangesnė*” (Truth is pricier than gold, LTR 4376/76/, LKŽ 1: 999, etc.). Truth is also portrayed as a principle worth sacrificing one’s life for: “*Už teisybę nebaisu ir galvą padėti*” (There’s no fear to die for truth, LTR 6491/555/, 6491/3077/, etc.) and as the source of wisdom: “*Kas teisingas – išmintingas*” (The truthful is wise, LTR 6027/709/, 5895/60/, etc.). It is also commonly metaphorically associated with light, as exemplified by the proverb “*Teisybė už saulę šviesesnė*” (Truth is brighter than the sun, LTR 6027/402/, 6014/1602/, etc.). This metaphorical conceptualisation is also reflected in the Lithuanian national anthem, which invokes truth and light as the nation’s guiding forces: “May the sun above our land / Banish darkening clouds around / Light and truth all along / Guide our steps forever” (“National Song”, trans. by Birutė Jatautaitė).

In Polish proverbs, truth is also considered sacred: “*Święta prawda*” (Sacred truth, Ad-Krz II: 1071) and inherently beautiful: “*Prawdy zdobić nie trzeba*” (Truth needs no decoration, Ad-Krz II: 1070). Consequently, it is regarded as something very dear and valuable: “*Milsza prawda niż przyjaciel*” (Truth is dearer than a friend, Ad-Krz II: 1063); “*Prawdy strzeż jako oka*” (Guard the truth as an eye, Ad-Krz II: 1070). Moreover, truth is metaphorically depicted as the foundation of the world and of humanity: “*Prawdą świat stoi i ludzie na nim*” (The world is based on truth and so are its people, Ad-Krz II: 1069), and presented as inherently interconnected with other fundamental moral virtues: “*Prawda, cnota a sprawiedliwość na jednym gnieździe lęgnie*” (Truth, virtue and justice are born in the same nest, Ad-Krz II: 1065). Similarly to Lithuanian proverbs, Polish paremia also associate truth with light-related imagery: “*Prawda jasna jak słońce*” (Truth is as bright as the sun, Ad-Krz II: 1066).

English proverbs do not metaphorically associate truth with light; instead, they emphasise its value by depicting it as royal: “There is nothing so kingly as kindness and nothing so royal as truth” (DAP: 618). Similarly to Polish proverbs, truth is often depicted as the foundation of other virtues, such as justice, excellence and freedom, as reflected in proverbs: “Truth is the spring of heroic virtue” (DAP: 617); “Truth is the gate of justice” (DAP: 617); “(The) Truth shall make you free” (DAP: 616).

Talking of the axiological conceptualisation of lie as anti-value, the same aspects of [appearance] and [perception] can be seen. For instance, Lithuanian

4 All the Lithuanian and Polish paremia cited have been translated by the author using a word-for-word approach to preserve the original lexis.

proverbs again use colour as metaphor. If truth was associated with light, lies are metaphorically ascribed the colour black: “*Melagio puodas visada juodas*” (A liar’s pot is always black, LTR 457/288/). Another negative valuation can also be visible in the aspect of [collection], when liars are metaphorically compared to animals that in Lithuanian folklore are seen in a derogatory way, for example, dogs (“*Melagis meluoti, o šuva loti – lygiai gali*” (A liar can lie as a dog can bark, LTR 465/36²⁰⁷⁰/) or snakes (“*Melagio liežuvis dvilinkas*” (a liar has a split tongue, LTR 1177/23/). Lithuanian proverbs about liars also contain a strong ingroup vs. outgroup opposition, a common theme in folklore, when one’s own community is portrayed positively while outsiders are viewed with suspicion: “*Lenko tiesą velnias raistuose jodo*” (A Pole’s lie is ridden by the devil in a swamp, LTR 75/4119/; TŽ 3: 385); “*Nerasi teisybės pas žydą*” (You will not find truth with a Jew, LTR 4254/33/); “*Čigono amatas meluoti*” (Lying is a Gipsy’s trade, LTR 465/36³⁶⁷/); “*Ir latvis teisingas, kai apgauti negali*” (Even a Latvian is fair when they cannot cheat, TŽ 5 627). What makes Lithuanian proverbs unique is that cultural othering is directed not only at foreigners but also at some representatives of the non-peasant world, for example, priests and landlords: “*Kunigo / pono teisybė kaip nakties šviesybė*” (The truth/justice of a priest/landlord is like the light of the night, LTR 4135/2³/, 4180/432/). This shows that proverbs mirror the folk worldview of the peasantry.

The negative perception of lying in Polish proverbs is also reinforced through the aspect of [collection], where liars are likened to animals, such as dogs: “*Kłamię jak pies*” ((sb) lies like a dog, Ad-Krz II: 79) or cats: “*Falszywy jak kot*” (As false as a cat, Ad-Krz I: 560). Similarly, liars are compared to disreputable or unreliable figures, such as a thief: “*Łgarstwo to oszukaństwo, łgarz to złodziej*” (Lying is cheating, a liar is a thief, Ad-Krz II: 347), a shoemaker: “*Kłamię jak szew*” ((sb) lies like a shoemaker, Ad-Krz II: 79), or a boaster: “*Kłamca i pyszałek są sobie krewni*” (A liar and a boaster are kin to each other, Ad-Krz II: 80). A liar is also presented as someone unreliable or unstable: “*Kłamca – magazyn wiatru*” (A liar is a storehouse of wind, Ad-Krz II: 80). In Polish proverbs, cultural othering is less salient, but also observed in the use of a verb *cyganić* ‘to lie’, ‘to cheat’ which is derived from the noun *Cygan* ‘a Gypsy’, as can be seen in the example “*Kiedy dobrze scygani, to tak, jakby prawdę powiedział*” (When one cheats well, it’s as if one tells the truth, Ad-Krz II: 78). One Polish proverb uses a vivid imagery to describe lying as particularly repulsive and dangerous: “*Strzeż się kłamstwa jak zgnitego psa*” (Beware of a lie as of a decaying dog, Ad-Krz II: 82).

English proverbs about lying, similarly to Lithuanian, also contain the aspect of [collection] and employ colour metaphors, associating falsehood with darkness: “Falsehood is the darkness of faith” (DAP: 373); “A white lie leaves a black spot” (DAP: 372). Lie is also presented as sinful and devilish “As false as

hell" (ODEP: 243); "Sin has many tools but a lie is the handle which fits them all" (DAP: 372), and deceptively beautiful "Falsehood is a red apple rotten at the core" (DAP: 373). Similar to Lithuanian and Polish proverbs, English sayings make derogatory comparisons between liar and agents, such as thieves "Show me a liar and I will show you a thief" (ODEP: 458), cowards "None but cowards lie" (DAP: 373), and debtors "Debtors are liars" (ODEP: 458). Moreover, national othering is evident in the comparison of liars and Scots "As false as a Scot" (ODEP: 243).

Another salient aspect of proverbs on truth and lie in all three languages is that of [duration]. Truth in proverbs is presented as enduring and eternal, whereas lie is depicted as temporary and fleeting. For instance, Lithuanian proverbs present truth as withstanding all trials and hardships: "*Teisybė nei skęsta, nei dega*" (Truth neither drowns nor burns, LTR 52/47/, 5564/24/, etc.), and is permanent despite the ever-changing world: "*Viskas keičiasi, tik teisybė lieka*" (Everything passes but the truth remains, LTR 6491/1944/); "*Už teisybę pyksta, bet ji niekados nenyksta*" (People are angry about truth, but she never passes away, LKŽ 15: 1082). Truth is also portrayed as triumphant: "*Teisybė neteisybę visados pergali*" (Truth always triumphs over untruth LKŽ 15: 1083) and impossible to conceal: "*Teisybė kaip taukai ant viršaus pasirodo*" (The truth is like the fat that comes to the surface, PP: 135; LTR 4511/60/, etc.; "*Teisybė kaip saulė – delnu neuždengsi*" (The truth is like the sun – you cannot cover it with your palm, LTR 3044/39/). In contrast, lie is presented as temporary and easily exposed: "*Melo kojos trumpos*" (A lie has short legs, LTR 3477/514/, 5228/76/, etc.); "*Melą pavysi greičiau negu šlubą šunį*" (Lie is caught faster than a lame dog, LTR 4607/19/).

Polish proverbs also depict truth as durable and impossible to conceal: "*Prawda prawdą być nie przestanie*" (Truth will not cease to be truth, Ad-Krz II: 1068); "*Prawdę trudno zataić*" (Truth is difficult to conceal, Ad-Krz II: 1070). In contrast, lies are portrayed as temporary and impossible to hide: "*Kłamstwo ma krótkie nogi*" (A lie has short legs, Ad-Krz II: 81); "*Kłamstwo przeminie, prawda nie zginie*" (A lie will pass away, the truth will not perish, Ad-Krz II: 1062); "*Kłamstwo jak oliwa na wierzch się dobywa*" (A lie comes to the surface like oil, Ad-Krz II: 81); "*Kłamstwo jak szydło w worze, niedługo się zatai*" (A lie is like an awl in a sack, it cannot be hidden for long, Ad-Krz II: 81). As can be observed, a large number of Polish proverbs emphasise the fleeting nature of lies.

English proverbs also conceptualise truth as permanent and victorious "Truth is mighty and will prevail" (ODEP: 844); eternal "Truth crushed to earth, will rise again" (DAP: 616); "The truth will out" (DAP: 616); and as a value that never becomes outdated "Truth never grows old" (DAP: 617); "The truth is always green" (ODEP: 844). In contrast, lies are presented similarly to their depiction in Lithuanian and Polish proverbs, as temporary: "Lies have short [or no] legs

[wings]” (ODEP: 461); “A liar is sooner caught than a cripple” (DAP: 370), and unconcealable “A lie will give blossom but no fruit”; “A lie is the most difficult thing in the world permanently to conceal” (DAP: 372).

Another perspective through which truth and lies are viewed is the absolutism of truth and the relativity of lies. This distinction is observed through aspects such as [number], [gradation] and [partitivity], when truth is presented as singular, unique and integral (i.e., non-gradable and indivisible). For instance, Lithuanian proverbs state that, in contrast to lies, truth is always unique and singular: “*Šimtas klaidų, o tarp jų yra viena tiesa*” (There are one hundred mistakes, but only one truth, LKŽ 19: 148); “*Devyni melo, vienas pautos žodis – to ir teisybė*” (One word of truth is right even among nine words of a lie, LTR 703/1698/). Truth is also depicted as indivisible: “*Pusė teisybės – melas*” (Half of the truth is still a lie, MST: 122; TD 2 (9) 190). In contrast, lies can be numerous and different: “*Melas melui nelygu*” (A lie does not equal a lie, LTR 64/520/, 2914/1135/, etc.), which is sometimes presented through a conceptual metaphor of uncountable substance: “*Primelavo pilną maišą*” (To lie a full bag, LTR 4312/349/; “*Primeluoti devynias bačkas ir aštuntą*” (To lie nine barrows and an eighth, LTR 5103/24¹/).

In Polish proverbs, the view is very similar. Truth is depicted as unique: “*Prawda jedna, nieprawd niezliczenie wiele*” (Truth is one, untruths are innumerable, Ad-Krz II: 1066), whereas lies are numerous and cascading:⁵ “*Jedno kłamstwo pociąga za sobą inne*” (One lie entails another, Ad-Krz II: 81). Additionally, there are numerous Polish proverbs describing the act of lying, highlighting both its frequency and effortlessness: “*Kłamię, aż się za nim kurzy*” ((Sb) lies so much that they leave dust behind them, Ad-Krz II: 346); “*Kłamię co się zmieści*” ((Sb) lies as much as fits in, Ad-Krz II: 79); “*Kłamię jak z książki / z nut*” (Sb) lies as if from a book/from notes, Ad-Krz II: 79); “*U niego skłamać, jak jagódkę połknąć*” (Lying for sb is like swallowing a berry, Ad-Krz II: 79). All these proverbs underscore the effortless and unabated nature of lying.

There are fewer English proverbs that express the perspective of absolutism and relativism, but the aspects are quite similar. Truth is presented as unique “There are a thousand ways to tell a lie but only one way to tell the truth” (DAP: 372), whereas lies are depicted as numerous “One seldom meets a lonely lie” (DAP: 372), and cascading “A lie begets a lie until they become a generation” (DAP: 371), for example being metaphorically compared to a snowball: “A lie is like a snowball: the farther you roll it, the bigger it becomes” (DAP: 371), emphasising how they grow and compound over time.

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5 The term “cascading lie” was coined by Polish philosopher Wojciech Chudy (2003). It specifically refers to the multifaceted and irreparable nature of falsehood, where attempts to conceal an initial lie necessitate further deception. In this way, an entire “cascade” of lies is formed.

In all three languages there is also a pragmatic perspective on truth and lies through the aspects of [function] and [result], where truth is often seen as useless and causing problems and lies as pragmatically useful and necessary. For instance, numerous Lithuanian proverbs encourage lying and present it as a necessity of life: “*Meluok ir save vaduok*” (Lie and rescue yourself, LTR 5565/825/, 1202/15/); “*Nemeluosi – neparduosi*” (No lie, no sell, LMD I 676/27/; PP: 125). There are also many proverbs that warn of the negative effects of lying, although the tone of most of them is humorous. These proverbs are often exaggerated expressions reflecting a more playful rather than strictly moralistic approach: “*Nemeluok, liežuvis plaukais apaugs*” (Don’t lie, you will have a hairy tongue, LTR 6190/943/); “*Kas meluoja, kojom tabaluoja*” (Who is lying is dangling his legs, LTR 7111/414/). Regarding truth, proverbs depict it as non-diplomatic, causing problems and making enemies: “*Pasakyta teisybė neprietelius daro*” (Truth told makes enemies, BP: 216; LTR 4825/524/, etc.); “*Teisybę pasakyt, kaip širšių kulinį prakabint*” (To tell the truth is like stirring up a hornet’s nest, LKŽ 6: 834).

Polish proverbs express a very similar view. Lie is presented as a necessity, making life easier: “*Kto nie umie łgać, ten nie umie brać*” (He who does not know how to lie, does not know how to take Ad-Krz II: 345; “*Nie zęlgawszy świata nie przejdiesz*” (One will not cross the world without lying, Ad-Krz II: 347). In contrast, truth is depicted as unprofitable: “*Prawda nie zbogaci*” (Truth will not make you rich, Ad-Krz II: 1067); “*Kto prawdę mówi w oczy, tego bieda tłoczy*” (Who speaks truth into another’s face, lives in poverty, Ad-Krz II: 1063), and undiplomatic, therefore, making enemies: “*Prawda nienawisć rodzi*” (Truth bears hatred, Ad-Krz II: 1067); “*Nie mów prawdy w oczy, bo na cię kij skoczy*” (Don’t tell the truth to someone’s face, or a stick will jump at you, Ad-Krz II: 1063). On the other hand, lying can also have negative effects, which Polish proverbs caution against. Some of these proverbs use humour and hyperbole, making the tone less severe: “*Kto dużo kłamie, temu przy śmierci język kołym stanie*” (Who lies a lot, will have his tongue stuck before death, Ad-Krz II: 79; “*Kłamca taki czy siaki ma język obrośnięty w klaki*” (Any kind of a liar has a hairy tongue, Ad-Krz II: 80); “*Kto łże, ten wisi*” (Who lies will be hanged, Ad-Krz II: 345). However, there are also proverbs that highlight the long-term grave consequences of dishonesty: “*Kto raz skłamię, temu już nigdy nie wierzą*” (Who lies once, will no longer be believed, Ad-Krz II: 79); “*Łgarz sam sobie nabarzi szkodzi*” (A liar harms himself most, Ad-Krz II: 348).

English proverbs express this view somewhat differently. The pragmatic perspective of truth is very ambiguous: on the one hand, truth is presented as dangerous and undiplomatic, additionally employing the aspect of [agentivity]: “Follow not truth too near the heels, lest it dash out thy teeth” (ODEP: 272);

“Truth finds foes, where it makes none” (ODEP: 843); “Flattery begets friends, but the truth begets enmity” (DAP: 21). On the other hand, truth is also depicted as useful and beneficial: “The truth always pays” (DAP: 616); “Truth is a useful idea” (DAP: 617); “Truth never hurt the teller (anyone)” (DAP: 617). Talking of lie, English proverbs do not express the aspect of [function] and do not depict it as pragmatically useful, instead focusing on the aspect of [result] and the negative effects of dishonesty: “Liars never prosper” (DAP: 370); “False is a nettle that stings those who meddle with it” (DAP: 197); “Deceit is a spider’s web which traps the deceiver” (DAP: 140); “Liars begin by imposing upon others, but end by deceiving themselves” (ODEP: 457).

Other salient aspects, which have already been mentioned, are the aspect of [appearance], [agentivity] and [perception], reflecting a physical perspective. Some Lithuanian proverbs personify truth and conceptualise it as less attractive, glamorous and appealing than lies: “*Tiesa – melo pastumdėlė*” (Truth is a lie’s underdog, LTR 5218/54/; LKŽ 9: 541, etc.); “*Melas atjoja ant balto žirgo, o tiesa ateina pėsčiomis*” (A lie rides a white horse, the truth walks, LTR 7834/2⁵⁰/, 4375/135³/, etc.). Truth is also presented through perceptual metaphors of taste: “*Teisybė – karti patrova*” (Truth is a bitter dish, LKŽ 13: 996; LTR 4096/41/, etc.), or pain: “*Teisybė skaudī*” (Truth is painful, LTR 4254/87/). Additionally, several proverbs present it as unfair, succumbing to power or wealth: “*Kas stipresnis, tas gauna visados tiesą*” (The stronger always get the truth, LKŽ 16: 184); “*Pinigas ir netiesą tiesa paverčia*” (Money can turn the false to true, LKŽ 18: 844; TŽ 5 594/40/).

Polish proverbs express a similar view. Truth is conceptualised through the metaphors of pain: “*Prawda boli*” (The truth hurts, Ad-Krz II: 1065); “*Prawda kole w oczy*” (Truth stings the eyes, Ad-Krz II: 1066); and taste “*Prawda jest gorzka*” (The truth is bitter, Ad-Krz II: 1066); “*Prawda wtedy słodka, gdy nas nie dotyka*” (Truth is sweet when it does not touch us, Ad-Krz II: 1069). Additionally, it is presented as noble but unpleasant: “*Prawdę każdy chwali, ale nie każdy chętnie słucha*” (Everyone praises the truth, but not everyone willingly listens to it, Ad-Krz II: 1069); or even as disgusting “*Prawdę widzę, ale się nią brzydzę*” (The truth is seen, but observed with disgust, Ad-Krz II: 1070).

There are fewer English proverbs expressing this perspective, however, they contain similar metaphors. Truth is presented as bitter: “Truth tastes bitter” (DAP: 617) and painful “The truth hurts” (DAP: 616); “Truths and roses have thorns about them” (ODEP: 845). It is also depicted as noble but unattractive “Truth has a good face, but bad (ill) clothes” (ODEP: 843); “Truth has a scratched face” (ODEP: 843).

Though the analysis of proverbs on truth and lies demonstrated that these values are frequently positioned as polar opposites on the axiological scale, there are also

proverbs presenting them as ambiguous and showing a fuzzy boundary between truth and falsehood. For instance, some Lithuanian proverbs state that truth is sometimes difficult to distinguish from lies, its relativity depending on time: “*Kas seniau buvo teisybė, šiandien – pasaka*” (What used to be true is a fairy tale today, PP: 199; LTR 2914/1666/, etc.), or perspective “*Vieno tiesa, kito – nemelas*” (What is true for one person, may be not a lie to another, LMD I 700/123/; PP: 438). One proverb even advises a cautious balance between telling the truth and lying: “*Tiesos nesakyk, bet ir nemeluok*” (Don’t tell the truth, but don’t lie either, LTR 5482/36⁶³/, 5335/1153/, etc.). There are also several proverbs mocking fake or distorted truth: “*Teisybė kaip pečiaus šviesybė*” (As true as the light of the stove, LKŽ 9: 733; LTR 465/36³⁹²/, etc.); “*Tokia teisybė, kad vilkas šieną ėdė*” (as true as the wolf ate the hay, LTR 390/140¹⁴¹¹/).

Polish proverbs also reflect the same fuzzy boundary between truth and falsehood, illustrating how easily they can interchange: “*Z prawdy fałsz, z fałszu prawda skora być zawsze*” (The truth can easily become a falsehood and a falsehood can easily become a truth, Ad-Krz II: 1073); “*Z prawdy się bajki knują*” (Out of the truth tales are spun, Ad-Krz II: 1073). Some proverbs suggest the possibility of a middle ground between truth and lies: “*Nie skłamać i prawdy nie powiedzieć*” (Don’t lie and don’t tell the truth either, Ad-Krz II: 79). Additionally, Polish, similarly to Lithuanian, abounds with proverbs mocking fake truth: “*Tak to prawda jak pies płakał*” (As true as a dog cried, Ad-Krz II: 1071); “*Tak to prawda, jak że wesz kaszle*” (As true as a louse coughed, Ad-Krz II: 1072); “*Tak to prawda, jako kiedy żywe kiełbasy po świecie latały*” (As true as live sausages flew around the world, Ad-Krz II: 1072); “*Taka prawda, jak kamień pływa*” (as true as a stone floats, Ad-Krz II: 1072); etc.

English proverbs also mock things presented as true when they are not: “That is as true as I am his uncle” (ODEP: 840); “That is as true as the cat crew, and the cock rocked the cradle” (ODEP: 841). However, no English proverbs reflecting a fuzzy boundary between truth and falsehood have been observed. Instead, numerous English proverbs depict truth as something very clear and concrete through the aspects of [origin] and [location]. Truth is often depicted as grounded in empirical proof, such as fact: “Figures don’t lie” (DAP: 373) or simplicity “The expression of truth is simplicity” (DAP: 616); “Truth is simple, requiring neither study nor art” (DAP: 617); “Truth seeks no colours / has no need of rhetoric” (ODEP: 843); “Truth gives a short answer, but lies go round and round” (DAP: 616); “Truth shows best being naked” (ODEP: 845). In contrast, lies are typically found in a lack of clarity or excessive verbosity: “Misunderstanding brings lie to town” (DAP: 372); “In many words a lie or two may escape” (ODEP: 460); “Ask no questions and you will be told no lies” (ODEP: 20).

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the values of both truth and lie in the proverbs of all three languages are presented as polysemantic and ambiguous. Their ambivalence is probably rooted in their origin and usage: proverbs are born from people's experiences and employed in a variety of situations. The similarities in the conceptualisation of TRUTH and LIE across all three languages can be observed in their axiological profile, which is expressed mainly through the aspects of [collections], [number], and [duration]. In the proverbs of all three languages, truth is portrayed as one of the cardinal values – absolute and eternal –, while falsehood is depicted as one of the main anti-values, a breach of ethics, temporary and relative. One minor difference that might be observed is in ingroup vs. outgroup opposition, when one's own community is portrayed positively while outsiders are viewed with suspicion. Only Lithuanian proverbs encode the cultural othering of certain figures from the non-peasant world, most notably priests and landlords. This phenomenon might reflect the socio-historical reality of the peasantry and serfdom. The proverbs mainly demonstrate the peasant worldview, which views aristocracy and the intelligentsia as socially distant and suspicious.

The pragmatic profile of truth is quite similar as well, accessed through the aspects of [result], [agentivity], [appearance] and [perception]. The proverbs of all three cultures present it as non-diplomatic, non-beneficial, unattractive and causing problems. However, the three countries show differences in their pragmatic profiles of lie: some Lithuanian and Polish proverbs talk of the [function] of lies, such as improving life or helping to achieve some benefit, with this not observed in English proverbs. These differences may reflect historical experience. Lithuania and Poland, situated at the crossroads of Europe, endured numerous wars, invasions and occupations. In such turbulent conditions, deception could serve as a tool of survival allowing individuals to protect their lives, families and possessions. This collective experience is perhaps expressed in proverbs that tolerate lies.

The main differences can be observed in the fuzzy boundary between truth and falsehood, which is salient only in Lithuanian and Polish proverbs. English proverbs do not contain any examples where the fuzziness of this boundary is clearly evident. Additionally, only English proverbs contain the aspects of [origin] and [location], originating truth from clarity, facts and empirical proof and locating lies in verbosity and lack of clarity. This is perhaps culturally embedded and related to English empirical philosophy, which emphasised observation, evidence and verifiable experience.

The analysis has mainly revealed the conceptualisation of TRUTH and LIE in the paremiological worldview of all three cultures. Since the concepts are not finite but constantly changing cognitive units, this research cannot be considered

exhaustive, and can be updated with analysis of other branches of traditional and contemporary folklore. Nonetheless, the analysis of the paremiological data provides quite a comprehensive cognitive picture of the concepts analysed and can serve as a basis for further research.

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