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Proverb Introducers in a Cross-Linguistic and Cross-Cultural Perspective. A contrastive study of English and Polish tags used to introduce proverbs

Abstract. This paper is an attempt to compare the forms and usage of proverb introducers in English and in Polish. It has often been observed that the word *proverb* is used less often to introduce proverbs in English than its equivalents in other languages, and its relatively low frequency in the British National Corpus as compared to the frequencies of its equivalents in the corpora of Polish or Czech (cf. Čermák 2004) seems to support this claim. The use of the word *proverb* is likely to be related to the status of proverbs and language-specific ways of speaking, therefore an attempt is made here to discuss the use of *proverb* and its Polish equivalent *przysłowie* with reference to English and Polish cultural history.

Key words: *proverb, introducer, Polish, English, cross-cultural*

1. Introduction

Research on proverbs is impressively extensive: many books have been published on the use of proverbs by famous writers, on the employment of proverbs in advertising and psychological tests, as well as on the use and origins of individual proverbs. In linguistics, however, proverbs seem to be a marginal topic. The low profile of the proverb in linguistics may partly be explained by the general disinterest in relations between language and culture in much of modern linguistics and the low status of proverbs in contemporary learned culture. As Obelkevich (1994) observes, in England, proverbs were expelled from the learned culture in the eighteenth century, and have never regained the position they enjoyed in Middle English and Early Modern English. It seems likely that a similar tendency can be observed in other European countries, where the development of science and technology

was accompanied by the loss of importance of traditional wisdom. However, proverbs do continue to be important tools of communication in modern societies, and their usage provides valuable material for cross-linguistic and cross-cultural studies.

It has been noted by linguists that when proverbs are quoted in English, they are rarely labelled as such, i.e. metalinguistic tags used to introduce them rarely contain the word *proverb*; instead, native speakers of English seem to prefer to use such tags as *as the old saying goes* or *you know what they say* (cf. Goddard 2009). In other languages, e.g. Polish or Czech (cf. Čermák 2004), proverbs are more likely to be introduced by means of metalinguistic tags containing the equivalent of the word *proverb*, (e.g. Pol. *jak mówi przysłowie* 'as the proverb says'). Čermák provides two explanations for the apparent avoidance of the word *proverb* in English: "(1) language users are not able to assign proper labels to the forms they use, (2) they purposefully avoid the word for a reason impossible to specify", and adds that "Czech speakers do not seem to have such difficulty in identifying a proverb and its linguistic label as the English speakers do". I believe that the reported "difficulty in identifying a proverb" and the avoidance of the word *proverb* in English can be explained with reference to England's cultural history.

The aim of the present paper is thus to investigate the way proverbs are introduced in English and Polish, and to examine the use of the word *proverb* and its Polish equivalent *przysłowie* with reference to the cultural history of Poland and England. The study is corpus based. It draws material from the British National Corpus (<http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/>) and the IPI PAN corpus of modern Polish (<http://korpus.pl/>).

2. Proverb introducers: a short characteristics

Proverb introducers are words and phrases used by speakers to signal that they are going to use a proverb or that they have just used it. In English they include such expressions as *according to the proverb*, *as the old saying goes*, *they say*, etc. In Polish, proverbs are introduced by such metalinguistic tags as *jak mówi przysłowie*, *zgodnie z przysłowiem*, *zgodnie ze starym powiedzeniem*, etc. Proverbs are also introduced by conjunctions, e.g. *but* (Pol *ale*) or adverbs, e.g. *sometimes* (Pol *czasami*). In both languages, metalinguistic tags may precede as well as follow proverbs; sometimes tags are also inserted in the middle of the proverb text.

3. Proverb introducers in English

As already mentioned, contemporary tendencies in the use of proverb introducers in English have been studied by Čermák (2004). He selected 20 proverbs with high frequency in the British National Corpus, examined metalinguistic qualifiers used to introduce them and compared the results he obtained with his findings for Czech. The proverbs he used in his analysis are:

Table 1. Proverbs used in Čermák's study

	Proverb	Frequency in the BNC
1.	<i>You can't have your cake and eat it</i>	42
2.	<i>There is no such thing as a free lunch</i>	36
3.	<i>Prevention is better than cure</i>	36
4.	<i>Chickens come home to roost</i>	31
5.	<i>Every cloud has a silver lining</i>	22
6.	<i>Better late than never</i>	18
7.	<i>Discretion is best part of valour</i>	15
8.	<i>All's well that ends well</i>	14
9.	<i>Forewarned is forearmed</i>	13
10.	<i>A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush</i>	13
11.	<i>Let bygones be bygones</i>	12
12.	<i>Practice makes perfect</i>	12
13.	<i>Don't look a gift horse in the mouth</i>	12
14.	<i>Like father like son</i>	11
15.	<i>An eye for an eye</i>	11
16.	<i>An apple a day keeps the doctor away</i>	11
17.	<i>Once bitten twice shy</i>	9
18.	<i>Two heads are better than one</i>	8
19.	<i>Charity begins at home</i>	8
20.	<i>Too many cooks spoil the broth</i>	8

Čermák's study shows that in both English and Czech, proverbs are introduced by four broad classes of tags. He grouped the English ones as follows:

- (1) nouns, such as *axiom, proverb, maxim, adage, saying, rule, principle, fact, message, conviction, phrase, argument, cliché* (often followed by *that*, e.g. *message that*)

- (2) verbs, such as *remember, conclude, comment, decide, assert, point out, counter*
- (3) phrases, such as *as they say, mind you, so it is said, they say that, on the basis/premise that, to quote X, or*
- (4) other, mostly adverbs or conjunctions, such as *always, really, but, though, if – then, definitely, well, so.*

Less frequent or more extended introducers include such expressions as *commenting, he decided, coining the phrase, the grim fact that..., but the idea was that...* or references to their authors, such as in *All's well that ends well, to quote Shakespeare.*

The top 5 introducers in Čermák's study are: *saying* (7x), *always* (7x), *they say that* (5x), *decide* (5x), and *principle* (4x), while "the obvious candidate, being a direct name English has here, namely *proverb*, has only a marginal frequency (1x), being superceded by *saying* (7x), or, to a lesser extent, by *maxim* (2x), *adage* (2x), *axiom* (2x) and the like". The top 5 Czech introducers which he identified are: *heslo* (*slogan* 30x), *příslovní* (*proverb* 16x), *platit* (*hold* 14x), *ale* (*but* 14x), *zásada* (12x). In both languages nominal introducers turned out to be more common than all the other types.

There are also numerous cases of the use of proverbs without any introducers (about 80%), a tendency which seems more common in English than in both Czech and Polish. Interestingly, Čermák's findings are remarkably consistent with Honeck's (1997) illustration of "proverbs in action" in English. Honeck describes four situations of proverb use, three of which contain no metalinguistic qualifiers, and one containing the introducer *remember*. None of the examples of proverb tags which Honeck has selected to discuss the way proverbs are used in English contains the word *proverb*. Instead, he chose such tags as: *Well, you know what they say*, and *As the saying goes* (Honeck 1997: 16).

4. The use of the word *proverb* in the English corpus

There are 99 occurrences of the word *proverb* in the British National Corpus (100 million words), not all of which are used to introduce actual proverbs. In 4 cases the word appears in texts discussing the use of proverbs in medicine; in 2 cases it is listed next to other phraseological units in linguistic papers. This leaves us with 91 occurrences of the word referring actual proverbs or proverb use. Some of those cases are comments on someone's use of proverbs, e.g. *Lewis Carroll used an English **proverb**, He paused, letting the crowd dwell on the **proverb**...*, *His favourite **proverb** was...*, *... realized the truth ... of the **proverb***. Others refer to the meaning of some proverbs, e.g. *I still don't*

*understand what that **proverb** means, if there wasn't a **proverb** to fit then it was time someone wrote one, Needs must, this well-worn **proverb** goes right out of the window, Haydon realized the truth, he said, of the **proverb**, Who goes a-borrowing goes a-sorrowing.*

Interestingly, in 42 cases the word *proverb* is used to introduce a foreign proverb, eg.: *There is a Danish **proverb**..., so runs a Burmese **proverb***, or *As the Chinese **proverb** says..., As a Chinese **proverb** has it*. This may suggest that foreign proverbs are more likely to be introduced as proverbs than native ones, the reason being perhaps that in the case of foreign proverbs, which may be unknown to the addressee(s), speakers may feel the need to give them the appropriate label.

It seems that in English, proverb introducers typically precede the proverbs they are used with (Čermák 2004). Expressions containing the word *proverb* which are used in this position include:

- [as] the proverb says /said (6x)
- as a proverb has it (5x)
- there's a proverb (5x)
- we have the old proverb that [states] (3x)
- the proverb [that] (2x)
- an/one old proverb runs (2x)
- according to the proverb (1x)
- remember the old proverb (1x)
- in the words of the proverb (1x)
- a [Chinese] proverb has it that (1x)
- as a Spanish proverb puts it (1x)
- An American Indian proverb cautions (1x).

Tags which follow proverbs include:

- says [said] the proverb (5x)
- as/like the proverb says (2x)
- runs/ran a proverb (2x)
- so runs a Burmese proverb (1x)
- as the old Jewish proverb has it (1x).

There are also more elaborate introducers, as in: *I go right along with the never look a gift horse in the mouth proverb* or *His favourite proverb must be....* In the BNC there are also some allusions to proverbs, e.g. *as the fish in the proverb*.

In addition to the noun *proverb*, proverbial expressions are introduced with the adjective *proverbial*, which has a higher frequency in the BNC than the word *proverb*: 161 occurrences, and the adverb *proverbially*, which however is much less frequent: only 19 occurrences. Examples from the BNC include:

- *This is not the **proverbial** free lunch.*
- *He looked greener than the **proverbial** grass to her.*
- *Naturally, there is the **proverbial** robin – well, robins to be precise.*
- *It is prophets who **proverbially** have no honour in their own country.*

The adverb *proverbially* is both less frequent in the BNC and less often used to refer to actual proverbs. In many cases it is used to introduce commonly held opinions, which seems to be the case in: *Venetian drivers are **proverbially** supposed to be the worst in Italy.*

There are three nouns in the BNC whose meaning is similar to that of the word *proverb* and whose frequency in the corpus is comparable, i.e. *adage* (115x), *saying* (a *saying* 48x, *old saying* 59x) and *the maxim* (94x). They are also (but not exclusively) used to introduce proverbs, e.g.:

- *Indeed, the old **adage**: ‘spare the rod and spoil the child’ has much wisdom.*
- *The old **adage** ‘you only get what you pay for’ doesn’t always apply.*
- *Thus his conduct very well illustrates the **maxim** ‘Look before you leap’.*
- *It is an old **saying** that you cannot tell a book by its cover.*
- *But there is a **saying**, is there not: ‘Man proposes, and God disposes!’.*

Such tags may also be used to introduce other linguistic items, for example *a saying* may refer to expressions used by individuals or groups of people, e.g.: *In the Billy Graham team we had a **saying** But that was yesterday.*

Čermák’s analysis of the use of such introducers as *proverb*, *adage*, *as they say*, *principle*, *they say*, *saying* in the whole corpus, not only with the twenty proverbs discussed above, shows that of all these, the word *proverb* is the most standard introducer of proverbs, in the sense that it almost always refers to proverbs, while the other ones also frequently occur with idioms and other types of expressions. A notable exception is the word *adage*, whose primary function also seems to be that of proverb introducer.

5. Proverb introducers in Polish

Polish proverbs analyzed in the present study have been selected from the list of 56 proverbs published in Szpila (2003). Szpila’s list includes proverbs which he found to be most common among students of Jagiellonian University in Krakow in Poland. Many proverbs from his list do not appear in the IPI PAN corpus, so only those which are evidenced in the corpus have been selected for the analysis. The English equivalents of the proverbs listed below are quoted after Pająk’s *Dictionary of Proverbs and Sayings. English-Polish. Polish-English* (2007). The equivalents which are actual proverbs are written in italics to distinguish them from translations, which are not italicized.

Table 2. The Polish proverbs selected for the analysis

	Proverb	Frequency in the IPI PAN corpus
1.	<i>Nie ma tego złego, co by na dobre nie wyszło</i> (Every cloud has a silver lining)	44
2.	<i>Mądry Polak po szkodzie</i> (lit. A Pole is wise after the event)	35
3.	<i>Gdzie dwóch się bije, tam trzeci korzysta</i> (lit. When two people fight, the third one benefits)	32
4.	<i>Jedna jaskółka wiosny nie czyni</i> (One swallow doesn't make a summer)	12
5.	<i>Raz na wozie, raz pod wozem</i> (He that falls today may rise tomorrow)	12
6.	<i>Nie wszystko złoto, co się świeci</i> (All that glitters is not gold)	11
7.	<i>Darowanemu koniowi nie patrzy się w zęby</i> (Don't look a gift horse in the mouth)	11
8.	<i>Prawdziwych przyjaciół poznaje się w biedzie</i> (A friend in need is a friend indeed)	11
9.	<i>Lepszy wróbel w garści niż gołąb na dachu</i> (A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush)	10
10.	<i>Niedaleko pada jabłko od jabłoni</i> (The apple doesn't fall far from the tree)	8
11.	<i>Czym skorupka za młodu nasiąknie tym na starość trąci</i> (What youth is used to, age remembers)	7
12.	<i>Kwiecień plecień bo przeplata, trochę zimy trochę lata</i> (April weather, rain and sunshine both together)	5
13.	<i>Nie czyni drugiemu, co tobie niemiłe</i> (Do to others as you would have them do to you)	3
14.	<i>Bez pracy nie ma kołaczy</i> (He that will not work, shall not eat)	3
15.	<i>Jak sobie pościesz, tak się wyśpisz</i> (As you make your bed, so you must lie on/in it)	3
16.	<i>Mądrej głowie dość dwie słowie</i> (One word is enough to a wise man)	2
17.	<i>Mowa jest srebrem, a milczenie złotem</i> (Speech is silver, but silence is golden)	2
18.	<i>Dopóty dzban wodę nosi, dopóki mu się ucho nie urwie</i> (The pitcher goes often to the well, but it is broken at last)	1
19.	<i>Nosił wilk razy kilka, ponieśli i wilka</i> (At length the fox is brought to the furrier)	1
20.	<i>Jak się wejdzie między wrony, trzeba krakać jak i one</i> (When in Rome, do as the Romans do)	1

The variety of tags used to introduce the analysed proverbs is rather wide: over 60 different expressions, and only 7 cases of proverbs used without any introducers. The top 7 introducers are: *przysłowie* 'proverb' (26x), the conjunction *ale* 'but' (23x), *zasada* 'rule' (16x), *porzekadło* 'old saying/proverb' (8x), *powiedzenie* 'saying' (8x), and *mówi się* 'they say' (8x), *można powiedzieć* 'you can say' (7x). As in the case of English and Czech proverb introducers, Polish tags can be grouped under four main headings:

- (1) nouns: *przysłowie* (proverb), *porzekadło* (proverb, old saying), *powiedzenie* (saying), *zasada* (principle), *maksyma* (maxim), *reguła* (rule), *hasło* (slogan), *refleksja* (reflection, afterthought), *wniosek* (conclusion), *stwierdzenie* (statement), *założenie* (assumption), *prawda* (truth), *dewiza* (motto);
- (2) verbs: *okazało się* (turn out), *pamiętaj* (remember), *zapomniał* (forget), *stwierdzał* (state), *powtarzam* (repeat), *mówimy* (say);
- (3) phrases: *mówi się* (lit. it is said), *jak to mówią* (as they say), *w sumie* (all in all), *jak widać* (as can be seen), *wiadomo że* (lit. it is known that), *no cóż* (well);
- (4) others, mainly conjunctions and adverbs: *ale* (but), *ponieważ* (because), *bo* (because), *wszak* (after all), *więc* (so/therefore), *skoro* (since), *choć* (although/even though), *często* (often), *ponoć* (supposedly), *podobno* (supposedly), *może* (maybe), *czyli* (so), *jednak* (but/yes), *przecież* (but/yes).

As in Čermák's (2004) study, also here "it seems that semantics of proverbs may influence the choice of introducers in some cases". For example, Čermák observes that "the co-occurrence of the verb *decide* with the proverb *Discretion is best part of valour* in almost 50 percent does not seem to be due to chance only". Among the Polish proverbs analysed here, there are some for which the noun *przysłowie* (and, more generally, nominal tags) is a common introducer, e.g. *Mądry Polak po szkodzie* (lit. A Pole is wise after the event) is introduced with the noun *przysłowie* (9x), *porzekadło* (3), *zasada* (3), *powiedzenie* (2x), *maksyma* (1x), *hasło* (1x), *refleksja* (1x), *wniosek* (1x), and the proverb *Gdzie dwóch się bije, tam trzeci korzysta* (lit. When two people fight, the third one benefits) is introduced by *przysłowie* (10x), *zasada* (5x), *założenie* (1x), *stwierdzenie* (1), *refleksja* (1x). There are also proverbs in the corpus which are never introduced with the word *przysłowie*, e.g. *Lepszy wróbel w garści niż gołąb na dachu* (*A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush*) and *Nie wszystko złoto, co się świeci* (*All that glitters is not gold*). In the case of these two the absence of the word *proverb* in their introducers may be accidental and related to their low frequency, however, the proverb with the highest frequency among those analysed here, *Nie ma tego złego, co by na dobre nie wyszło* (*Every cloud has a silver lining*), is introduced by a tag including the word *proverb* only once. Instead, it is introduced by numerous conjunctions and adverbs, such

as *ale* (8x), *więc* (4x), *choć* (3x), *skoro* (2x), *w sumie* (2x), *ponieważ* (1x). Thus, some connection between the proverb's meaning and its introducers does seem to exist but the present findings do not provide sufficient and reliable data for this kind of analysis.

6. The use of the word *przysłowie* in the Polish corpus

The word *przysłowie* has a relatively high frequency in the Polish corpus: 788 occurrences per 250 million words, i.e. 315 per 100 million words. It needs to be mentioned here that in an inflectional language like Polish, the frequency of equivalents of such English words as *proverb* or *saying* has to be established on the basis of the frequencies of all their inflectional forms. The IPI PAN corpus searches for each of the inflectional forms separately, thus, 788 is a sum of the frequencies of all singular forms of the word, i.e. *przysłowie* (552x), *przysłowiu* (47x), *przysłowiem* (69x) and *przysłowia* (120x). The last form, *przysłowia*, can be both singular and plural in Polish, but the plural instances have been disregarded in the present analysis, mainly because they are less frequent and are less often used to introduce proverbs.

There are numerous tags with the word *przysłowie* in the IPI PAN corpus, e.g.: *jak mówi przysłowie* (as the proverb says) is used 25 times, its slightly old-fashioned synonym *jak powiada przysłowie* (as the proverb says) occurs 9 times, *zgodnie z przysłowiem* (according to the proverb) has 10 instances, *jak w przysłowiu* (as in the proverb) has 7 occurrences, and *stare przysłowie mówi* (an old proverb says that) has 5 occurrences. The word *proverb* is used with such modifiers as *stare* (old: 69x), *polskie* (Polish: 64x), *znane* (well known: 34x), *ludowe* (folk: 27x). There are also numerous cases of foreign proverbs introduced with the word *proverb* preceded by an adjective referring to their country of origin, eg. *chińskie przysłowie* (a Chinese proverb).

In most cases such introducers precede the proverbs they are used with, but occasionally the tag is inserted into the proverb text, as in:

- *Ryba, jak mówi przysłowie, psuje się od głowy* (lit. Fish, **as the proverb says**, begins to stink at the head)
- *Żadna praca, jak mówi przysłowie, nie hańbi* (lit. All work, **as the proverb says**, is honorable)
- *Diabeł, jak mówi przysłowie, tkwi w szczegółach* (lit. The devil, **as the proverb says**, is in the details)
- *Dobrymi chęciami piekło jest wybrukowane, mówi przysłowie* (lit. Hell is paved with good intentions, **says the proverb**)

- *Muzyk gra, jak mu płacą, mówi przysłowie* (lit. A musician plays as he is paid, **says the proverb**)
- *Lepiej późno niż wcale, jak mówi przysłowie* (lit. Better late than never, **as the proverb says**).

The word *przysłowie* has a less frequent and a little old fashioned synonym in Polish: *porzekadło*, used 324 times in the corpus. Other nominal expressions with similar meanings include: *stare powiedzenie* (an old saying: 66x) and *takie powiedzenie* (the/the following saying: 134 occurrences), *ludowe powiedzenie* (folk saying: 6x), *mądrość ludowa* (folk wisdom: 14x), *stara prawda* (old truth: 57x).

The Polish equivalent of the adjective *proverbial*, i.e. *przysłowiowy* (and all its inflectional forms) has an even higher frequency than the word *przysłowie*: there are 2.074 occurrences in the 250-million corpus, i.e. 829 occurrences per 100 million words (as compared to only 159 occurrences in the British National Corpus). In Polish, adjectives are inflected for number, gender, and case, so the English word *proverbial* corresponds to the following forms in Polish: *przysłowiowy* (317x), *przysłowiowego* (222x), *przysłowiowemu* (9x), *przysłowiowa* (143x), *przysłowiową* (403x), *przysłowiowej* (185x), *przysłowiowe* (386x), *przysłowiowym* (296x), *przysłowiowych* (85x), *przysłowiowymi* (28x). The IPI PAN examples of the use of the adjective *przysłowiowy* with proverbs include:

- *W polityce zachowywał się zwykle w **przysłowiowy** sposób – jak stoń w składzie porcelany* (lit. In politics he usually behaved in a **proverbial** manner – like a bull in a china shop)
- *Jesteśmy jak **przysłowiowy** szewc bez butów* (lit. We are like the **proverbial** shoemaker without shoes).

However, the adjective *przysłowiowy* is also frequently used to introduce idioms and other non-proverbial expressions, e.g.:

- *... który łapie **przysłowiowy** drugi oddech* (lit. who catches the **proverbial** second breath)
- ***przysłowiowy** domek z ogródkiem* (lit. the **proverbial** house with a garden)
- *Piłkarze grają za **przysłowiowy** uścisk dłoni prezesa* (lit. Footballers play for the **proverbial** handshake of their chairman).

The Polish equivalent of the adverb *proverbially*, i.e. *przysłowiowo*, has a rather low frequency in Polish: 26 occurrences per 250 million words, i.e. 10.4 occurrences per 100 million, which is even fewer than the in the case of its English counterpart, which has 19 occurrences in the BNC. The adverb tends to precede idioms and colloquialisms rather than actual proverbs, as in: *Wymienione zabiegi mogą pomóc bezrobotnemu, który posiada wykształcenie i kwalifikacje, ale nie potrafi ich **przysłowiowo** ‘sprzedać’* (lit. The mentioned procedures may

help the unemployed who has the right education and qualifications but does not know how to **proverbially** ‘sell’ them).

Likewise, expressions such as *jak to mówią* (lit. as they say), *mówi się* (lit. it is said) and *powiedzenie* (saying) are not only used to introduce proverbs. They precede various types of phrases, e.g.:

- *Zabrakło, jak to mówią zdrowia* (lit. We didn’t have, **as they say**, enough health)
- *Każdy nowy dom, jak to mówią, “pracuje”* (lit. Every new house, **as they say** “works”)
- *W taki sposób mówi się o zwierzętach* (lit. In this way **they talk** about animals)
- *Jest takie powiedzenie, że wszystkiemu winni są cykliści i dziennikarze* (lit. There is a **saying** that cyclists and journalists are to blame for everything)
- *Jest pośród muzyków jazzowych takie powiedzenie: chcecie posłuchać dobrej muzyki? To ja sobie sami nagrzejcie* (lit. There is a **saying** among jazz musicians: do you want to listen to good music? Make it yourselves).

Thus, it seems that the most reliable proverb introducers in Polish are *przysłowie* and *porzekadło*, much like in Czech, where the most common ones are *příслови* and *pořekadlo* (Čermák 2004).

7. Proverbs and cultural values

Proverbs appear to have always been used in human communication (Honeck 1997), but their role and status have been subject to change. Biblical proverbs have traditionally enjoyed high reputation, but attitudes towards folk proverbs have alternated from great enthusiasm to condemnation. Generally speaking, in England, folk wisdom encapsulated in proverbs had ranked high until the Enlightenment when it started to be perceived as inconsistent with the new emphasis on rational thinking and empirical evidence. In Elizabethan England, when “truth and wisdom ranked above facts and figures, proverbs had unquestioned authority; to educated people they were not folkloristic curiosities but part of their cultural capital” (Obelkevich 1994: 227). Elizabethans collected proverbs and used them as ornaments on their tapestries, plates, knife blades, and sundials. In schools, proverbs provided moral advice and were used to teach Latin (Crystal 2006: 425). “The sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries were the two great proverb-making centuries of the English language” (Wilson 1994: 178). Morris Palmer Tilley’s *Dictionary of the Proverbs Used in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (1966) contains over 2000 references to proverbs and proverbial phrases found in

Shakespeare, a list which, although remarkably inclusive, is, according to Wilson (1994), still incomplete. However, most of the proverbs Shakespeare used have by now been forgotten.

In the late seventeenth century, enthusiasm towards proverbs began to wane, and a century later, Lord Chesterfield told his son that “a man of fashion never has recourse to proverbs or vulgar aphorisms” (cf. Obelkevich 1994: 230).

The publication of John Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), which stressed limitations of human knowledge, initiated a period which proved to be very influential in shaping English culture, or, perhaps more appropriately, ‘Anglo’ culture, as Wierzbicka (2006) calls it. The term ‘Anglo’ culture refers to common values and cultural norms found in the countries where English is the primary language, i.e. the UK, the USA, Ireland, Canada, Australia and New Zealand (Wierzbicka 2006). This ‘cultural baggage’ is reflected in English vocabulary, fixed expressions, grammar and speech practices, and includes the respect for facts, the ideal of accuracy, and the concept of ‘being reasonable’, all of which go back to the Enlightenment (Wierzbicka 2006; 2010). The Anglo respect for facts and empirical evidence is well evidenced in the English language: words and expressions which were originally used in scientific discourse became part of everyday English, e.g. *actually, accurate, accuracy, to be exact, exactly, to be precise, precisely* (Wierzbicka 2006: 31–32). As Wierzbicka writes, “given the central role of science in modern Anglo culture, it is understandable that scientific discourse has become in this culture, for many intents and purposes, the model of “good speech”: rational, dispassionate, factually based, precise, and accurate” (2006: 30). It does not seem coincidental then that proverbs were expelled from learned culture precisely when such values began to predominate. Proverbs became taboo, and the taboo on the use of proverbs has probably led to the avoidance of the word *proverb* in English.

Obelkevich (1994: 239) claims that, “today its [the proverb’s: A.R.] reputation among educated people is lower than at any time since the seventeenth century (...) [u]sed in any straightforward way – apart from the occasional allusion – proverbs are taboo”. Somewhat ironically, the expulsion of proverbs from educated language was accompanied by the appearance of new proverbs in English: proverbs which encapsulated the new values and ways of thinking, e.g. *Facts are facts, Facts are stubborn things, Facts don’t lie*. Obelkevich (1994: 236–7) mentions that Romanticism witnessed a partial re-discovery of proverbs, and Lord Chesterfield’s earlier critique of proverbs was then said to have been carried too far, but the renewed interest in proverbs soon declined. Naturally, proverbial wisdom has retained its authority

outside educated circles, and has continued to be part of everyday communication, in particular in situations when audience was composed of “ordinary people”, i.e. speeches of politicians, advertisements, popular literature and films. However, generally speaking, the status of proverbs has remained low since the Enlightenment. As Obelkevich argues:

Educated people have many reasons not to use proverbs, even if they rarely need to spell them out. (...) proverbs put the collective before the individual, the recurrent and stereotyped before the unique, external rules before self-determination, common sense before the individual vision, survival before happiness. And with self-fulfillment goes that everyone has (or should have) their own unique, ever-changing experience of life, and that that experience should be expressed in freshly chosen words on every occasion. To use proverbs would deny the individuality of both speaker and listener. (...) It does not matter that they can be used with a wit and subtlety unsuspected by their cultural despisers, nor that their critics may in practice tie themselves up in knots of jargon, or use fewer proverbs but more clichés; still less does it matter that in viewing proverbs as a linguistic ‘other’, associated with peasants, plebeians and the petty-bourgeois, they ignore their historic role in elite culture itself: the avoidance of proverbs remains one of the articles in the modern linguistic faith”. (Obelkevich 1994: 240)

Even though the influence of scientific discourse on ordinary language is not an exclusively Anglo phenomenon, it seems to be stronger in English than in other languages. For example, as Wierzbicka (2006: 31) notices, “there are no words corresponding to *accurate* and *accuracy* in German or French (although there are words corresponding to *exact* or *precise*)”. In Poland, the philosophy of the Enlightenment had a different reception and a different ‘flavor’ than in England (Kostkiewiczowa 2001). In Poland, it was combined with the ‘Sarmatist’ ideal of political anarchism, which originated in Baroque and was intended to protect the rights of the nobility. As Davies observes, in eighteenth-century Western Europe, the anarchic views found in Poland were completely unfashionable and often misunderstood. “During the Enlightenment, ‘Anarchie’ was used as a term of abuse, a synonym for chaos and terror; and in the nineteenth century, the former Republic continued to be the object of retrospective derision” (Davies 2005: 246). Thus, while the philosophy advocating the primacy of reason over emotions did reach Poland, its influence on Polish society, which still found the ideals of Baroque very attractive, was not as great as it was in England. The English Enlightenment placed much greater emphasis on empirical knowledge and rational thinking than the Polish one did. Polish cultural patterns owe more to the ideals of Baroque than the Enlightenment, an influence which has frequently been noted by scholars (Jasienica 1988; Hryniewicz 2004). Baroque gave priority

to spontaneity, light-heartedness and emotions over rational thinking. Hryniewicz (2004: 208) argues that the cultural patterns and values represented by Baroque were so influential in Poland that they played the role of a filter in shaping attitudes towards other cultural trends: those similar to Baroque were received enthusiastically, while those which fostered different values were less eagerly accepted or rejected.

Thus, the popularity of Romanticism and its philosophy in Poland may partly be explained by the epoch's similarity to Baroque, manifested in the primacy of emotions and spontaneity over rational thinking. As Wierzbicka observes, "[i]n the romantic poetry which played a fundamental role in shaping the Polish national ethos, *serce* 'heart' is opposed to the scientist's *szkiełko i oko* 'magnifying glass and eye', as a source of 'live truth' versus the domain of 'dead truths', and this opposition has retained an important place in the Polish ethnotheory" (2003: 54). This attitude is reflected in the numerous variants of the proverb *Gdzie serce każe, tam rozum iść musi* (lit. Reason has to follow in the heart's footsteps) and the famous proverbial quotation from the Polish Romantic writer, Adam Mickiewicz, *Miej serce i patrzaj w serce* (lit. Have a heart, and look in your heart) (cf. Rozumko 2009).

8. Conclusion

In both languages proverbs are introduced by a variety of metalinguistic tags, the most standard of which are the words *proverb* and *adage* in English and *przysłowie* and *porzekadło* in Polish. There are also other high frequency proverb introducers, such as *they say* in English or *jak to mówią* in Polish, but these are also frequently used with non-proverbial expressions. In English, proverbs are often used without any introducers, a tendency which is less common in Polish. The English word *proverb* has a significantly lower frequency than its Polish equivalent *przysłowie*, the ratio being 99 to 315 (occurrences per 100 million words). In the case of the adjective *proverbial* and its Polish counterpart *przysłowiowy*, the difference is even more significant: 159 occurrences in the English corpus and 829 in the Polish corpus. It seems that the rather low frequency of the words *proverb* and *proverbial* in English can be explained with reference to England and Poland's cultural history. The cultural 'baggage' of English has its roots in the Enlightenment, which placed emphasis on empirical knowledge, facts, precision and accuracy, and gave priority to scientific ways of speaking. Polish culture, in turn, owes more to the ideals of Baroque and Romanticism, which, possibly more in Poland than in other countries, stressed the importance of emotions and feelings, ra-

ther than rational thinking and empirical evidence. It thus seems legitimate to suppose that the cultural climate of Poland has traditionally been more favourable towards folk wisdom encapsulated in proverbs than the cultural climate of England. This in turn may be the reason why in Polish proverbs and proverbial expressions are more frequently labelled as such than they are in English.

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**Operatory metatekstowe wprowadzające przysłowia
w międzyjęzykowej i międzykulturowej perspektywie.
Analiza kontrastywna angielskich i polskich wyrażeń
wprowadzających przysłowia**

Streszczenie

Artykuł jest próbą porównania form i użycia wyrażeń wprowadzających przysłowia w języku angielskim i polskim. Słowo *proverb* jest używane rzadziej do wprowadzania przysłów w angielskim niż w obcojęzycznych ekwiwalentach analizowanych operatorów. Tę obserwację potwierdza relatywnie niższa częstotliwość użycia go w the British National Corpus w porównaniu z wystąpieniami jego odpowiedników w korpusach polskim i czeskim. Użycie słowa *przysłowie* jest prawdopodobnie związane ze statusem przysłowia i charakterystycznymi dla danego języka sposobami mówienia, dlatego autorka podejmuje próbę omówienia użycia wyrazu *proverb* i jego polskiego ekwiwalentu *przysłowie* poprzez odwołania do angielskiej i polskiej historii kultury.