# SIMPLE FORMS

## An Encyclopaedia of Simple Text-Types in Lore and Literature

edited
by

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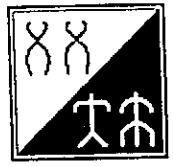

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## PROVERB

**1. Definition:** The p. is one of the oldest and most popular traditional expressions, and it is one of the most central genres within the system of folklore all around the world. A p. is a short saying which is current in a more or less stable form and which, in very general terms and in colloquial language, expresses everyday rules and comments. Although the p. is one of the most accessible and collected genres of folklore, and although there have been many attempts to find a suitable definition of the p., however, there is no generally accepted definition which covers all the specifics of the proverbial genre; on the contrary, even outstanding proverb scholars, such as A. Taylor (1931: 3) or B.J. Whiting (1952: 331), have abandoned the search for a comprehensive definition.

**2. Examples and Analysis:** P.s have the form of complete fixed word complexes which are known in this relatively stable form. Thus, a p. such as (1) 'New brooms sweep clean', for instance, is recognized and used in this verbal form, and it is handed down from generation to generation. The process of phrase formation and stabilization over generations may be favoured by the use of common poetic devices; thus, phenomena like metre, rhyme, metaphor, assonance, alliteration, and others are (but need not be) inherent in p.s. Of course, p.s may always occur in variations; thus, we do not only know a p. of the form (2) 'Where there is smoke, there is fire', but the additional form (2a) 'There is no fire without smoke', too. Yet, both of these variants are complete verbal clichés, and they are both known in their respective complete form, independently of each other. P.s need not necessarily be grammatically or syntactically complete, as can be seen in p.s such as (3) 'Like father, like son': there is no verb in this p., but it is a complete, meaningful text. This feature of internal completeness distinguishes p.s from proverbial phrases such as (4) 'To jump from the frying pan into the fire', or (5) 'To put the cart before the horse', which take their final verbal shape only in a concrete verbal context, and which allow variation in terms of subject and tense (cf. e.g., 'He/she is/was used to put the cart before the horse'). In many cases, however, it is impossible to make a clear-cut distinction between the p. and the proverbial phrase; there are fluent transitions between the two types (cf. 'Don't put/You shouldn't put the cart before the horse'). For this reason, p.s and proverbial phrases have often been included in p. collections without further distinction.

The main characteristic of p.s (and proverbial phrases) is that they have two levels of signification: they not only have a literal meaning, but can, or even must be understood on a figurative level. Thus, one can easily use the utterance from ex. (1) as an ordinary statement about new brooms being the objects denoted and their quality of cleaning better than

older brooms; when used as a p., however, this expression is used to connote new things (or rather persons) in general and their alleged capacity to do better work than the older things they replace. The central semantic mechanism which explains the shift from the denotative level of signification to the connotative level of signification is the assumed anthropocentrism of p.s, i.e., p.s are usually understood as utterances about human behaviour. For many p.s, of course, the interpretation can be immediately derived from the literal meaning such as, for example, (6) 'Better late than never', or (7) 'Haste makes waste'. Most scholars, therefore, have usually made a clear distinction between these two types, and they have given different names to them, e.g. Taylor (1931), who calls one type 'metaphorical proverbs', the other one 'proverbial apophthegms', or Barley (1972), who terms them 'maxim' vs. 'proverb', etc. Such clear-cut distinctions, however, are difficult to make: a p. like (8) 'Look before you leap' may, in fact, be used literally as well as figuratively, connoting something like 'Be cautious enough before you act'. In fact, the 'semantic distance' between the two levels of signification may be of different extent, the difference between 'proverbs proper' and 'metaphorical proverbs' (as defined above) seems to be gradual rather than categorical. Consequently, it seems reasonable to speak of two different types of *use* of a given expression, depending on the various situational contexts in which such sayings are used (cf. Norrick 1981: 3, Hasan-Rokem 1982: 15).

The Russian folklorist G.L. Permyakov (1970, 1979b) has proposed a different solution. In his analyses of verbal clichés (and among them of p.s), he distinguishes between two types of motivation: he calls the first type (e.g., ex. 1 and 2) 'image-motivated' (so-called 'proverbs proper'), the second type (e.g., ex. 6 and 7) 'directly motivated' ('folk aphorisms'). This distinction does not exclude the possibility that single tropes are included in directly motivated items: in ex. (9) 'The pen is mightier than the sword', for instance, both 'pen' and 'sword' are used as metonymies. Still, this does not make the whole saying a figurative one, a 'proverb proper', or a 'true proverb', the greatest subcategory of the whole proverbial stock. The crucial point with both of these two types is that they may be applied in an infinite number of situations. Thus, both (10) 'All's well that ends well' (which would classify as literal or directly motivated), and (11) 'One swallow does not make a summer' are not restricted to one particular situation. The latter, for example, may be used in any situation in which the existence (appearance) of one particular feature of a given phenomenon is not regarded as a reliable indicator of the appearance (existence) of the phenomenon on the whole (e.g., one won battle in a war, the first goal in a soccer match, etc.). Therefore, Permyakov (1970) calls p.s (and proverbial phrases) of both two types *polythematic* (or *synthetic)* as opposed to *monothematic* (or *analytic)* sayings such as superstitious omens, portents, etc., the relevance





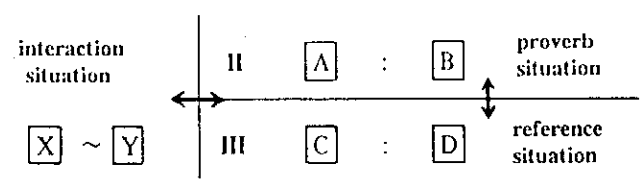
of which is restricted to particular situations. The latter display only one (literal, denotative) level of signification; they allow no extended interpretation, and the meaning of them can be deduced from the sum of their components (cf. 'When the swallows fly low, there will be rain').

P.s often have been considered to be eternal truths with a mainly normative or didactic function. Yet, more recently, both of these assumptions have been seriously called into doubt. Firstly, a p. may serve not only didactic, but other functions as well (a phenomenon for which we have the technical term 'polyfunctionality'): a p. such as the above-mentioned (10) 'All's well that ends well', for example, may function as a statement, a comment, a justification, an argument, etc. Normativity, too, would therefore rather be one possible function of a p., not an intrinsic feature (Grzybek 1993). Secondly, it would be incorrect to regard p.s as truths, whether eternal or not. This can most easily be seen in the case of proverbial antonyms which may exist within a given culture such as (12) 'Absence makes the heart grow fonder' and (13) 'Out of sight - out of mind', which, from an intrinsically logic point of view, clearly contradict each other. To solve this problem, Permyakov (1970) has shown that p.s are not truths and that one, consequently, can never 'prove' anything with p.s. Rather, they are models of real-life or conceived situations. The notion of situation implied here can best be clarified referring to a distinction of different situation types involved in proverb usage; according to Seitel (1969), we have to distinguish:

(1) the *interaction situation*, in which a proverb is actually used,
(2) the *context situation*, to which one refers,
(3) the *proverb situation*, which is contained (i.e. modelled) in the proverb itself, if taken literally.

This differentiation results in the following figure:

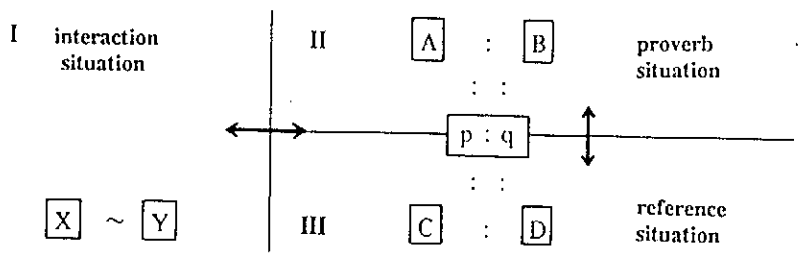
Fig. 1




Two aspects of proverb use have thus to be taken into account: first, the speech act of uttering the proverb in a given interaction situation, and

second, the logical process of relating proverb situation to context situation. According to Seitel (1972: 147), proverb usage can consequently be expressed by the analogy of A : B :: C : D, since we are concerned with an analogy between the relationship of entities of the proverb situation and entities of the context situation. Actually, however, the matter is even more complex than Seitel assumes: his model does not pay attention to the fact that in the case of p.s, what is 'meant' on the connotative level is more important than what is 'said' on the denotative level (see above). Therefore, since it is the abstract idea on the connotative level of signification rather than the proverb situation in its literal (denotative) meaning, which is relevant in the semantic functioning of proverbs, we are concerned with a process of double analogy. If we call this abstract idea 'p : q', we obtain the following overall formula: A : B :: p : q :: C : D (cf. Grzybek 1984a: 227ff., 1987d: 49ff.). This modification can be illuminated by the following figure:

Fig.2




Ultimately, it is exactly this relationship termed 'p : q', which turns out to be invariant in proverb use: both the concrete verbal form and the situation to which the p. refers may vary, but the modelled situation remains invariant and serves as a semantic potential. This fact explains why one cannot ultimately define the meaning of a p. just on the basis of its text. The Estonian paremiologist Krikmann (1974a,b) has described this phenomenon (which he calls the "semantic indefiniteness of proverbs") in detail. It turns out that the p.'s polyfunctionality, its polysemanticity, and heterosituativity (i.e. its application in various





contexts) are highly interrelated factors (cf. Grzybek 1987d: 43f.).

In his logico-semiotic approach, Permyakov has succeeded in describing the whole lot of situations modelled in p.s by reducing them to four major invariants (cf. §3); thus, semiotic approaches to the p. not only confirm Burke's (1941: 256) earlier assumption that p.s "are strategies for dealing with certain situations"; additionally, they specify traditional views and provide a general theoretical framework for previous research on an elaborate level.

Permyakov's definition of p.s and proverbial phrases as "signs of situations or relationships between objects" allows him to theoretically separate proverbial phrases from phraseological entities (usually called 'idioms'), which have often been included in collections of p.s and proverbial phrases without further distinction. Thus, it becomes possible (and necessary) to distinguish proverbial phrases (such as ex. 4 and 5) from phraseological entities, which, according to Permyakov do not model the relationship between two concepts, but which, instead, express single notions, i.e. serve as signs of single objects or notions, such as 'to bury the hatchet' (≈'to make peace'), 'to kick the bucket' (≈'to die'), or 'to hit the sack' (≈'to go to sleep'), and phraseologisms of other types; for a detailed discussion of the problem see Eismann and Grzybek 1993. This view would give an objective foundation to Röhrich's (1973: 12) assumption that proverbial phrases - along with traditional comparisons - are the simplest forms among the simple forms; speaking in semiotic terms, Čerkasskij has called p.s the "minimal unit of the supra-linguistic level" (Čerkasskij 1968: 364).

**3. Typology:** Existing p. typologies have naturally been dependent upon not only the notion of what a p. is, but also the question of what a p. type, in particular, might be. There are at least two different approaches to the definition of a p. type: these might be called a broad and a narrow approach. P. types in the broad sense, then, represent particular subcategories within the whole of the proverbial stock; p. types defined in the narrow sense can be understood as particular p.s which are semantically similar to each other, equivalent, or even identical, yet differently expressed (be it in the same or in some other language).

A common approach to the establishment of p. subcategories is to use the thematic fields which a p. is either taken from or applied to. Here, distinctions are not only made between 'true' metaphorical and non-metaphorical, literal p.s, or between p.s and proverbial phrases (see §2); additional special classes, such as *legal p.s, medical p.s* or *weather p.s*, are also established. Typical examples of legal p.s would be (13) 'Those who will not work, shall not eat', or (14) 'First come, first served'; popular instances of medical p.s are (15) 'An hour's sleep before midnight is worth two after' or (16) 'An apple a day keeps the doctor

away'. Finally, common examples of weather p.s would be (17) 'April showers bring May flowers' or (18) 'Every cloud has a silver lining'.

P.s and, in particular, legal p.s, play a definite role in the judicial system in certain African cultures (cf. Messenger 1959); they exist in many other cultures, too, and they are usually relics of obsolete legal rules which have survived in contemporary language, but which are no longer part of the legal system. Thus, for example, a German document of the 14th century declares: "Wherever you can attach a proverb, do so, for the peasants like to judge according to proverbs" (Taylor 1931: 87). Medical p.s, too, which are mostly concerned with health and its maintenance, food, and eating, often have an authentic historical background, and the meteorological background of many weather p.s is also correct. It is no wonder, then, that p.s of all these types have been regarded as sayings which require literal interpretation. This fact, however, means that their classification as special *proverbial* types is extremely problematic, since many p.s of the above-mentioned special types need not necessarily be interpreted literally: they can be applied to other issues apart from their legal, medical, or meteorological content. An expression such as (18) 'Every cloud has a silver lining', for example, may be used to refer to *any* unlucky or gloomy situation which still shows some hope, and a saying such as (16) 'An apple a day keeps the doctor away' might be used in *any* situation in which constant precaution or preparation is regarded as ultimately beneficial. At this point, however, these sayings would cease to be specific medical, legal, or weather p.s. in the strict sense of the word. This fact calls corresponding thematic classification systems into doubt. Historically (genetically), such a typology still seems to be acceptable, and, perhaps, meaningful; on a synchronous level, however, such sayings either turn out to be strictly monothematic (see §2) - and in this case should be classified as superstitious omens - or as polythematic p.s in general (cf. Permyakov 1970, 1975, Dundes 1984). Of course, one and the same text may be used either as a p. or as a superstitious omen; in this case it would have to be regarded as a homonymous text, and its generic classification would depend on context and function. Paremiological homonymy (or synonymy, too) is quite usual in folklore; the same phenomenon can be observed, e.g., when an identical text may turn out to be either a p. or a *riddle (cf. Permyakov 1974).

A different set of attempts to define a p. type in its narrow sense have been undertaken in the last 20 years, in particular by Permyakov and by the Finnish scholar M. Kuusi. Kuusi (1966) separates three different levels which can be used to group together various p.s: (a) the idea, (b) the formula, and (c) the internal kernel (*Baukern*) of a p. Internal kernels are understood as images or figures; formulas are typically reoccurring verbal stereotypes such as "Better ... than", cf.: (19) 'Better late than never', (20) 'Better safe than sorry', (21) 'Better bend than





break', etc. The validity or relevance of a formula can be restricted to a particular language if one does not regard literal translations to belong to the same formula. The above-mentioned English p. (2) 'Where there is smoke, there is fire', for example, would then be represented by the same formula and the same internal kernel in the German equivalent (2b) *Wo Rauch ist, da ist auch Feuer*. In the French equivalent, (2c) *Il n'y a pas de fumée sans feu*, however, there is still the same internal kernel, but not the same formula; additionally, the order of the two elements has been reversed. In the p. (22) 'Where there is lightning, there is thunder', the same idea is expressed with the same formula, but with a different internal kernel.

Consequently, Kuusi's (1972) attempt to develop an *International Type-System of Proverbs* - methodologically comparable to Thompson's index of *Types of The Folk-Tale* (1928) - is predominantly based on identical ideas of p.s. Kuusi's system, which is still in the process of development, is based on underlying binary oppositions; in his view, the relations which can be established between them, represent "the most coherent principle" for classification (Kuusi 1972: 710). Thus, his first group, e.g., is based on the opposition *One: Two (Many)*, which is then subdivided into further categories , such as

1.1. It is (not) good to x alone - cf.
'Loneliness means danger' (Danish),
'A single man is meat for the wolfs' (French), or
'Single cocks are eaten by the foxes' (Dutch), etc.

Kuusi's typology is based on actual p.s, and for each new idea, a special type has to be inventorized. This is not the case with Permyakov's approach, which claims to cover not only all existing p.s, but also p.s which are conceivable. Emphasizing the fact that completely different ideas may be transmitted via one and the same binary opposition (an assumption which would not be doubted by Kuusi, by the way) - cf. 'Where there is one A, there are two B' vs. 'One A is better than two B' - Permyakov strictly separates the theme of a p. (binary oppositions like Kuusi's) from its logical form. In his earlier works (until 1978), Permyakov has not strictly kept apart thematic and logical classifications. In his later approach, the theme of a p. is defined on the basis of semantic oppositions similar to Kuusi's. Having analyzed more than 50,000 p.s from more than 200 various cultures, Permyakov has arrived at the conclusion that 76 semantic oppositions (twelve of which are intersections of elementary pairs) suffice to cover ca. 97% of the whole proverbial material. The logical treatment of the theme is described by four major "logical-semiotic invariants" (which may be submitted to a complex system of further logical transformations). Both thematic and logical classifications have to complement each other in order to grasp a

p.'s meaning; a particular p. type is thus defined as an "intersection of a certain inventory of proverbial thematic elements [...] with an exactly defined kind of logical relation between these elements" (Permyakov 1979b: 342). To give but one example: the mandatory complementary description of the invariant meaning of a p. can be illustrated by the following three p.s, which belong to one and the same 'higher logico-semiotic invariant': (23) 'Where there is smoke, there is fire'; (24) 'No rose without thorns'; (25) 'No river without a bank'. All three of them belong to the invariant IB, which is characterized by the logical operation of implication [A --> B]. Permyakov (1970: 21) rephrases this logical operation: "If there is one object (P), there is another object (Q); or, more accurately, given a connection between one object and another object, if there is one object, there is (will be) another object." All three of them maintain that the first part of a given pair does not come into appearance without the second part. Yet, the meaning of these p.s is not the same: In the first one, it is maintained that there is no 'consequence' without 'reason', in the second one, there is no 'good thing' without any 'disadvantage', in the last one, that there is no 'whole' lacking any of its constituent 'parts'. According to this system (which Permyakov has significantly elaborated and which he has termed "Grammar of Proverbial Wisdom"), each single p. falls neatly into a specific category; the definition of a p. type may thus be applied to examples from different languages.

**4. History:** The name *proverb* goes back to the Latin term *proverbium*, the origin and meaning of which has not been reliably clarified. Probably, the name *proverbium* came into use in the 1st century B.C., when it replaced the earlier Old Latin name *adagio* (for more detailed information on the etymology of names for the p. see *adage). Around this time, the name *adagio* was no longer understood, and it was replaced either by the Greek term παροιμία (paroimia), or by the name *proverbium*. First references to the term *proverbium* can be found in the works of Cicero and Varro (Bieler 1936: 248). Whereas the origin of the Greek term 'paroimia' seems relatively clear ('par' and 'oimos'), its meaning is not: for a long time it was interpreted as being a reminder, "an utterance which accompanies the listener, the receiver, along his way" (Rupprecht 1949: 1708). It seems more reasonable, however, to interpret it as something "walking along with a narrative" (Rupprecht 1949: 1708). This might not only be a hint at the close relationship between the p. and particular narrative genres (see §5); additionally, this would coincide with the Old Latin and Old and High German names for the proverb, too (see also *adage).

As far as the roots of the p. as a genre are concerned, it is probable that its origins are preliterate. This view does not, of course, preclude





the fact that particular p.s have arisen more recently. The source of many p.s must be traced item per item. Painstaking investigations of the source of each p., however, can at best lead to the first written document, which in no way necessarily reflects the actual source of the p. in question, which may have been in popular use before. The first documented p. sources go back to the 2nd millennium B.C.: already in the Sumerian culture, p.s were recorded on cuneiform tablets (Gordon 1955); some of these p.s exhibit striking parallels with p.s still in use today (Kramer 1959). Such examples, however, should not necessarily be regarded as direct sources of today's proverbial treasury; rather, the predominant basis of today's European proverbs "are translations and recoinings of quotations from ancient Greek and Latin literature and from the Bible" (Moll 1966: 113). In fact, many p.s which can be found in the work of Greek or Roman writers, such as Aristophanes, Plautus, Theocratus, and many others, and which are best documented in the monumental collections of Leutsch and Schneidewin (1839/51) and Otto (1890), are still in use today in their respective translations. It is most likely, however, that p.s were current in popular speech long before they were incorporated either into literature or into the Bible. In most cases, we are not aware of the classical or biblical origin of such p.s, when we use them today. If so, many scholars would tend to term them *winged words, instead of p.s.

Although p.s are part of oral tradition and transmitted from generation to generation in a more or less stable form, they are subject to variations over time, not only in terms of their lexical change, but in terms of their content as well. Thus, specific details may be replaced by others, general traits may be replaced by more specific ones, obsolete details may be removed, etc. etc. The familiar English p. (26) 'A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush' illustrates such changes: thus, in 1562, Heywood included in his collection the p. (26a) 'A birde in the hand is worth ten in the wood', and still older is the variant (26b) 'A birde in hond is better than three in the wode' (Taylor 1931: 22f.). Most recently, empirical research has been able to show that such variations are not restricted to historical (diachronic) changes of a particular proverbial form; on a synchronic level, too, many commonly known variants of a p. can be observed - mainly with regard to merely linguistic (e.g. morphological, lexical and syntactic) phenomena - which result in an amount of variation often neglected by folklore scholars (cf. Grzybek, Chlosta 1993; Roos 1993). Naturally, such variational effects are multiplied in the case of loan translations, i.e. borrowings and translations from other languages. What becomes evident is the extreme importance of p. collections for the study of p.s and their origins, in spite of the p.'s oral nature.

Collections of p.s have been increasingly compiled since the Middle Ages. Of primary importance is Desiderius Erasmus' (Erasmus of

Rotterdam's) *Adagiorum Collectanea* (1500), which can be regarded as one of the most valuable documents of the ancient cultural knowledge. It is not only a collection of p.s; it also contains excellent comments on their tradition. Because of its moralistic-didactic orientation, this collection, which was most instrumental in spreading classical p. lore among European vernaculars, is quite typical of collections of this period. This tendency decreased only in the 19th century, when the first scholarly editions were published, in connection with the rise of philology and due to Romanticism. Collections such as Wander's *Deutsches Sprichwörterlexikon* (1867-80) in five volumes can still be regarded as milestones of international paremiography (i.e. p. collecting, documenting and publishing).

P.s are not only used but also newly created nowadays; yet there has been an important decrease in the exploitation of their didactic and normative function. In recent years, they have been increasingly used for dismantlement, a tendency best documented in Mieder's (1982/85) collections of so-called 'anti-proverbs'. P.s are frequently used in literary texts (cf. Mieder 1978; Grzybek 1991a); they often occur in political speech and advertisements, where they either serve as direct quotations or as material for allusions and transformations (cf. Röhrich, Mieder 1977: 108ff.; Mieder 1983; Chlosta *et al.* 1993). Thus, the p. continues to live, though partially in a different form and with functions other than in earlier times.

**5. Related Forms and Transformations:** In terms of its pointed and marked form on the one hand, and its extreme brevity on the other hand, the p. shows much similarity to closely related genres such as the aphorism, *apophthegm, epigram, maxim, sententia, *winged word, and the like. Unlike all of these forms, which are characterized either by their definite individual authorship or their written manifestation and origin, the p. is predominantly part of oral folklore, and the question of authorship is ultimately irrelevant. Yet, a zone of fluent transition between the p. and all of these 'individual' sayings should be posited for two reasons. Firstly, the p. is not - as was generally assumed during the Romantic period - the immediate expression of the *Volksgeist;* rather, it is often taken from literary sources, or it was initially uttered by a single person. The p. is, as Russell termed it, "The Wisdom of Many and the Wit of One" (Taylor 1931). Secondly, all the above-mentioned types of 'individual' sayings may become so popular and widespread that they become an integrated part of a culture's oral repertoire and thus converge with p.s.

The p. can be found in almost any other genre, not only in folklore, and either as a direct quotation or as an underlying basic structure. These two types should be clearly separated.

In particular in *fables, p.s are often quoted in order to 'summarize'





the content, the moral of the story. But this quotation is often only an explicit manifestation of a structural similarity which underlies both the p. and the fable. In this case, the fable can either be understood as a thematic elaboration of the idea of a p., or both genres can be understood as text manifestations to both of which there is a common semantic deep structure (Carnes (ed.) 1988; Grzybek 1988, 1989). In former times, in fact, p.s were often expanded into larger narratives in order to illustrate their moral and to make the p. more easily understood and better-suited for moralistic-didactic purposes. Other elaborations may include short dramas which were extremely popular in 17th century France, where they were called *proverbes dramatiques.* On the basis of Permyakov's assumption of the "conversion of genres", according to which folklore items can be regarded as "paradigmatic forms of one and the same entity [...] in which some aspects of internal and external structures are transformed", a theoretical model can be described which tries to explain such elaborations as divergent syntagmatic expansions of underlying identical thematical and logical components (Grzybek 1984a, 1987d). This kind of interpretation does of course not explain any historical or genetical questions. P.s and fables have often been regarded to depend on each other's existence (cf. §4, etymology): some scholars have claimed that p.s precede the longer types, others claim that the p. is a remnant (*Schwundstufe*) of formerly longer texts. It seems most reasonable to assume that, depending on the particular p., both kinds of processes are equally likely to take place.

Another kind of relationship is represented in case of the p. and the *riddle. A p. and a riddle are sometimes completely identical verbal forms which can be distinguished only by divergent intonational patterns and, of course, situational and functional differences. In certain cases, the first part of a p. corresponds to a riddle question, and the p.'s second part is the solution to it. In other cases, p.s turn out to be the answers to riddles. Here, once again, the instructive function of both the p. and riddle, which has been institutionalized especially in the educational systems of more remote cultures and societies, becomes most evident.

Still another and a somewhat different kind of transformation can be seen in pictorial representations of p.s, i.e. in painted illustrations such as, e.g., the famous "Narrenschiff" (1494) by Sebastian Brant (1458-1521), or the "Netherlandic Proverbs" (1559) by Pieter Brueghel (ca. 1520-1569). These illustrations, however, are usually restricted to the denotative (literal) meaning of p.s and proverbial phrases. They do not reflect the underlying connotative meaning. The discrepancy between the denotative and connotative levels of meaning in p.s and proverbial phrases also makes them well-suited material for visual jokes and riddles, such as, e.g., the charade.

**6. Geography:** P.s have been documented in all parts of the world,

although not always with identical frequency and function. Thus, they are widely used, in particular as "argument-makers and intensifiers of conversation" (Abrahams 1972: 119) in Europe, Asia, and America. They are widely spread in Africa, too, which has been shown in ethnographic reports by Herzog, Blooah (1936), Messsenger (1959), by Seitel (1972) and others. Here, p.s often have a fixed and institutionalized place in the educational and judicial systems of many cultures. Whiting (1931: 61) states that p.s are less common among Australian aborigines and concludes "that if proverbs do exist, they occur seldom, and play no part in the ordinary life of the people". The relative lack of evidence, however, may not prove the low frequency of p.s among certain peoples; as Whiting (1931: 61) admits, "there is always the possibility that proverbial sayings escaped the attention of foreign observers". This was the case, for instance, when the acknowledged anthropologist Boas, still in 1925, claimed that "hardly any proverbial sayings are known" to the American Indians, an assumption which has been definitely disproven by subsequent ethnographic research. Although there are many particular p.s which are known in several cultures, many other p.s are known only in specific parts of a given culture. Such divergent patterns of distribution require individual studies. Ek (1964), for example, undertook such an investigation in Sweden for the p. (24) 'He who comes first, mills/grinds first' (≈ 'First come, first served'), Grober-Glück (1974) has put together an atlas of distribution of German proverbial expressions which indicates not only the distribution, but the density of use as well. Still unique is Kuusi's (1957a) attempt to demonstrate the universal distribution of the proverbial expression 'When it rains and the sun shines ...' and its world-wide variants.

A somewhat different approach has been suggested by Permyakov. In two experimental studies undertaken in the 1970s (cf. Grzybek 1984a, 1991), Permyakov has attempted to empirically investigate proverb familiarity among contemporary Russians. His studies have resulted in a Russian paremic minimum, i.e., in an inventory of paremic sayings, mainly of proverbs and proverbial sayings, well-known to every Russian native speaker. Based on Permyakov's methodology a number of studies have been initiated trying to find out proverb familiarity in various cultures (cf. Grzybek 1991; Grzybek, Chlosta 1993). These studies do not only reveal which proverbs are actually distributed in a given culture, but they also display the broad spectrum of their linguistic variation (see above). Parallel investigations of a variety of cultures should provide an answer to the question of which proverbial expressions are actually in use today. As to cross-cultural and typological comparisons, the emerging picture should be more reliable than former comparative studies, based on literal sources, which are full of loan translations never actually used (Grzybek, Škara, Heyken 1993).





**7. History of Interpretation:** "Unfortunately, the history of paremiology has not yet been written" (Voigt 1977: 164). This lack of a systematic overview of p. scholarship (paremiology) does not seem to be accidental: A. Taylor, in his fundamental study on *The Proverb* (1931: vii), regrets that "the proverb and related forms have long been the objects of general interest and the occasion for many books, but they have attracted little serious and thorough study". Kuusi (1957b), in his seminal *Parömiologische Betrachtungen*, similarly calls paremiology a "science of tradition without tradition". In fact, p. scholarship as an international discipline came into being only in this century, when the p. began to be studied by anthropology, ethnology, psychology/psychiatry, literary scholarship, (historical) linguistics, pedagogy, and many other disciplines.

Of course, the rather theoretical question of what a p. is (or does), and how it can be described, cannot be separated from more or less practical questions, such as the organization of p. collections and the principles underlying their arrangement. Consequently, it would be wise to date the beginning of p. scholarship to the period when the first scholarly organized collections were made and edited. In fact, the first systematic investigations of the p. and closely related genres appeared at the same time as the first scientific p. collections, in particular in the 19th century. This interrelation is best demonstrated in the case of Wander (1803-79), who was responsible for the monumental five-volume *Deutsches Sprichwörterlexikon* (1867-80), and who also published a less known philological research into the proverb, its form and function some thirty years before, in 1836.

Milestones in international p. scholarship, which date from the first half of our century, are Seiler's (ed.) (1922) *Deutsche Sprichwörterkunde* and, first of all, Taylor's (1931) seminal study *The Proverb*, which, in fact, became the foundation of modern paremiology. A series of articles published in the 1930s, such as *Problems in the Study of Proverbs* by Taylor (1934) and *The Study of Proverbs* (Whiting *et al.* 1939), stimulated further research. Field work on the borderline between ethnography and sociology was initiated by Hain in the early 1950s, a direction of work, which was later continued by scholars such as Arewa and Dundes (1964) and others.

The foundation of an international journal of paremiology, *Proverbium*, provided a comprehensive scientific forum. *Proverbium* was initially edited in Helsinki from 1965 to 1975; after a short period of time, when it was published in Hungary under the title of *Proverbium Paratum* (vol. 1-4), it started being edited in form of a yearbook in 1984. Thus, p. scholarship succeeded in overcoming national and regional limitations: paremiology was rendered an international and interdisciplinary subject. The need for international comparisons significantly favoured structuralist and semiotic approaches, which have

been most intensively and most successfully developed in Eastern Europe, mainly in Hungary (Kanyó 1981), Romania (cf. Negreanu 1989), and, first of all, in the former Soviet Union (cf. Grzybek 1986). This kind of approach seems particularly promising, since it provides a theoretical framework which gives a home to both traditional and modern questions.

Bibliographical data are reliably obtainable: For a long time Moll's (1958) *Sprichwörterbibliographie* was an important research tool, since it replaced earlier outdated bibliographies such as the one by Bonser, Stephens (1930). Only recently, it has been surpassed by Mieder's (1982, 1990, 1993) annotated bibliographies on *International Proverb Scholarship,* which are annually updated in the yearbook *Proverbium.*

## 8. Collections

### 8.1. Bibliographies

Röhrich, Mieder (1977: 119ff.) name the most important proverb collections of various languages. From 1984 onwards, W. Mieder provides an annual report of new and reprinted proverb collections of any language. These reports can be found in: *Proverbium. Yearbook of International Proverb Scholarship.* See also Mieder 1982, 1990, 1993.

### 8.2. Important English and American Collections

Mieder 1988, 1992; Simpson 1982; Stevenson 1948; Taylor, Whiting 1958; Wilson 1935 ($^{3}$1970); Whiting 1968, 1977, 1989.

### 8.3. Important German Collections

Mieder (1984) gives a comprehensive account of German paremiography and German proverb collections. The following list represents but a small selection of major works. Mieder's (1985/89) collection of 'anti-proverbs' differ from all other works, since it represents playful transformations of proverbial items.
Beyer, Beyer 1984; Mieder 1985/89; Röhrich 1991; Simrock 1846; Wander 1867-80.

### 8.4. Polyglot Collections

Röhrich, Mieder (1977: 124) name a whole list of polyglot proverb collections; most of them treat proverbial parallels rather naively, as far as a theoretical typology is concerned. Without doubt, Kuusi's (1985) collection has set the standard for future collections of this kind.
Davidoff 1946; Gluski 1971; Kuusi 1985.

## 9. Bibliography

ABRAHAMS 1972; AREWA, DUNDES 1964; BARLEY 1972; BIELER 1936; BONSER, STEPHENS 1930; BURKE 1941; CARNES (ed.) 1988; ČERKASSKIJ 1968; CHLOSTA *et al.* 1993;





DAL' 1862; DUNDES 1984; EISMANN, GRZYBEK 1993; EK 1964; ERASMUS OF ROTTERDAM 1500; GORDON 1955; GROBER-GLÜCK 1974; GRZYBEK 1984a, 1984b, (ed.) 1984, 1986, 1987d, 1988, 1989, 1991a, 1991b, 1993; GRZYBEK, CHLOSTA 1993; GRZYBEK, CHLOSTA, ROOS 1993; GRZYBEK, ŠKARA, HEYKEN 1993; HASAN-ROKEM 1982; HERZOG, BLOOAH 1936; KANYÓ 1981; KRAMER 1959; KRIKMANN 1974a, 1974b; KUUSI 1957a, 1957b, 1966, 1972; LEUTSCH, SCHNEIDEWIN 1839/51; MESSENGER 1959; MIEDER 1977, 1978, 1982, 1982/85, 1983, 1984; MOLL 1958, 1966; NEGREANU 1989; NORRICK 1981; OTTO 1890; PERMYAKOV 1970, 1974, 1975, 1979a, 1979b; RÖHRICH 1973; RÖHRICH, MIEDER 1977; ROOS 1993; RUPPRECHT 1949; SEILER (ed.) 1922; SEITEL 1969, 1972; TAYLOR 1931, 1934, 1962; THOMPSON 1928; VOIGT 1977; WANDER 1836, 1867-80; WHITING 1931, 1952; WHITING *et al.* 1939.

P.G.