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## **HOW DO PROVERBS GET THEIR MEANINGS? THE MODEL OF INTERPRETATION BASED ON A METAPHOR THEORY<sup>1</sup>**

The constellation of proverbs is quite permanent. Only one third of proverbs are supposed to change in about one hundred years (Kuusi 1994: 117–118). This means that the proverbs used in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are much the same as the proverbs in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and quite the same as in 1850's. In this article I focus on the proverb as a significant unit. Even if the proverbs are unchangeable, their meanings are not.

The proverbial expressions can be looked from at least four stand points:

- (1) What is the proverb decoded to mean?
- (2) What do the words mean?
- (3) What does the speaker mean?
- (4) How does the listener interpret the proverb?

With all the four ways there are some weak points. In the first case the meaning is an etic-interpretation and it is given outside. Most often there exists hardly any context information about the use of proverbs. Paremiologists do quite often make interpretations based on the common knowledge by using a standard proverbial interpretation (SPI) (Norrick 1985: 109–117). There exists a presupposition of universality and the cultural prejudices are included in the interpretation. The second case is a matter of the lexical meaning. The interpretation is bound in the meanings of the words in some space (time and place). If the lexical meaning is used there is no need to interpretation. Anyhow, when looking at the words and the meaning of the sentence in a new space, the meaning might appear absurd. It is possible that even the lexical meaning has changed.

The two later ones are emic-interpretations that have to do either with the speaker or the listener. In the third case the speaker gives the meaning to the proverb. When using a proverb he/she wants to point out something. The way the speaker understands the world and all the things included in it, is a part of the utterance of the

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speaker. It is a question of what kinds of similarities, continuities and differences the speaker see. With proverbs I find this quite problematic because the intention of the speaker (or writer) is not really known. The fourth case deals with the listener. The listener's interpretation can be found for example in some narratives. In life-stories a situation, person or action rise up the proverb, or vice versa the proverb is connected with the situation or the person. In life-stories the narrator tells why he/she thought the proverb was used and what he/she believed to be the meaning of the proverb. If we do not know anything more about the context, even this is not enough. (Granbom-Herranen 2008: 172–173).

In this article I concentrate on the fourth case: “What does the listener hear and understand?” In my earlier researches the main interest has been in proverbs from childhood. The narrative material is from the Folklore Archives of the Finnish Literature Society in Helsinki (Finland). I have used two collections including life-stories about 1000 narrators. When looking at the proverbs in a context (Granbom-Herranen 2004) I have focused on *Perinne elämässäni* [*Tradition in my life*], from year 1985. In the study of pedagogical speech (2008) I have included also the collection *Karjalaiset elämäkerrat* [*Karelian biographies*], from years 1983-1984. The life-stories in interest tell about the childhood in Finland before the Second World War.

However, the importance to understand the mechanism behind interpretations lies on the fact that both the proverbial utterances and the metaphorical language are a part of building up the individual's social reality (Devitt & Sterelny 1987: 116–117). When looking at the significance of proverbs I have two main starting points. Firstly, Gottlob Frege's (2000) principle of context, and secondly, the language is not only an instrument of communication but it is connected to our thinking (Vygotski 1967). Some special challenges are to be counted when we are dealing with language has. One of them is the fact that the language is always defined in a language by using some language. Thereby all the concepts have to get the meaning in the language before we can use the language to define the phenomenon. (Ricoeur 2005: 149).

## 1. CONNECTION BETWEEN PROVERBS AND METAPHORS

The similarities in proverbs or metaphors as a theoretical challenge have not been the main interest of researchers. Estonian folkloristic Arvo Krikmann (1994; 2008) makes an exception among paremiologists. He bases his model of proverbs called “Four

Rules” in the first hand on the Lakoff’s and Turner’s ideas of metaphor and the Lovejoy’s idea of Great Chain of Being.

The use of proverbs and metaphors is a part of communicative speech that is supposed to follow Paul Grice's cooperative principles of quantity, quality, relation, and manner (Grice, 1975: 45–46). Each of the categories includes maxims in various levels. The category of quantity says: make your contribution as informative as required for the current purpose, but do not make your contribution more informative than is required. It is related to that how much information is provided. The category of quality tells us: do not say anything you believe to be false and do not say anything which you lack adequate evidence. The most important thing is to try to keep oneself in the true speech. The category of relation means to be relevant. The difficulty is that the relevance is an invariable concept. The fourth category, the category of manner, guides us to avoid the obscurity and ambiguity in an expression, as well as to be brief and orderly. The manner is related to the well-aimed speech.

All these principles can be violated either consciously or subconsciously. That happens both in the use of a proverb as well as in the use of a metaphor. The use of them violates one or more of above mentioned categories. The way we recognize the proverb in speech or text has the same problems as when we speak of recognizing the metaphor. The special meaning of them is based on that they somehow differ from the ongoing discourse and they conflict with one or more Grice's cooperative principle.

Proverbs and metaphors have also other things in common. They are signs that connect the thinking with emotions and feelings and they can be used to create new meanings (Bruner 1986: 65). Proverbs like metaphors are a part of everyday language and tightly bound with culture. With them we can handle things that are earlier unknown for the listener and we can bring to the discourse phenomena that are otherwise difficult to reach. Both proverbs and metaphors give the possibility to understand abstract phenomena and this way they contribute to our way to understand the world. However, even if proverbs and metaphors are very much alike in the way we use them and how we can interpret them, the metaphor does not have the status of the mythical wisdom from ancient times like the proverb does. (Granbom-Herranen 2008: 159–162).

## 2. THEORIES FOR METAPHOR

In principle researchers are quite united with the basic purpose of a metaphor. The metaphor makes one to notice similarities or assumed similarities and the same assumption is made with proverbs. How the similarities are designed and what is the reference, it divides the opinions. Metaphors and proverbs base either on similarity or continuity that can be real, assumed or associated. Actually, there is no disagreement about it how a proverb or metaphor is supposed to function. We have two things, phenomena or activities that are to be put together. The difference between the theories lies on how these two things do find each other. This means, how the reference is anchored.

The most important and the best known models of metaphor are comparison theory, interaction theory, intention theory, and literal interpretation. The metaphor in the possible world semantics has been less used. The metaphor of Lakoff and Turner has got the position of basic metaphor in linguistics research. This generic-is-specific schema can be situated in Black's interaction theory (Lakoff & Turner 1989: 165; see also Lakoff & Johnson 1981: 151–154).

The comparison theory (or Aristotelian view, used for example by Robert Fogelin 1988) is so well known among folklorists that many times it is taken as the only possibility. The interpretation of metaphor is based on the comparing. When thinking about proverbs, it means either looking at the words (compositional principle) or the whole sentence (contextual principle). Normally according to this theory the literal interpretation is not possible.

The interaction theory by Max Black (1981) says that the metaphor is a comparison based on the interaction. Talking about proverbs it is the relation between the situation (including all the effective elements in it) and the utterance. Actually the similarity enables to use all kinds of proverbs in all kinds of situations. It is always possible to find some similarities. Normally the literal interpretation is not possible.

In the intention theory by John Searle (1981) the interpretation is founded on the meaning, either the speaker's intention or the assumed meaning. The theory points out that the utterance has always the literal meaning, but it is not supposed to be the right one. In a proverb this is a matter of the speaker's intention, which is supposed to base on the standard meaning. Most often the literal interpretation of the utterance is not seen as the intended interpretation.

The literal interpretation by Donald Davidson (1981) is also called one-world-metaphor. In the literal interpretation the metaphor means just what the words in their

lexical meaning are telling us. Actually it is not the question of comparison it is rather the question of a statement. In proverbs we can easily connect this with the calendar proverbs.

In the possible world semantic as professors of philosophy Jaakko Hintikka and Gabriel Sandu (1994)<sup>2</sup> specify it (in future PWS-model), the main idea is quite clear: in order to understand the meaning of a term, we should understand the extension of the term both under the present circumstances and also its extension under other kinds of circumstances (Hintikka & Sandu 1994: 152). This because a person cannot be said to know the meaning of a term if all that he or she can is to know its actual extension. The PWS-model differs from other models of metaphor by using the world lines and meaning lines between existing worlds or inside one world. The main thing is the anchor point in different worlds, how the reference points are defined, and where the meanings are anchored. A proverb or a metaphor is an expression bounded to the reference and to the anchoring of the reference. PWS-model allows both the lexical and the figurative interpretation of a proverb.

In every case, the similarity or comparison between two things is not a sufficient basis (as Fogelin 1988 and Black 1981), the speaker's intention is generally not clear (as Searle 1981), and the literal interpretation is not enough (as Davidson 1981) to understand a proverb. I apply the model in which the interpretation of the proverbs can be based on through the listener and the context in the space consisting of time and place (Hintikka & Sandu 1994). The usefulness of the PWS-model with proverbs lies firstly on that it enables to do comparison between two or more different realities, worlds or situations. Secondly, it allows also the literal interpretation of the utterance that means the interpretation is made inside one world. In the PWS-model the context is the space (or the universe) around. It includes the life experience of one person but also the whole society and culture exist there. This life experience connecting the individual and the utterance creates the meaning of the expression. All the time it is to be noticed that the meaning is not necessarily same for the speaker and the listener. The model of

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<sup>2</sup> Shortly about Professor Jaakko Hintikka and Professor Gabriel Sandu. After teaching at university of Helsinki (Finland) and at Florida State University and University of Stanford (USA) and the years in the Academy of Finland, Professor Jaakko Hintikka is currently working with his researches at University of Boston (USA). His main interests have been in the area of mathematical- and philosophical logic, language theory, epistemology, and philosophy of science. He is regarded as the founder of formal epistemic logic and of game semantics for logic. Professor Gabriel Sandu is a professor in theoretical philosophy at University of Helsinki in Finland. He has specialized in the logic, the philosophy of language, and the truth theory.

the process how proverbs get their meanings uses the operational similarity of proverbs and metaphors.

### 3. THE SIGNIFICANT REFERENCE POINT

By using the PWS-model it is possible to understand how the meaning of the proverb is effected on with the changes that occur in everyday life. The reference point is anchored in different ways in different era and the same goes with the place. The reference point explains that the individual interpretation differs from the assumed standard proverbial interpretation. In the archive material the interpretations of proverbs from childhood are nearer the lexical interpretation than the interpretations based on comparison or interaction theories or the idea that the proverbs are a part of ancient wisdom (Granbom-Herranen 2008: 195–196).

The main concepts are the world line and the meaning line. The world line can be seen in connection with the reality. The world line restates those two individuals in two different worlds that are counted to be identical. The lexical meaning of a metaphor is found by drawing the world line and can be interpreted by the world line from one world to another or inside one world. The reference point of the metaphor or proverb is the lexical meaning. (Hintikka & Sandu 1994: 155–156).

The meaning line tells simply what is meant. The meaning line connects the expression to the reference, which exists in another world (or is a point inside the same world). An important aspect of drawing meaning line, is the anchoring or mooring of the line. The line begins and ends somewhere. The figurative similarity considerations are given in relation to some point. The proverb and metaphor operate the way that both the speaker and the listener recognize the used worlds and there are no regulations how the meaning line should be drawn. The recognition of the reference point is made by similarity or continuity, but there is no reason why these would be the only basis to draw the meaning line and the reference point. (c.f. Hintikka & Sandu 1994: 156).

I consider the world lines and the meaning lines to be the most important elements of the PWS-model when compared with the other theories of metaphor. When we interpret a proverb it comes to be an artifact of the space (time and place). We are to do at least with two possible worlds. The first one is the world in which the proverb is used and the second one the world of the interpretation. In the background there might exist both the world of the recording and the world of the birth of the proverb. The

interpretations made in the new space do not always meet the worlds either in the past or the ones parallel at present time. Anchoring of a line is done by using a reference-point.

The actual world is not to be the only one in the possible world semantics. There exists the possibility to various worlds, which means both scenarios or situations, and historical periods (Hintikka & Sandu 1994: 166). Novels and films compose a part of contemporary fairy-tale-reality and they often function as the anchoring point. In folklore we can see the fairy tales and the anecdotes as various possible worlds. Anyhow, quite often but not always it is the actual world where the meaning line is anchored by the lexical meaning. In anchoring the reference point the actual world is quite near the world of popular opinion, which may differ from the real one. “The locution *He is a real Einstein* is, or used to be, colloquially applied to mathematically gifted persons. A historian of science might nevertheless sum up his or her analysis of Einstein’s gifts (which were physical to a higher degree than mathematical) by saying, ‘In a vulgar sense, Albert Einstein was not an Einstein.’” (Hintikka & Sandu 1994: 165). Anyhow, in order to be understood, the relevant aspects of the reference point of the utterance must be familiar to the listener or reader.

When the meaning line is anchored to the reference point using the common knowledge, the proverb could be quite easy to interpret, but only in one space (time and place). The interpretation is possible if we know the contexts. However, is it ever possible to really know the contexts? I assume this is only a theoretical possibility. Even in this case we presume that there exist some micro- or macro-universal and some common knowledge. The narration material points out that the common knowledge is not standardized. It is inside the socio-cultural frame but it is also connected with the individual level of maturation and growth. It has relation to the way how a person uses and how he/she is able to use language and thereby conceptualize both abstract and concrete phenomena and acts. (Granbom-Herranen 2008: 201). We can understand the importance of the reference point by looking at how an utterance (a proverb or metaphor) changes its meaning when its anchor is moved (Hintikka & Sandu 1994: 163-164).

The signification of the reference point can be found in the material in the following excerpt dealing with the interpretation of the proverb *Hyvät ja kuuliaiset*



*lapset varhain kuolee* [*Good children die young*]<sup>3</sup>. In Finland in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and even in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the death of small children was not unusual, and the children saw death both at home and in the neighborhood. It might have been that grown-ups tried to comfort themselves by saying the death was for the best for the child, *Good children die young*, or according to their religious faith they actually regarded the death of the child as the best thing for his/her still sinless soul. Anyhow, the narrator puts her thoughts into words of relief. She knew she was not a good child and so there was no need to be afraid of death. She was not going to die in her early years, because only good children were in danger. The child understood and connected the messages heard in two separate situations and drew a conclusion.

**Example 1:** It was a lot of talk about God's Ten Commandments. When I was six year old I had already with when the priest gave us a grilling about them. I could tell all the Ten Commandments with the explanations to them. It is in my old school report that I have got 4 for the Christian doctrines and 2 for reading fluently. We were often reminded: "Try to remember what is said in the Ten Commandments". When thought afterwards, I have felt that the faith gives safety. Of course I was sometimes afraid, when I had sworn and told lies. Think if God would drop a big stone on me! The evening pray was the protection. A lot of children died that time. It was always told how good this peacefully died was and it was added: *Good children die young* [*Hyvät ja kuuliaiset lapset varhain kuolee*]. This took away my fear for the death. I was neither good nor obedient.

When the anchor point moves place, it makes also the meaning of the proverb to change. The effectiveness of the comparison gets new aspects when the listener understands the message in another way that is the assumed intention of the speaker.

#### 4. LEXICAL AND FIGURATIVE MEANING

Proverbs act like metaphors in the Hintikka's and Sandu's PWS-model and they are anchored to the event as the whole sentences. They are not handled as comparisons done word by word. It is one situation the proverb is spoken, heard, and understood. It is there the proverb gets the meaning. In all situations a proverb has always some practical role (Krikmann 2010: 51; Granbom-Herranen 2008: 223). In the situation there are the speaker and the listener, both with their life experiences. This makes the micro context. This context is a part of some cultural, social, and economical space at one era. That can be called a world. The most important factor is how the proverb is anchored in

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<sup>3</sup> All the excerpts used in this article are included in the life-stories from the Folklore Archives of the Finnish Literature Society. All translations of the proverbs and the excerpts are made literally by L G-H.

those existing worlds. It is how the meaning line is drawn and how the proverb is anchored to its reference. Dealing with proverbs, the drawing of world lines has mostly been done by using a single word as a meaningful unit. In every case, meaning line is to be drawn by using the whole sentence. The events, actions, and phenomena are the references. The metaphorical aspect is included to the situation, not to the interpretation of a single word. A proverb cannot have only metaphorical meaning without the literal meaning (cf. Hintikka & Sandu 1994: 164).

Nowadays the lexical meaning of a proverb is not anymore functioning as the most important reference point since even the terms used in proverbs are out of the contemporary world. The power of the proverb is based on the assumption that both the speaker and the listener recognize those worlds the meaning line uses. The recognition of the message should happen in same way, the speaker and the listener draw the meaning line in the same way. This is often one of the weak points when using proverbs. Often the speaker and the listener do not recognize the same worlds for one reason or another. It means the words they use have different references and the given meanings do not face up to each others. This is quite normal in pedagogical and educational discourse when the listener is a child.

The statement implied by the proverb does not have to be true or false. The proverb can be true both in the literal and in the metaphorical meaning. So might have been for example in the case of *Lapset tulee leipineen* [*Children come with bread*] in which the narrator does not include to the proverb the idea of people having always the ability for life. This explanation has been widely presented in Finnish tradition. Vuorela (1977: 208) puts this proverb under the title “The hardworking mother fosters lazy children”. On the other hand, in Nirvi and Hakulinen (1953: 176) it is under the subtitle “Family” in the category “Man, woman, marriage, family”. In Kuusi’s (1990) proverb collection this proverb could not be found either with keywords (lapsi, leipä / child, bread) or index of theme (collected with child, upbringing, birth, eating). This proverb is not included in M6-database that is considered the one of the collections nearest to include the standard proverbial interpretation of Finnish proverbs. There exists a same kind of proverb *Ei Jumala ole luonut leivätöntä lasta* [*God has not created a child without bread*]. It is classified to “B, Faith and basic attitudes -> B1, God: man and religious institutions -> B1b, The goodness and generosity of God, blessing, turning to God”.

The narrator tells about the tradition related to the time after a child had been given the birth. The neighbors and the relatives paid a visit and brought with some food like bread and cakes etc. (called “rotinat” in Finnish in this special meaning). *Children come with bread* can be just a concrete thought of food.

**Example 2:** When a new child was born to a family, it was a custom to pay a visit with some food [in Finnish “rotinat”]. All neighbors brought some bakery with them. A big sweet wheat bagel was a very common present but there were also pies, biscuits, and cakes. This was how the child *was born with the bread* [*Lapsen tullen leipineen*] as it was told. Also to other kind of feasts like weddings and funerals people used bring bakery with. Especially always when we went far away and stay overnights.

This proverb has been explained with a pedagogical motivation. Depending on the context it has been taken as a proof of the wishes of a poor family or as an affirmation that there will be enough food. However, the narrator tells that for him the *Children come with bread* has meant sweet bakery.

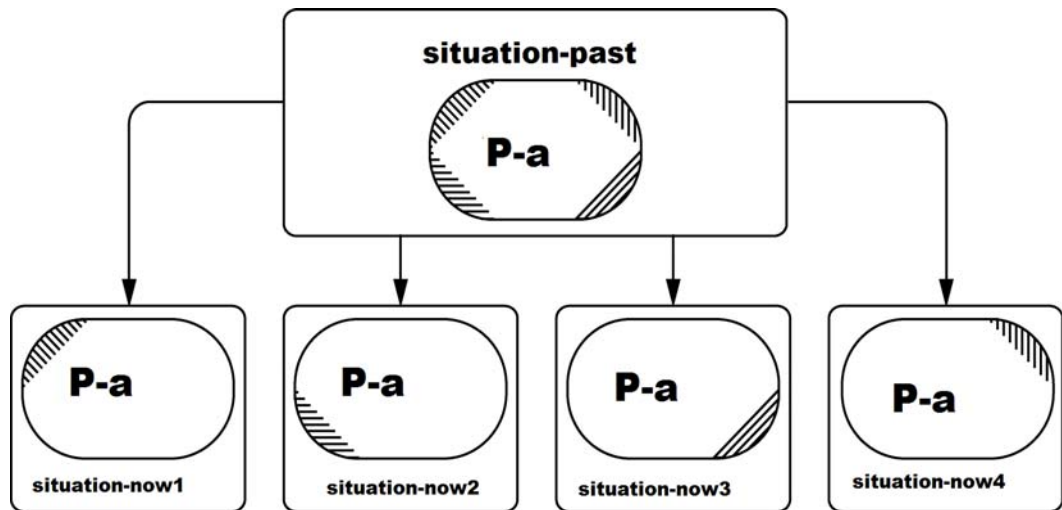
## 5. PROVERBS IN CONTEXT, THE SITUATIONAL CONNECTION

The main target with the model is to show how proverbs change their meanings. The model makes use of the functional similarities of proverbs and metaphors.

### 5.1 ONE PROVERB IS MADE OF MANY ELEMENTS

For example the proverb *Muut tekee mitä ne osaa, minä teen mitä lystää* [*Others do what they can / are able to do, I do whatever I want / please myself*] in M6-database is in the category “M, Coping and learning -> M5, Skill/tools/material -> M5a, Skill, professional skill and skilled or unskilled worker”.

Figure 1: One proverb. When used in different situations the parts of the proverb get different emphasis.



In the first excerpt (example 3) the proverb *Muut tekee mitä ne osaa, minä teen mitä lystää* [*Others do what they can / are able to do, I do whatever I want / please myself*] is connected with finding time, in the second one (example 4) with being able to and in the third one (example 5) with wanting or pleasing. Both the meaning and the atmosphere of the proverb do change because of the emphasis of the words.

**Example 3:** My father was a very skillful man, a carpenter of his time. He went all around in the Suomussalmi districts, he build houses and was good to do anything. It was often said *Miikkula does everything he finds time for. Others do what they can.* [*Miikkula tekee mitä ehtii. Toiset mitä osaavat.*] In the winter evenings he used to make shoes for his own family.

**Example 4:** My father was a very special self-studied man. He could near to everything in which brains or hands were needed. So I heard many people to say: *The others do what they are able to but Matti does what he wants.* [*Toiset tekevät mitä osaavat, mutta Matti tekee mitä tahtoo.*] He could all kind of arithmetic. He understood the square roots and many others. He knew history. He studied Esperanto and even Russian.

**Example 5:** My mother was both artistic and energetic so she was very effective. Her creativeness was not restricted only to needlework but everything she made with her hands. It could be with painting, modeling or even cooking. Everything was balanced not something like it. Sometimes my mother said as a joke: *Others do what they are can but I do what is pleasing me!* [*Toiset tekkeevät sitä mitä hyö ossaavat, mut mie teen sitä mitä mie haluan!*] The motto of my mother was that if a person has enough strong will of his/her own, he/she can go even through the grey stone. Often my mother did.

The same can be seen to happen with the proverb *Jolla on paikka paikan päällä, sillä on markka markan päällä* [*One who has the patch on the patch has the coin on the coin*]. Still in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's Finland the clothes were expensive, often self made from the beginning to end, and for common people they were not easy

to get. In M6-database this proverb is in the category “M, Coping and learning -> M8, Thrift/stinginess -> M8a, Careful economy, thrift, peasant ascetics”.

In the first excerpt (example 6) the proverb is connected with frugality (the coin), in the second one (example 7) with clothes (the patch) and in the third one (example 8) the narrator comes from clothes to the debts (the patch -> the money).

**Example 6:** We were taught to be sparing and modest by proverbs: *One who does not have working clothes he/she does not have anything to put on when going to church. One who has the patch on the patch has the coin on the coin.* [Jolla on riihiremputtimet, sillä on kirkkokemputtimet. Jolla on paikka paikan päällä, sillä on markka markan päällä.]

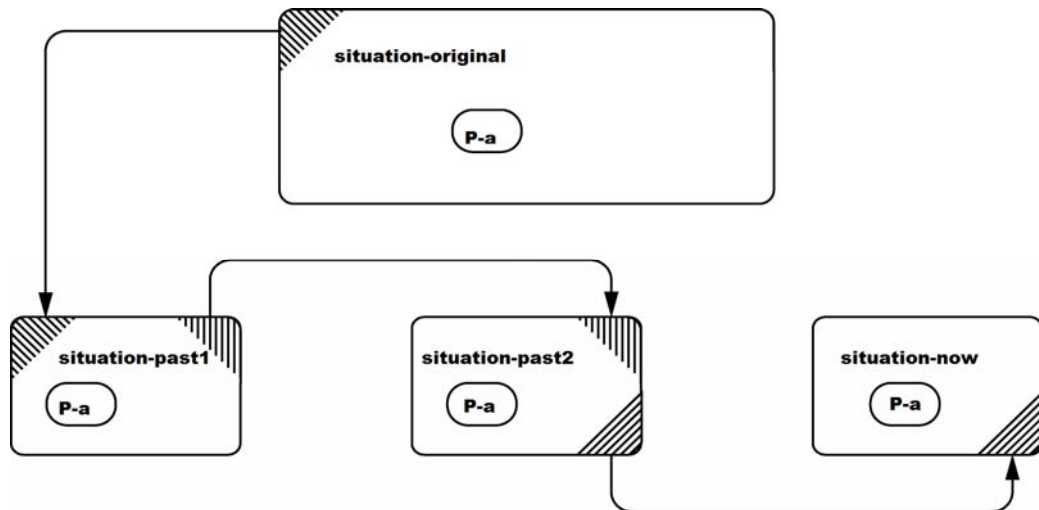
**Example 7:** When I was a child we did not use to have carpets on floor except on Sundays and on the special holidays like Christmas. Weft for rags were not easy to get, all the clothes were sewed up and were used until they were worn out. *One who has the patch on the patch has the coin on the coin.* [Kel on paikka paikan päällä, sil on markka markan päällä.] It was an old proverb. The patch was supposed to be sewed fine, not with any long stitch.

**Example 8:** We bought hardly anything else but salt from a shop. Instead of coffee we used rye and chicory. Many times it was just rye. In every spring we fetched from Vaasa [a town] the herrings for the whole year. There were also peddlers selling herrings. All the clothing were homemade, both outerwear and underwear. They were sewed up time after time and it was said *one who has the patch on the patch has the coin on the coin.* [Kel on paikka paikan päällä, sil on markka markan päällä.] If the house was run into debt, one had to be frugal to be able to pay taxes and the rates of the debt.

## 5.2 ONE PROVERB, TWO SITUATIONS

In a life-story the narrator tells she heard one and same proverb in two different kinds of situations. The proverb *Pieni lintu kun munii suuren munan, niin repeää tajkapuoli* [When a little bird lays a big egg it makes the buttocks to broken] is combined with two meanings that are not equal. The common thing with both situations is that the speech has to do with earning one's keep and the property, but the subject matters and the expected consequences of the situation varies.

Figure 2: The similarity of the situations makes one to use the same proverb.



**Example 9:** Hilja, the daughter of my grandfather<sup>4</sup>, was born in 1904. She looked very much like my grandfather and they were near to each other. He liked to visit her daughter. The son in law was a business man and my grandfather was afraid of his big businesses. I remember how they discussed. My grandfather said “Juho, you have better to believe that *when a little bird lays a big egg it makes the buttocks to broken*”. [*Pien lintu ko käyp tekemää suurta munnaa, ni repijää takapuol*]. Juho, the son in law answered “Listen to me my father in law, if everything goes, it is not much. We do not fall very high, just from the broom to the floor”. The business was fine and my grandfather did not have to take care of his daughter’s living.

**Example 10:** Often my grandmother said to my grandfather: “How is it *when a little bird lays a big egg*”. [*Mite käyp ko pien lintu munnii suure muna*] My grandfather bought the threshing machine and the motor in 1928. About at the same time he bought the first radio in the village.

In M6-database this proverb is known as *Pieni lintu jos rupeaa suurta munaa tekemään, repäisee perseensä* [*When a little bird lays a big egg, it makes the buttocks to broken*] and it is situated in the category “C, The basic observations and socio-logic -> C4, Little:big / a little:a lot -> C4a, A small thing or one single thing cannot become great; the individual is insignificant to the whole”.

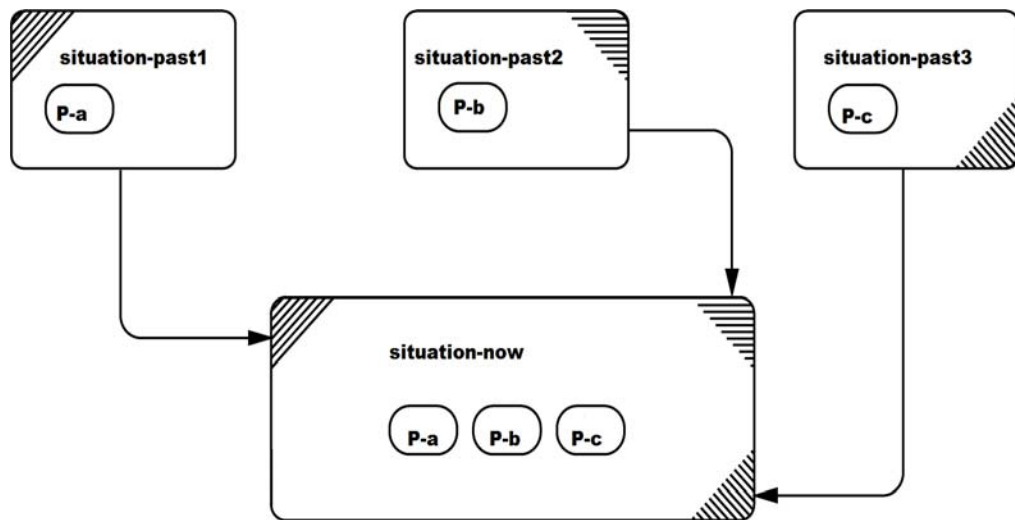
### 5.3 TWO PROVERBS, ONE SITUATION

If the speaker in some situation uses more than one proverb, he or she does have some motive for that. Even if two (or more) situations are seen to be similar they cannot be equal. Something between the situations has changed: the persons, the time, the place or something else. In standard language it is possible to call the situations similar but they are not completely identical.

<sup>4</sup> This expression is from the narration, as all the texts in the examples.

**Example 11:** She [mother] knew for example an endless amount of proverbs and sayings. For every occasion she had many proverbs. [--] When we had not enough money for the living, mother complained: “*There is everything under the sun, even the poor ones*” [Kaikkia siton kun on köyhiäkin] or “*How might the louse hawk when it does not have any chest*” [Milläs täi rykii kun ei oo rintoja].

Figure 3: Several proverbs can be used in the same situation.

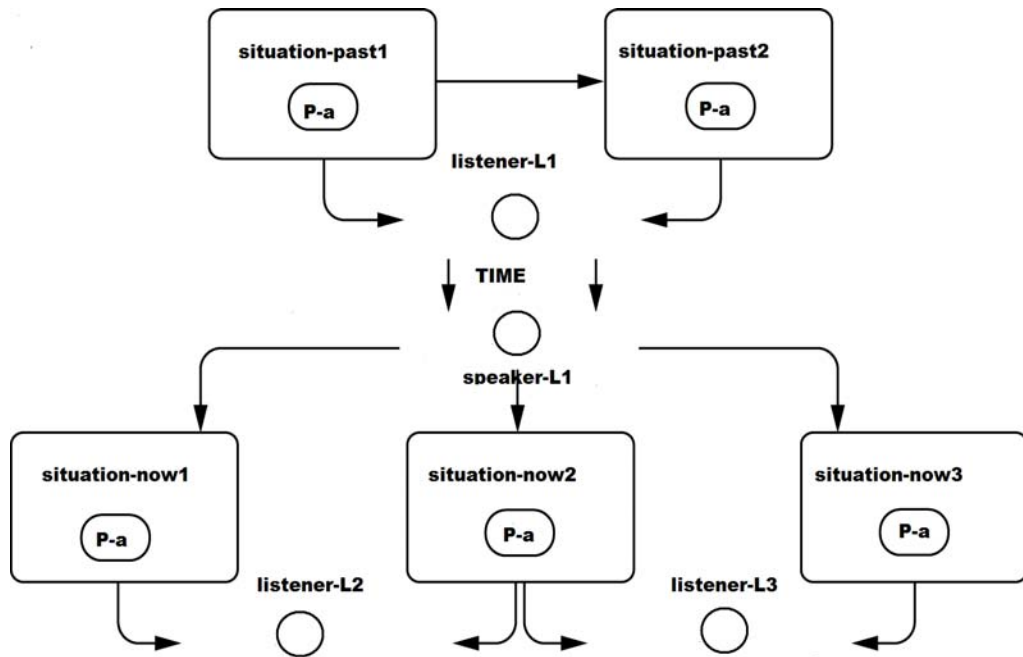


None of these proverbs are expected to be heard when handling with the money and living. In M6-database the proverb *How might the louse hawk when it does not have any chest* [Milläs täi rykii kun ei oo rintoja] is in the category “K, Social position -> K2, Welth:poverty/money -> K2h, Money provides safety, self-esteem and a voice > the poor must be silent and humble”. The other one, *There is everything under the sun, even the poor ones* [Kaikkia siton kun on köyhiäkin], is not included in the database.

#### 5.4 LISTENER BECOMES SPEAKER, SPEAKER IS LISTENER

In the life-stories exists a marvelous example when the narrator has earlier been a listener for proverbs in her childhood and later in her life she has used them when brought her children and grandchildren up. Finally she is grandmother and a listener to the same proverbs used by her grandchild. The motivation for the proverbs lies on the past. The narrator was brought up in Karelian district [after Second World War a part of Soviet Union] by her own grandmother, who was born in 1872. The narrator had been told to take care of clothes in her own childhood.

Figure 4: The chain of the intended interpretation and the implemented interpretation.



**Example 12:** The cleanliness was important. It was said *even an old cloth is beautiful, if it is clean and undamaged*. [Vaate kaunis vanhanakin, jos on puhdas ja eheä] The clothes were valued. It was said *one who does not have working clothes he/she does not have anything to put on when going to church*. [Kel ei o riihe rimpsutinta, sil ei uo kirko kimpsutinta] I have told this also to my children and grandchildren.

My first grandchild (15 years) came up to me, dressed up in ragged and worn out jeans. Of course the first thing I said was “So horrible!” So she clapped me on the shoulder and said: “Grandmother, you have self taught us *one who does not have ...* [kel ei uo riihe rimpsutinta...] and *in rags there is property* [ryysyissä se raha lepää] and *who has a patch over a patch has a coin over a coin* [kel o paikka paika pääll, sil o markka marka pääl].

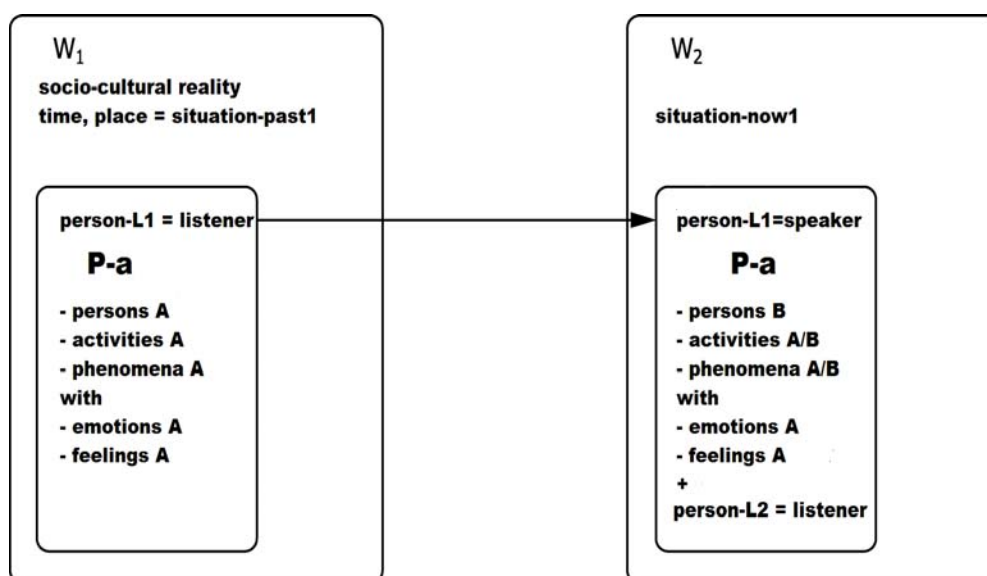
I could do anything but laugh – when she on top of everything said it in the beautiful Karelian dialect.

## 5.5 INTENDED MEANING, IMPLEMENTED INTERPRETATION

The proverb *Kel ei o riihe rimpsutinta, sil ei uo kirko kimpsutinta* [One who does not have something to put on for the drying barn, does not have anything to put on for the church] is the same but it gets entirely different meaning when the grandchild uses it in 1980’s than when grandmother interpreted it in her childhood in 1920’s.



Figure 5: The proverb in the childhood (as the listener) and in the adulthood (as the speaker) in another situation.



With the proverb *Kel ei o rihe rimpsutinta, sil ei uo kirko kimpsutinta* [One who does not have something to put on for the drying barn, does not have anything to put on for the church] the worlds of the grandmother and the granddaughter differ from each other. The living conditions have changed in fifty years, but the proverb is still the same. Actually the grandmother has been a listener in two different worlds. I suppose she noted the differences between these two worlds because the situation went off with laugh.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

I connect the model of interpretation with the proverbs from childhood. The proverbs learnt in childhood follow us all through our lives. As the proverb is owned by the user, it is mostly associated with some special person (Briggs 1988; Granbom-Herranen 2004; 2008). Every time the proverb is heard it is connected to the owner of the proverb and the situation in which it was heard in for the first time. The life-stories give also descriptions of the emotions, feelings, and sensations present in the situation the proverb had been heard in. All this is linked with a proverb.

The proverbs used by parents and grandparents are special even in one's adulthood. Passing from one generation to another, proverbs have been a part of the

speech of the family and neighborhood. The use of proverbs in everyday activities and in pedagogical speech has been, and still is, more often like a slip of tongue than wisdom transmitted consciously. Proverbs are the language of authority and in childhood they are speech of the very first authorities in a child's life. Proverbs are not merely tradition passed on by parents, grandparents, and other grown-ups because besides words and meanings proverbs are combinations of socio-cultural context, people, and all kinds of information in various situations. Language structures the reality. However, the conditions of living influence the concepts that are possible to use in the language.

The discussion of the capability to understand proverbs is a part of the question how we accept other truths besides our own or the only right one. The right way to understand proverbs is bound with the demand to understand them in the same way as the civilized people do – the civilized might mean people in one's own circles, the adults, the majority or English speaking people as well as the Christians people or whatever the speaker decides.

For the child, the proverb is primarily a piece of advice, not a metaphor. The contents of the proverbs are first of all connected with the matter and the person at hand while the child gives the attention to the ongoing activities, events, and phenomena. The power of childhood proverbs does not lie in the metaphorical wisdom of the ancient times. The power lies in the child's comprehensive experience. That is what is remembered and what he/she goes back to when using or meeting the proverb later in his/her life. I assume the process is much the same when a grownup meets a new proverb. However, even if the listener does not look for hidden meanings in proverbs, it does not mean that none exists. It is hardly possible to know the obvious or hidden intentions of the speaker. In life-stories of childhood the proverbs in pedagogical speech were told from the listeners' points of view. The narrators described the event and the situation. They recounted what they had heard and understood or what effect it had had on them. Also, even though proverbs are connected with the speaker, he/she is seen only as a participant in the situation.

In life-stories the interpretation of proverb seems to be a matter of an individual experience. It is combined with all that the listener feels the proverb is transmitting. It is not a question of what the proverb is supposed to mean while interpreted with the assumed standard proverbial interpretation.

The proverbs follow people all through their lives. In the used narrative material, everybody who mentioned that they use proverbs in their own speech had earlier been a listener, but not vice versa, not everybody who had heard proverbs mentioned using them. It does not become clear on what grounds the use of proverbs is transmitted to the next generations.

However, an awareness of the model of transmitting proverbial meanings is significant in order to understand the way we build up our reality. Even a proverb is not understood in childhood as an abstract expression, the time for thinking over the proverb as well as looking for and finding symbolism in it might come in adulthood. Anyhow, the interpretation made in childhood is still the most important also in one's adulthood.

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## HOW DO PROVERBS GET THEIR MEANINGS?

### THE MODEL OF INTERPRETATION

### BASED ON A METAPHOR THEORY

#### Summary

This article focuses on the challenge to explain why proverbs are understood in various ways. Even the proverb is unchangeable the meaning depends on the time and place. The model for the interpretation of proverb bases on the similar practical function of the metaphor and proverb. The model allows both the literal and the metaphorical meaning. The anchor point of the reference has a special significance for the interpretation. A proverb does not use the expression "like something". A proverb expresses the matter as a simple statement. In the same way a metaphorical expression is not "like something" but it is a direct statement "is something".

The sketched model rests in the metaphor theory that combines the principles of common metaphor theories. It makes use of the functional similarities of metaphors and proverbs. The model has been applied to dissect the impressiveness of proverbs from childhood.