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EMPIRICAL AND FOLKLORISTIC PAREMIOLOGY:
TWO TO QUARREL OR TO TANGO?

0. Abstract

In this article, we attempt to discuss the realm of intersection between folkloristic and empirical proverb scholarship. In characterizing various methodological convergences and divergences of these two approaches, we will touch upon some of their specific advantages and shortcomings. Our material is based on an empirical study, which we conducted in the USA and in Canada in 1991. In discussing our examples, we will repeatedly refer to the *Dictionary of American Proverbs* (DAP), because this work, with its strict empirical orientation, is unique in empirical paremiography. Comparing our results to the material of the DAP, our discussion will be mainly *text-oriented*, rather than *subject-oriented*; questions as to factors influencing proverb knowledge will not be particularly focused upon. For the time being, we can only point out many questions (and not answer all of them); we can demonstrate particular trends and tendencies (and not entirely explain them); and we can invite scholars to discuss the relevant questions in the future.

1. Introduction: There is safety in numbers!

Let us start with a concrete example:

(1) *There is safety in numbers!*

According to our investigation (for details see below), this proverb is familiar to more than 95% of the North American population. There seems to be no equivalent in the German proverbial stock; quite on the contrary, people often say "*Mit Statistik kann man alles beweisen*" [*You can prove anything by means of statistics*]. Perhaps, this is some telling indication of why it is particularly in Germany that the youngest branch of proverb scholarship, empirical paremiolo-

gy, has been so skeptically and pessimistically appreciated. The central reproach (which is not always explicitly expressed) consists in the assumption that the abundant variety of proverbs is reduced to "bare numbers", and that the results have nothing in common with the diversity of the existing proverbs; additionally, critics assume that the results cannot be reliable, since the proverb is deprived of its everyday context, and since the concrete conditions of proverb usage are neglected.

In our opinion, we are concerned here with a crude misunderstanding because empirical paremiology by no means denies proverbial varieties, but, on the contrary, attempts to structure the 'infinite' number of collected proverbs (and their variants) on the basis of their respective degree of familiarity. In doing so, many a proverb has indeed to be classified as obsolete, or 'generally unknown'; such proverbs would in fact have to be regarded as outdated, as not belonging to the contemporary (!) proverbial stock any more. But no one would ever eliminate them from the traditional proverb treasury - they remain important witnesses of a culture's proverbial richness, though witnesses of days passed by...

As has been repeatedly pointed out elsewhere (Grzybek/Chlosta 1993), the quantitative results obtained by empirical paremiology are only an intermediate objective; first and foremost, these results should be understood as a basis, which subsequent (paremiological, philological, linguistic, etc.) studies can take for their starting point.

2. Empirical Paremiology and Minimum-Oriented Paremiology

Empirical proverb scholarship is, of course, closely related to *minimum-oriented* paremiology; the latter should be understood as one particular direction of empirical paremiology, and, in fact, one of its major objectives. These manifold aspects, reasons, and aims of determining the proverb minimum of a given culture, and the particular steps in achieving these goals, have been discussed elsewhere in detail (Baur/Chlosta/Grzybek 1994, 1995). Therefore, a short summary of the most crucial points will suffice here.

The main objective of a minimum-oriented research is the establishment of a list containing all proverbs 'generally known' in a given culture. Since there cannot be a strict, let alone an a priori defined borderline between 'familiar' and 'unfamiliar' proverbs, usually a percentage of 90% (or 95%, or 97.5%, respectively) of statistical probability is assumed for 'general knowledge' of a proverb.

As far as text-oriented questions are concerned, this general leading idea is accompanied by two major fields of interest: first, to find out which proverbs are known to what degree, and second, in which concrete verbal form(s) these proverbs are known. Thanks to the specific method employed -- only the beginning of a proverb is presented, and this partial text must be completed by the informants --, both questions can be answered in one step. A partially presented text such as

(2) *A good lawyer ...*

may hypothetically be completed by an infinite number of both possible and plausible endings, such as:

(2a) *... is a bad neighbor.*

... has a big car.

... has a fool for a client.

... always wins.

... is a bad father.

It becomes evident at first sight that there are some 'idiosyncratic' completions among these 'solutions' which would hardly be classified as a real proverb by native speakers; in fact, such idiosyncrasies usually only occur once among dozens of informants. As opposed to such singular occurrences, the most frequent form(s)¹ filled in by the informants can be regarded as the contemporary standard variant(s).² Given the infinite number of possible completions, it is highly unlikely, if not impossible, to simply guess the ending of a proverb. This bold assertion is often called into question by members of the culture the proverbs are taken from, among them paremiological specialists. But the simple attempt to complete proverbs of an unfamiliar culture would quickly set many a critic right...

In presenting the relevant proverbs to native speakers, it would not be possible, however, for mere quantitative reasons, to include all proverbs ever recorded in the traditional proverb collections. Therefore, the first step in minimum-oriented paremiology must be the establishment of an *experimental corpus*, which must obey two parameters: qualitatively, it must contain all potentially known proverbs of a culture; and quantitatively, the corpus must not be too large so that it can be managed by the individual informants.

2.1. Designing an Experimental Corpus

Turning to our concrete study of English proverbs, the aim was not to establish such a proverbial minimum.³ Therefore, no all-en-

compassing studies and no pre-tests were undertaken to cover the complete stock of possibly well-known proverbs.

We used Mieder's (1988) collection of *English Proverbs*, which, according to his introductory words, contains the English proverb minimum, and which additionally includes only such proverbs which occur with a particular frequency still today in oral and in written discourse (Mieder 1988: 4). For our purposes, we regarded it sufficient to distribute this proverb collection to a limited number of informants ($N=16$). These informants' task was to mark all proverbs unknown to them; we then decided to include all those proverbs in our experimental corpus, which were *not* labeled '*unknown*' by any one of the informants. As a result, a list of 236 proverbs was obtained and, consequently, included in our questionnaires.

2.2. The Paremiological Experiment

After the ending of each of the 236 proverbs had been eliminated, the questionnaires with the proverbs' beginnings were distributed in the USA and among anglophonic Canadians. As to the informants' age, our sample was intended to correspond to the requirements of our experimental group of stroke patients. As a result, the sample's mean age was ca. 63 years (± 11.6), for the US Americans ca. 57 (± 10.7) years, for the Canadians 66.8 (± 10.7) years of age.⁴

Given the size of our sample, it is evident that we cannot arrive at results which might claim to be representative of American and/or Canadian proverb knowledge in general. To achieve an actual minimum-oriented study, by far more informants would have to be asked, and the sample's structure would have to correspond adequately to the culture's social structure. These limitations will have to be kept in mind throughout the following analyses, although we will not repeat them at any stage.

Although statistical results and quantitative analyses would be most interesting to many a reader, we cannot present the complete list of the 236 proverbs within the framework of this article; neither can we discuss the results obtained concerning familiarity of each proverb, with respect to factors influencing knowledge of a given proverb, or with regard to the spectrum of variation, etc. (cf. Chlosta/Grzybek 1995). Instead, we will concentrate on the analysis of some selected examples which will, on the one hand, prototypically demonstrate the efficiency and problems of empirical paremiology, and, on the other hand, disclose the intersections between empirical paremiography and paremiology.

3. Results of the study

3.1. Generally known proverbs

Before analyzing particular examples in detail, let us present some general results and a list of those proverbs which were generally known exactly in the expected form.

Of all possible 13,924 completions (236×59) a relatively high number of proverbs ($12,363 = 88.8\%$) were indeed filled in; of these completions, 8,747 (70.7%) were completed in the initially expected form. These data may be interpreted as an indication not only of the reliability of our experimental corpus, but of the quality of *English Proverbs*, in general. It turns out to be quite unexpected, therefore, that only nine proverbs (3.8%) of all 236 presented items were familiar to all informants in the initially expected form. These nine proverbs are not only the best known proverbs of Mieder's (1988) *English Proverbs*; they also represent part of all generally known proverbs in the USA and in Canada. Therefore, it is rather surprising that there are two among them (marked by '*') which are not contained in the *DAP* which consistently includes only those items given by the informants. This clearly shows that empirical paremiography depends very much on the informants' answers, just as does empirical paremiography, though in different aspects. One can only speculate as to the concrete reasons why the two items are not included in the *DAP*: on the one hand, it might be helpful to assume something like an unconscious or intuitive "censorship" on the part of the informants, who do not recognize (or accept) particular items as 'proverbs'; on the other hand, we know that the usage of proverbs is strictly situation-bound, and as long as there is neither a (reference) situation nor a particular verbal stimulus which elicits (or 'triggers') a given proverb, it might well escape a paremiographer's attention. Anyway, none of the following nine proverbs should be missing from any future collection claiming to contain all generally known English proverbs:⁵

1. *Much ado about nothing.* *
2. *Boys will be boys.*
3. *Charity begins at home.*
4. *The customer is always right.*
5. *Two heads are better than one.*
9. *Better late than never.*
6. *No news is good news.*
7. *One good turn deserves another.*
8. *A chip of the old block.* *

It goes without saying that it would not be correct to assume that, apart from these nine proverbs, all other items were 'unknown': they were either known to a lesser degree, or they were completed, at least in part, in the form of particular variants which did not correspond to the initially expected variant, based on the *English Proverbs*. Since deviations from the initial form may be more or less significant, i.e., may display more or less proximity to the expected initial form, a complex classificational system had to be developed to categorize each individual completion (Grzybek/Chlosta/Roos 1994). With regard to the given study, this system's function was, among others, to categorize systematically the remaining 29.3% of variants obtained.

The system needs not be discussed here in detail; suffice it to say that, for our purposes, only significant semantic differences (be it on a lexical or phrasal level) were interpreted as an indication of lacking familiarity. Lack of familiarity, in this context, means that no familiarity with the initial form was intersubjectively intelligible any more. This definition does not exclude the possibility that a given unexpected completion turned out to be of general familiarity. Therefore, for our purposes, an important methodological decision had to be made: we had to go away from the assumption that the crucial element in a proverb -- with regard to which the answers are classified as 'known' or 'unknown' -- is an apriori defined (or expected) 'original proverb', or its 'basic variant', or 'standard form', in addition to which there are a number of additional variants (often assumed to be 'occasional'). Instead, we termed the initial form "*zero variant*", and we did not associate any qualitative or quantitative expectations with it. Each individual completion was meticulously recorded and classified, and quantitative descriptions were only given a posteriori, i.e., subsequent to statistical analyses.

By way of this classification we received a list of another 40 proverbs, which were completed by at least 90% of our sample, either in the form given in *English Proverbs*, or in a form, which can be considered *very close* to it.

Again, if one compares this list to the *DAP*, a surprising phenomenon can be observed: among these generally known proverbs, quite a number are indicated in the *DAP* as current in a restricted area, only. Thus, proverbs such as (3) *Easy does it* or (4) *Live and let live* (whose overall familiarity in our study was 91.5% and 94.9%, respectively) are characterized by the *DAP* as being current in the USA only; and a proverb such as (5) *Marriages are made in heaven* (which received an overall familiarity of 98.3% in our study) was

named only in four US states. According to our data, all three proverbs were known 100% by the participants from the USA; the corresponding data for the Canadian informants are 86.1%, 91.7%, and 97.2%.

As far as the *DAP* is concerned, it is important to note, however, that the reference to restricted areas of distribution "does not exclude the possibility that the proverb occurs in other regions of the United States and Canada" (Mieder 1992: xiii). Therefore, one should be careful with quantitative conclusions on the basis of the material included in the *DAP*.

Even before our concrete analyses, we arrive at a first indication of how closely folkloristic paremiology and empirical paremiology have to co-operate with each other: empirical paremiology offers reliable data about the familiarity and distribution of proverbs, but in constituting its empirical corpora, it has to rely upon folkloristic field research.

With this perspective in mind, let us return to our proverbs. In further pursuing our objectives, it might be tempting to follow a traditional path of text-oriented paremiology, and to direct our attention at *lexical* variants in order to analyze metaphorical variations. This would be an unwise decision, however, since many additional observations on linguistic variation below the lexical level would be lost; even seemingly minimal variations, e.g., orthographic or phonetic/phonological ones -- always within the realm of familiarity with the proverb in question.

3.2. Variants and Variations

As was stated above, each individual completion was meticulously recorded and classified. At first sight, this painstaking endeavor may seem rather small-minded and hypertrophical; it does however offer interesting paremiological perspectives, which shall be demonstrated now.

There are three major groups of variations: they concern various levels of variation, such as orthographic and grammatical modifications, reductions and extensions, as well as lexical changes.

3.2.1. Orthography

A good example of orthographic variation is the following proverb:

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------|---------|
| (6) <i>Discretion is the better</i> | <i>part of valour.</i> | (27.1%) |
| | <i>part of valor.</i> | (32.2%) |

The variants obtained displayed clear regional differences: the 'valor' variant was chosen only by 19.4% of the Canadians, but by more than half of the US Americans (52.2%); the 'valour' variant, as opposed to this, was given by 44.4% of the Canadians, but not by any one of the USA Canadians. This example shows that allegedly simple orthographic variations may reflect processes of cultural specifics (history of language or orthography).

3.2.2. Grammatical Variations

At first sight, example (7), too, looks like an orthographic variant, or like a simple spelling mistake, resulting from the informants' "orthographic sloppiness":

- (7) *First come* | *first served.* (69.5%)
 | *first serve.* (30.5%)

However, approximately two thirds (65.2%) of the informants from the USA filled in the "incorrect" form, whereas only a third (34.8%) chose the zero variant -- too many for a mere slip of the pen, to our mind... Any explanation along these lines does not seem to be convincing -- the more so, since only 8.3% of the Canadian subjects filled in the active voice form as compared to 91.7% who chose the passive voice variant. Holding the "orthographic sloppiness" view, we are in need of explaining why this attitude should be more common among US Americans; moreover, we would have to explain, why this attitude becomes obvious in this particular proverb, but plays an overall unimportant role.

From a different perspective, the two completions ultimately result in two contradictory statements. Taking both versions at face value, the second, rather unexpected form gives rise to the following question: why should that person who arrives first, be the one who serves first (and not the one being served)? For a native speaker, this question will turn out to appear paradoxical. Yet, hypothetically speaking, we have to ask ourselves if we are still concerned with only one proverb (and two variants⁶ of it), or with two different proverbs: is the meaning of both proverb texts still one and the same, or do different (antonymous) meanings exist for each of them? If we should really be concerned with two proverbs and, consequently, with two different meanings, then it should be possible to name two different manners of usage, two practical contexts -- but which are they?

It seems most plausible, of course, that there are no differences between the two versions on a deep semantic level. From a semiotic perspective, it is a well-known fact that the meaning of a proverb is

not (necessarily) reflected in the individual lexical elements of the surface text -- only and solely the customized proverb model represents the meaning. In this sense, it may well be that it is, from a deep semantic point of view, irrelevant to say *serve* or *served*.⁷ A possible explanation might then be a (merely linguistic, or rather poetic) tendency towards morphosyntactic parallelism.

In any case, we cannot be sure about any explanation without further empirical research. It is exactly at this point that folkloristic paremiology has to enter the field (in this word's double meaning), in order to clarify the conditions of usage, by way of actual field research.

Another example of grammatical variation is interesting not only for paremiology, but for linguistics and grammar in general:

- (8) *Every dog has* | *his day.* (44.1%)
 | *its day.* (40.7%)

Contradictory to our expectations, many informants did not use the masculine pronoun; rather, a similar amount of the answers used the neutral pronoun of unmarked speech. Since the masculine or feminine pronoun is common for animals in folklore genres such as the fable or the fairy tale, the result obtained should give rise to study systematically the contemporary use of pronouns referring to animals in proverbs. It seems interesting to note that none of the many variants listed in the *DAP* documents this tendency.

3.2.3. Proverb Reductions and Extensions

The third group of variations, still displaying variations without direct implications for the proverb's meaning, concerns the tendency to form longer or shorter versions of an alleged standard variant. Since the process of reduction is usually thought to be more probable than extensions and, in fact, has repeatedly been dealt with in paremiology, let us first concentrate on this phenomenon.

Example (9) is a prototypical instance of the process of reduction:

- (9) *Lightning never strikes*
 | *the same place twice.* (5.1%)
 | *twice.* (66.1%)
 | *twice in the same place.* (18.6%)

As can be seen from these data, about two thirds of the informants fill in a significantly reduced form. This result turns out to be of utmost importance, if one pays attention to the fact that this most frequent variant is not given in the *DAP*.

Whereas example (9) is characterized by mere lexical reduction, the following examples (10) and (11) demonstrate, how a tri-partite proverb is transformed into a bi-partite one, a process which concerns the proverb's formal structure:

(10) *If at first you don't succeed*

<i>try, try, try again.</i>	(15.3%)
<i>try, try again.</i>	(72.9%)
<i>try again.</i>	(5.1%)

The tendency is rather clear: approximately three quarters of the informants confine the repetition to two times. This time, the dominant variant coincides with the version given in the *DAP*; the zero variant is missing completely, however.

Whereas example (10) concerns the repetition of a single lexical item, the following example (11) is structurally tri-partite:

(11) *Hear no evil,*

<i>see no evil, speak no evil.</i>	(28.8%)
<i>speak no evil.</i>	(32.2%)
<i>see no evil.</i>	(27.1%)
... ..	

Only the three most frequent answers are listed above; still, the tendency is obvious: most answers imply a clear trend towards reduction, the variants displaying a similar quantitative distribution. Canadians and US Americans answered along different patterns, however: whereas in the USA the zero form still turned out to be the most frequent (43.5%) of these three variants, it was the most rarely chosen variant among Canadians (19.4%), and whereas the third alternative (... *see no evil*) was the rarest completion among US Americans (8.7%), it was the most frequent among Canadians (38.9%).⁸

All these examples clearly demonstrate how complex variations obtained by means of empirical paremiology can be: they should warn and teach us to pay due attention to even the smallest (and intuitively insignificant) deviations from the zero variant of a given proverb. Regardless of what kind of modification we are concerned with, each single change must be recorded, and these records must be accompanied by quantitative data -- often, the deviating forms turn out to be the more frequent ones.

The phenomenon of proverb extension might perhaps be unexpected for many a paremiologist. Example (12) represents a relevant item:

(12) <i>You cannot have your cake and eat it.</i>	(22%)
<i>and eat it, too.</i>	(71.2%)

<i>and it it.</i>	(1.7%)
<i>and eat to.</i>	(3.4%)
<i>and eat it to.</i>	(1.7%)

Disregarding the question of correct orthography, we can observe that three quarters of the informants add an additional 'too', whereas only a quarter of the informants use the zero variant. One might object that the addendum does not explicitly change the proverb's meaning; still, the proverbial statement is modified on the prosodic level. This explanation might well coincide with the assumption that the longer form came into being only subsequent to Bob Dylan's "*Lay, Lady, Lay*"; in this song, Dylan quotes the proverb in the longer form - it might be an interesting question to pursue if the longer form was ever in common use before the song became popular.

The following two examples (13) and (14) are quite similar; in these two cases, however, an additional word is inserted, not appended:

(13) <i>Every little helps.</i>	(10.2%)
<i>bit helps.</i>	(35.6%)
<i>bit helps a lot.</i>	(1.7%)
<i>bit counts.</i>	(11.9%)
<i>thing counts.</i>	(3.4%)
... ..	
(14) <i>Leave (Let) well alone.</i>	(23.7%)
<i>enough alone.</i>	(72.9%)
<i>enough be.</i>	(1.7%)
... ..	

Proverb (14) might be a good example for rhythmic considerations, since the iambic structure at its basis is enhanced by the additional 'enough' and results in a iambic structure with two ictuses.

The majority of completions in both example (13) and (14) are longer than the corresponding zero variants. It would not be justified, however, to speak of a general tendency of extension. This false impression might arise, if one took the zero variant from *English Proverbs*; in the *DAP*, as opposed to this, we find the longer versions. On the other hand, it would equally be wrong to say that *English Proverbs* does not contain the "correct" form, since the zero variant was completed by approximately a quarter of the informants, as well.

Paremiography should make use of such examples and results, and it should list both variants in future (perhaps with additional hints at the degree of familiarity).

Summarizingly, one can say that our observations on proverbial extensions and reductions are not only important for the analysis of single proverbs; they are also relevant for the analysis of complete proverbial corpora. All our examples can only serve as material to stimulate further discussions; subsequent studies on specific questions such as sentence length, rhythmic structure, and many other linguistic phenomena must be tackled. Folklorists who are mainly interested in the analysis of particular 'motifs', may find our examples irrelevant. Many a paremiographer, however, will perhaps find one additional text or another, and s/he will integrate it into future collections as an additional variant.

3.2.4. Lexical Variation

Most proverb definitions refer to the criterium of frozenness; a proverb is considered to be relatively stable in its verbal form. This statement does not exclude adaptations to the reference situation, when a proverb is used. In such cases, one likes to speak of 'occasional variations'. As opposed to such variations, all changes discussed above should be considered to be customized forms in a speaker's mental lexicon.

It is important to distinguish between quasi-synonymical changes, which do not semantically affect a proverb's overall meaning, and changes which modify the overall image.

In the following example, no significant semantic changes result from such substitutions:

(15) *A drowning man will clutch at a straw.*

Yet, there are some intriguing results: the verb 'clutch' was substituted by various verbs, such as 'grasp', 'snatch', 'catch', or 'grab'. The highest percentage of any of these variants was about 10%, however; equally important is the fact that all variants containing the verb 'clutch' of the zero variant (... *clutch at any straw* / ... *clutch at straws, etc.*) taken together were below the 10% level, as well; additionally, none of the informants answered with the zero variant itself.

The results of example (16) may be interpreted in terms of a contamination of two (or even more) proverbs:

- (16) *There is always room* | *at the top.* (6.8%)
 | *for improvement.* (11.9%)
 | *for more.* (6.8%)
 | *for one more.* (59.3%)
 | *for another.* (3.4%)
 | *for doubt.* (1.7%)

Without a doubt, the proverb *There is always room for one more* turns out to be the one which is most closely associated with the presented beginning. Still, we can rely on our results only with limited certainty. In such cases, it will be unavoidable to develop reliable post-tests, probably involving a different experimental design.

A similar phenomenon might be involved in examples (17) and (18). Here, we are concerned with two items for which a very similar beginning was presented:

(17) *It takes two* | *to tango.*

(18) *It takes two to make* | *a quarrel.*

Commenting on *It takes two to tango*, Mieder (1989: 32) is definitely correct in assuming: "It is without doubt an American proverb, but we hasten to add that it is most likely a variation of the old proverb 'It takes two to quarrel'. Nevertheless, it has gained great acceptance in this form not only in this country but also in translation abroad. It can thus be considered as a new American proverb in its own right." Yet, one should also consider the following facts: whereas more than 90% completed the 'tango' version, only a very limited number of our informants knew the "old proverb" (even if taking into account various close variants):

- (19) *It takes two to make* | *a quarrel.* (13.6%)
 | *a fight.* (11.9%)
 | *an argument.* (8.5%)

The following example is important as to the treatment of lexical variation. When we started our investigation, we assumed

(20) *You cannot get blood from a stone.*

to be the standard variant of this proverb. When we analyzed the first questionnaires, we quite quickly came across the variant "... *from a turnip*". At that time, we did not know how to deal with it, since at that point of time, the only parameters available to us were classifications such as "filled in correctly" and "filled in incorrectly". In fact, this was one of the proverbs which convinced us to develop a new, comprehension classification system for empirical paremiology (Grzybek/ Chlosta/Roos 1994). Preparing that system, and further trying to understand the variations of proverb (20), among others, we found Mieder's (1989: 86) remark classifying the 'turnip' version as a specific Mississippi variant. On the one hand, we could be certain, then, that we were not concerned with an occasional variant; on the other hand, we were assured that we were not victims of an anti-proverb. Still later, analyzing the items given in the DAP, we learned

that only the 'turnip' version is listed as familiar both in the USA and in Canada. The confusion will be complete, now, if one takes into consideration the results of our study, which say that the majority of the US American informants used the 'turnip' version, whereas most of the Canadians preferred the 'stone' variant. Among the whole sample, too, the 'stone' variant turned out to be the most frequent completion:

- (20) You cannot get blood | from a stone. (40.7%)
 | out of a stone. (28.8%)
 | out of a turnip. (8.5%)
 | from a turnip. (18.6%)

In example (20), as in other proverbs, too, the spectrum of variation is rather small; additionally, the variants are characterized by clear parameters of regional distribution. There are many proverbs, however, which display an enormous amount of individual variants; therefore, it is not always possible to name one or two specific standard variants which one might recommend for future proverb lexica. In fact, there were many variants which were given by only few, sometimes by only one informant.

This question quite naturally brings up the problem of anti-proverbs and pseudo proverbs; also, the question of the informants' seriousness, and, subsequently, the authenticity of our material, is raised. Based on our experiences, we are convinced that the overwhelming majority of participants in our study actually completed the partially presented proverb texts to the best of their knowledge and belief. There are two major indices which make us almost sure: first of all, hardly a participant interrupted the work in the middle of the questionnaire, and second, idiosyncratic answers represent only a very small part of all answers, or answer types. Such idiosyncrasies make it particularly apparent how much empirical paremiology must be complemented by synchronic field research and by (diachronical) studies of individual proverbs.

Proverb (21) is characterized by such a broad spectrum of variance. Similarly to proverb (20), it displays clear regional, or rather cultural, distributional specifics, in so far as US Americans and Canadians answered quite differently.

The partial text given was "Great minds...". Relying on Mieder's (1989: 31) information and on the data from the DAP, one might expect "... run in the same channel" or "follow the same track" to be the most frequent completions, both in the USA and in Canada. In fact, however, the answer "... think alike" turned out to be the stan-

dard variant, given by more than two thirds of the informants (69.5%); none of the other variants was beyond the 5% level. Interestingly enough, this variant is not among the versions listed in the DAP -- it is, however, the zero variant we took from *English Proverbs*. And again, there were significant differences between US Americans and Canadians. Whereas 94.4% of the Canadians used the zero variant, no comparable standard variant could be determined for the US Americans: 30% of them filled in the zero variant, all other answers were distributed over several variants none of which was beyond the 10% level.

A last example which shall be discussed in this article is

- (22) The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence.

In analyzing our results, we can once more demonstrate the broad spectrum of variants obtained in empirical paremiology, on the one hand, and emphasize the promising perspectives of the two complementary approaches of folkloristic and empirical paremiology, on the other.

Mieder's (1993) most recent investigations into this proverb assure us that this is indeed one of the most frequent American proverbs. Our study confirms Mieder's conclusions: only one of all informants did not answer this proverb; all remaining answers, albeit varying, clearly indicated general familiarity with it. This fact can definitely be interpreted as a sign of familiarity with this proverb both in the USA and in Canada. A more detailed analysis of the variants tells us, however, that only a quarter of the informants filled in the proverb in what Mieder (1993: 153) terms it 'standard form'. This variant was quantitatively surpassed, however, by the reduction form "The grass is always greener on the other side", filled in by 42.4% of the informants; of many further variants, only one (... on the other side of the street) arrived at 11.9% familiarity -- all other version were named only once.

Mieder (1993: 154) lists 19 variants, all documented in the DAP. According to him, the lexical variations of the 'standard form' can be explained in terms of two spheres of living related to the text: in his view, proverbs displaying the substitution of the lexical item 'fence' by words ("realia") such as 'field', 'home', 'yard', 'street', 'lawn', etc., can be interpreted "as urbanized versions of an originally rural proverb". For empirical paremiology, it should be an extremely interesting task to relate the informants' (rural vs. urban) personal backgrounds to the particular answers given. Is it possible to demonstrate

a general tendency towards 'urbanization' in the proverbs' texts? Orienting only the "bare bones of proverb usage" (Arora 1994: 311) -- if there is such a tendency, is it restricted to urban population only? perhaps, the "bare numbers" of empirical paremiology can contribute to fleshing them out.

4. Conclusions: Fleshing Out Bare Bones By Bare Numbers?

As stated above, our study represents only a small section of paremiology need not necessarily quarrel with each other; instead, possible approaches within empirical paremiology. We did not bring both approaches can deduce promising perspectives from each other's up any subject-oriented question, and we discussed only a limited set results. A convergence of both approaches opens new perspectives, of text-oriented problems, based on a particular selection of well-not only for paremiology, but for paremiography, as well. known English proverbs.

It is our hope that we could show to what degree empirical proverb studies might have a stimulating influence on paremiology and paremiography. Both empirical paremiology and empirical paremiography are characterized by the attempt to study contemporary proverb usage, to work with or to provide authentic material. In tackling similar problems from different perspectives, both approaches may eventually arrive at different results.

It goes without saying that in approaching old problems with new methods, there must be many methodological shortcomings; empirical paremiology is no exception to this rule. Therefore, empirical paremiology must continue to learn, not only from its own mistakes, but also from other approaches. In testing, applying, and modifying its methods, empirical paremiology will always depend upon folkloristic paremiology, not only in constituting its experimental corpora. Likewise, folkloristic paremiology might profit from empirical research, e.g., in finding a reliable measuring instrument documenting the embodiment of the proverbial repertory in a culture's life, or learning about the usage of additional variants.

In this sense, the critical remarks which Arora (1994) has brought forth most recently in her review of the *DAP*, turn out to be of general relevance and do not concern so much, or not only, the methodological foundations of this particular collection. Acknowledging that of course each entry was submitted by someone who considered it to be a 'current' saying, Arora (1994: 308) asks, "of what does currency really consist, and how is the degree of 'currency' to be ascertained?" One cannot but support her claim that in this respect, frequency data would be of particular importance. In providing such data, it can, however, only be a first and preliminary step simply to record how many people from what places sent in which proverb variants; as long as folkloristic paremiology and paremiography are not complementarily enriched by additional methods and results of empirical proverb research, any proverb dictionary will run the risk of repre-

In pursuing common objectives, folkloristic and empirical paremiology need not necessarily quarrel with each other; instead, both approaches can deduce promising perspectives from each other's results. A convergence of both approaches opens new perspectives, not only for paremiology, but for paremiography, as well.

Starting this proverbial tango, it seems most likely that there will be many mutual misunderstandings, divergent results and methodological discussions; dancing partners, too, cannot avoid treading on their partner's toes, from time to time...⁹ One thing is mandatory, however, in order to start this paremiological tango seriously: it is necessary, after all, to conduct at least one representative empirical study, which might document the actual state of some tendencies discussed over the last few years, based on pilot studies only - otherwise, we will not stop turning ourselves on our own axis...¹⁰

Notes

1. Usually, one of the completed variants turns out to be the dominant one. There are cases, however, when there are two (or more variants) with a relatively identical degree of familiarity. In these cases, post-tests seem to be necessary, since familiarity with one variant does not necessarily exclude knowledge of another. Theoretically speaking, this may be always the case; still there seems reason to assume that informants tend to fill in the one form most familiar to them.
2. As will be demonstrated below, the 'standard variant' of a given proverb can be determined only subsequent to empirical research, as its result, not as an a priori form which is to be confirmed or rejected by empirical research.
3. Our starting point was the need to have a reliable list of English proverbs which were, on the one hand, highly familiar, and which additionally were, on the other hand, verbally highly stereotypical (i.e., which displayed only few linguistic variations). These specific demands resulted from a co operation with the Medical Research Center of the University of Montreal; here, we wanted to use the proverbial material in tests with a specific group of stroke patients. A combination of these factors turned out to be necessary, since the objectives would be to determine differences in the degree of familiarity, deviations in the concrete verbal form and possible impairments in proverb comprehension. Otherwise, there would be no reliable criterion, if a patient produced an idiosyncratic or regionally colored variant in completing the partial text presented.
4. The informants were additionally asked as to their sex, their level of education, their living place at present and up to the age of 18, as well as to language knowledge. The last point was particularly important, in order to tell apart first and second generation immigrants from actual native speakers. It goes without saying that we also asked informants if they had ever experienced any brain injury, and that formerly brain injured subjects were excluded from the sample.

5. The amount of proverbs belonging to this group (or any other) is based on the totality of all 59 subjects; the proverbial stock might change both in quantity and quality (i.e., which proverbs and how many proverbs represent part of a given percentage), as soon as one analyzes particular subgroups. Thus, for example, participants only from the USA, or only from Canada respectively, will know particular proverbs to a different degree, either less or more. Except for differences of the familiarity of particular proverbs between US Americans and Canadians, related questions are not being dealt with in this article.
6. Mieder (1989: 36) lists a number of variations of this proverb, all of which, however, are centered around the lexical substitution of 'first' and 'late'.
7. A similar phenomenon can be observed in German: here, quite a number of (mainly younger) people replace the verb 'mahlen' [= to grind] by the verb 'malen' [= to draw] in the proverb *Wer zuerst kommt, mahlt zuerst* [= He who comes first, grinds first]. Being asked to explain this proverb, they admitted that the non-standard form makes no sense to them -- why should one draw, when arriving first? Still, these persons would know the exact usage conditions and the modelled meaning of the proverb. This seems again to prove the fact that the concrete surface structure of a (well-known) proverb may be of secondary importance, and that questions of motivation are of a rather academic nature (cf. Burger 1973).
8. This example brings up another problem of methodology, related to the beginning of the proverbs which are crucial for the presentation of the initial partly presented text: whereas English Proverbs gives "*Hear no evil...*" as the beginning, the DAP lists both "*See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil*" and "*Speak no evil, see no evil, and hear no evil*" as variants. Variable beginnings might, however, be more important in other cases than this one.
9. The authors profited a lot from Wolfgang Mieder's valuable and critical comments, who read a preliminary version of this text. In fact, his reaction to the first version helped us very much in focusing upon relevant issues, and in correcting passages which could easily be misunderstood; his remarks represent that type of methodological discussion we would like to achieve on a more general basis. We are extremely grateful for his friendly help.
10. We are grateful for Brigitte Stemmer's (Montreal) and Rachael P. Wilson's (New Haven) help in distributing the questionnaires; without their help we could not have undertaken this study. We are also grateful for Rebecca Welland's (Graz) help in stylistically editing this text.

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