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ARE PROVERBS CLICHÉ?
AN APPLICATION OF THE ELABORATION LIKELIHOOD MODEL TO FOLKLORIC PERFORMANCE

Abstract: Although proverbs resemble clichés in the broad sense of being common fixed-form phrases, and have been considered to be clichés by some scholars, proverbs are not prototypically cliché in other ways. Most importantly, whereas clichés are generally presumed to tarnish communicative efforts, the invocation of proverbs may often be an effective rhetorical act. It is here proposed that whether a particular text, in this case a proverb, is perceived as cliché may depend as much on contextual factors surrounding the performance of the text as on the familiarity of the text itself. The Elaboration Likelihood Model, which grew out of the persuasion literature in social psychology, describes two different routes to persuasion. Analysis with respect to the ELM suggests that proverb performances may be successful either because they provide useful arguments (i.e., by way of the central route) or because they exploit any of a number of heuristic truth cues (i.e., by way of the peripheral route); in either case, a successful performance is unlikely to be deemed cliché. Proverb performances that fail, however, may be deemed cliché—either because the arguments they present fail or because heuristic cues (e.g., their commonness) result in rejection of the message without consideration of its merits. The likelihood of these outcomes, though, may depend as much on the type of processing used by the audience as it does on the invocation of the proverbial text itself.

Keywords: proverb(s), paremiology, cliché(s), Elaboration Likelihood Model, persuasion, central route to persuasion, peripheral route to persuasion, folklore, traditional wisdom

Many of us have had educational experiences that have prepared us to appreciate the humor of the t-shirt slogan that warns us to "Avoid Clichés Like the Plague." However, contrary to the long history of terms that refer to related linguistic categories—like proverbs, which were recognized at least as far back as the ancient Greeks (Whiting, 1932)—the term cliché itself is a relatively recent invention. When the C volume of the *Oxford English Dic-*

tionary was released in 1893, the term cliché was included only as a foreign word and only with reference to its technical definition as a type of printing surface from which multiple identical copies could be made (Pickrel, 1985; *Webster's*, 1989); the term's use in reference to a kind of stereotyped speech act appears to date only to the late 19th century (Haberer, 2005-2006; Kirkpatrick, 1996; Partridge, 1966; Pickrel, 1985, *Webster's*, 1989).

In its application to speech acts and other kinds of endeavors in which originality is presumably possible and desirable[1], the designation of an act as cliché has apparently always been derogatory. In no small part, the vilification of the cliché seems to be linked to an historical shift in the ethos of the educated. Whereas familiarity with stores of shared knowledge was once regarded as the hallmark of a good education, the rise of originality as a defining intellectual virtue meant that having ideas of one's own was at least as important as being familiar with a common cannon of culturally significant texts (Goldfine & King, 1994; Obelkevich, 1988).

The admonition that clichés are to be avoided has been maintained in many modern writing textbooks (e.g., Axelrod & Cooper, 2013; McKernan, 1988) and style guides (e.g., *The AMA Handbook of Business Writing*, Wilson, & Wauson, 2010; the *AMA Manual of Style*, American Medical Association, 2007; *The Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, American Psychological Association, 2010). Although such guides make it clear that clichés are to be avoided, however, what they leave far less clear is what they are. The linguistic category of the cliché has apparently been much easier to revile than to define (Goldfine & King, 1994, Haberer, 2005-2006, Kirkpatrick, 1996; Partridge, 1966; Pickrel, 1985; Rank, 1984; *Webster's*, 1989). It has, in fact, been noted that "it has become something of a linguistic cliché to say that it is difficult to define a cliché" (Kirkpatrick, 1996, p. 16). This problem has long been recognized. For example, in one early study, seven raters independently indicated the clichés they found in a speech by Franklin D. Roosevelt; of the 55 phrases selected as being cliché by at least one rater, none was agreed to be cliché by five or more of the raters and 62% were identified as cliché by only a single rater. What's more, raters were not even necessarily consistent with themselves, being more likely to mark a phrase as cliché if it was presented in isolation (in

a list) rather than in the context of a speech (Miller & Villarreal, 1945).

These problems of identifying defining features of the cliché may reflect, at least in part, the tendency of the category of the cliché to be "an inveterate borrower" (Kirkpatrick, 1996, p. 18). Alternatively it may be that the domain of the cliché is perhaps not so much compulsive in its borrowing as particularly adept at linguistic chameleonism, changing in appearance depending on the circumstances. Clichéd similes (e.g., light as a feather, strong as an ox), after all, do not cease to be similes when they become cliché although we may well see and respond to them differently when we encounter them in a context that leads us to interpret them as cliché. This chameleon-like nature also helps to explain why phrases may, in a different socio-historical context, "forfeit their cliché status" (Kirkpatrick, 1996, p. 19), as has (at least arguably) occurred with a number of entries from early lists of clichés as general knowledge of the classics and the Bible has declined. Should today's college students include in their essays phrases like, "timeo Danaos et dona ferentes" or his "name is Legion"—both of which were included in Partridge's (1942) list of clichés—one suspects the average college professor would be less likely to write "cliché" in the margin than to write "obscure," "archaic," or "unclear"—or "interesting point."

Although many different definitions of clichédness have been offered (see Kirkpatrick 1996 for a review), Partridge's 1942 definition highlights many of the major themes that also appear in later definitions, stating that "a cliché is an outworn commonplace; a phrase (or virtual phrase) that has become so hackneyed that scrupulous speakers and writers shrink from it because they feel that its use is an insult to the intelligence of their auditor or audience, reader or public" (pp. 59-60). Certainly this definition highlights the central role of overuse, and phrases are often argued to be cliché if they are "overused, too common, too familiar, seen too much, used too often, by too many people" (Rank, 1984, p. 45). In its broad sense, then, the characterization of a text as cliché seems to mean little more than frequently heard or encountered.

Some definitions of the cliché are, in fact, explicitly limited to emphasizing just this familiar fixedness of form; this is the case for Permyakov whose "Notes on the General Theory of Cliché" defined cliché as referring to "set word-combinations which are

reproduced in a form fixed once and for all" (1979, p. 8) and who, as such, included within this domain not only proverbs but also commonly cited quotations. Likewise, Rozhdestvensky, in his response to Permyakov's work, defined clichés as "ready-made and reproducible language units" (in Permyakov, 1979, p. 259). Importantly, this perspective suggests an objective definition of broad-sense clichédness. That is, if members of a group (within a given socio-historical context) are given partial phrases to be completed with the "most common ending" (e.g., "for all intents and _____," "a breath of _____," "deus ex _____," "once and for _____," or "it is what _____"), then truly cliché phrases should be completed in the same way by the vast majority of the group. Thus an objective definition of broad-sense clichédness is possible and such an approach, unwieldy though it may be in practical terms, could in theory circumvent the current problems of relying purely on idiosyncratic individual opinions to ascertain the clichédness of particular phrases (Kirkpatrick, 1996).

Partridge's early definition also highlights a second apparently defining feature of the cliché, however, and that is the disdain with which its use will presumably be greeted, suggesting that a phrase is a cliché only if it has worn out its welcome among members of a particular group. Many of the definitions that have been offered for the cliché suggest that the term "cliché" itself may be more of an invective, a pejorative evaluation of a common phrase, than a label for an objective linguistic category (e.g., Copperud, 1970; Haberer, 2005-2006; Kirkpatrick, 1996; Miller & Villarreal, 1945; Olson, 1982; Rank, 1984; Suhor, 1975; *Webster's*, 1989). This negative emotional reaction may stem, at least in part, from the perception that these phrases have been so widely used as to have lost much of their meaning (Olson, 1982; Orwell in Orwell & Angus, 1968; *Webster's*, 1989)[2]—hence the recurrent reference to terms like trite and hackneyed and the objection that the use of clichés is an insult to the intelligence of the audience. It is in this sense that clichés have been compared to "zombies or ghosts," not because they are common but because they are "dead but they won't lie down" (Ricks, 1984, p. 423).

This perspective suggests a second and narrower definition of clichédness, one in which a phrase becomes a true cliché not merely when it becomes familiar and predictable but instead when it becomes so common that its use becomes reflexive rather than reflec-

tive—when repetition *ad nauseum* has, in fact, made us quite sick of it. Importantly, this narrow-sense clichédness is also potentially objectively demonstrable. That is, if a phrase is clichéd in this narrow sense, then its invocation in a rhetorical act presumably adds nothing of substance to the act and, in fact, undermines it. Although the inclusion of a cliché phrase may make the appeal longer and potentially more poetic, the essence of the message itself is presumably unchanged. Thus although clichés may be appealing and impressive to audiences who are processing the message at only a shallow level, those rhetorical garnishes should presumably be dismissed by anyone who has the time, the ability, and the motivation to consider the issue at a deeper level. Thus if a phrase is defined by narrow-sense clichédness, and that is true on a consensual (and not merely an idiosyncratic) level, then two variants of a rhetorical appeal, one including a cliché (e.g., "this legislation will put a stop to this problem ONCE AND FOR ALL") and the other avoiding clichéd language (e.g., "this legislation will put a stop to this problem"), should show no advantage—and quite possibly a disadvantage—for the clichéd communication, at least among audiences who are carefully considering the merits of the message. Again, unwieldy though such an approach might be in practice, especially as the degree to which a phrase is regarded as cliché may vary considerably from audience to audience, this type of analysis could circumvent the current problems of relying on individual opinion to ascertain the degree to which a particular phrase is considered cliché (Kirkpatrick, 1996). The extent to which communicative impact really is undermined by clichéd language is, after all, an empirical question --although the answer to this question appears to have been more frequently assumed than investigated.

Proverbs and Clichédness in the Broad Sense

Despite its ambiguities, the issue of what it means to be cliché is of relevance to paremiology because proverbs, almost by definition, are cliché in the broad sense. This is evident once we consider that most definitions of the proverb emphasize elements including fixedness of form (e.g., Norrick, 1985; Taylor, 1931), an established history of use (e.g., Arora, 1984, Basgoz, 1990; Hulme, 1902; Lau, Tokofsky, & Winick, 2004; Mieder, 1993; Norrick, 1985), a relatively high level of currency, frequency of use, and familiarity to members of a group (e.g., Arora, 1984; Hulme, 1902; Mieder, 1993;

Mieder, Kingsbury, & Harder, 1992; Norrick, 1985), and brevity[3] (e.g., Abrahams, 1972; Basgoz, 1990; Hulme, 1902; Lau et al., 2004; Mieder, 1993; Mieder et al., 1992; Norrick, 1985)—all of which would also be typical of clichédness in the broad sense. The overlap between these domains is visually evident in Norrick's (1985, p. 73) feature matrix comparing proverbs to related genres. In this matrix, both proverbs and clichés are characterized as conversational, spoken, traditional, fixed form phrases that can constitute a single free conversational turn, and both proverbs and clichés are listed as being potentially figurative, characterized by prosodic features, and humorous, although neither is considered to be used primarily for the purposes of entertainment.

That said, however, some proverbs may not be clichés even in the broad sense. This could occur, for example, when a paremiological designation of proverbiality is bestowed on the basis of an established history of use despite the phrase being rare in contemporary usage.[4] In this sense, of course, even clichés may not always be cliché as some phrases that have been indexed as cliché within one socio-historical context are not only not overused but actually not even familiar in other groups, in other times or in other places. Olson (1982), for example, reported creating a quiz consisting of 30 phrases designated in textbooks and handbooks as "common clichés," and presenting each in an incomplete form (i.e., without its final word) to 120 students enrolled in a first-year English course. The average score on the quiz was 50%, meaning that the students were often unable to complete these phrases in the expected clichéd way despite the fact that the phrases were designated as prototypical clichés in authoritative sources. At the extreme, more than 93% of the sample were unable to complete the stems representing the presumed clichés "a tempest in a (teapot)," "the depths of (despair)," "doomed to (disappointment)," and "the acid (test)," suggesting that although these phrases may well have been regarded as cliché by some people at some time, they never were or were no longer cliché to American college students (or at least to the kinds of students who shared the culture of this particular sample). Similarly, despite presumably being limited to the kind of knowledge that "is meant to be shared by everyone" and to items and references that were presumed to be "likely to be known by a broad majority of literate Americans" (p. ix), Hirsch, Kett, & Trefil's (1988) *Dictionary of Cultural Literacy*

included a number of proverbs that research data have revealed to be generally unfamiliar to college students. When Haas (2008) asked college students in four different geographic regions of the United States to rate their familiarity with a sample of proverbs on a 1-4 scale with 1 indicating "Not at all familiar: I have never heard this phrase in this form before" (p. 330), many of the proverbs Hirsch et al. included as elements of cultural literacy were rated as being very unfamiliar; these included "The game is not worth the candle" (with average values in the four regions ranging from 1.00-1.03), "Murder will out" (1.00-1.07), "The burnt child fears (dreads) the fire" (1.03-1.10), "Comparisons are odious" (1.06-1.10), and "A new broom sweeps (new brooms sweep) clean" (1.03-1.13). In short, that which is presumed to be common knowledge (and therefore potentially cliché) may not actually be so commonly known after all, and these data suggest that many indexed proverbs may lack sufficient currency to be deemed cliché even in the broad sense.

The most prototypical proverbs, however, are likely to be those most frequently used in the mass media (Lau, 1996), those most frequently spontaneously generated by informants (Albig, 1931; Bain, 1939; Haas, 2008; Haynes, Resnick, Cougherty, & Althof, 1993), those rated as most familiar (Benjafield, Frommhold, Keenan, Muckenheim, & Mueller, 1993; Brundage & Brookshire, 1995; Cunningham, Ridley, & Campbell, 1987; Haas, 2008; Haynes et al., 1993; Higbee & Millard, 1983; Litovkina, 1996; Nippold, 1998; Penn, Jacob, & Brown, 1988), and those familiar enough that respondents are able to choose or supply the appropriate proverbial ending when provided with an incomplete stem (Berman, 1990; Litovkina, 1996). Evidence of such widespread familiarity would also seem to be sufficient to warrant that these common proverbs be categorized as cliché in the broad sense. Thus it is not surprising that dictionaries and other listings of clichés include a number of prototypical proverbs. Kirkpatrick (1996), for example, chose to include in Bloomsbury's *A Dictionary of Clichés* a number of phrases familiar in the paremiological literature in the categories of "Allusion Clichés" (in which a proverb, saying, or quotation appears in abbreviated form, e.g., "a bird in the hand," "birds of a feather," a "new broom," "the grass is always greener," and "there's many a slip"); "Quotation Clichés" (which includes misquotations, e.g., "a little knowledge is a dan-

gerous thing" and "money is the root of all evil"); "Catchphrase Clichés" (e.g., "a man's gotta do what a man's gotta do" and "you can't take it with you"); and, more messily, the "Idiom Cliché" (e.g., "take the bull by the horns") and the "Hackneyed Phrase" (e.g., "better late than never"). Most relevant, though, is the category of clichés Kirkpatrick called the "Proverb Clichés," a category that encompasses clichés that "start life as proverbs or sayings" (p. 21). Kirkpatrick gave, as examples of Proverb Clichés, "the early bird catches the worm, forewarned is forearmed, little pitchers have big ears, make hay while the sun shines, many hands make light work, and one good turn deserves another" (p. 21). Unfortunately, however, the issue Kirkpatrick left unaddressed is the question of whether *all* currently popular proverbs are, then, by definition, cliché within this system. That same question might be posed to a number of other scholars who also included proverbs (or, at least, phrases that a large proportion of paremiologists would be likely to deem proverbial) in their lists of clichéd phrases. Even Partridge, who explicitly claimed to omit proverbs (1942, 1966), included in his list of clichés a number of arguably proverbial phrases. For example, in his 1942 list of clichés beginning with the letter A he included, "accidents *do* (or *will*) happen," "all is fish that comes to (*e.g.*, his) net," "am I my brother's keeper?" and "any port in a storm."

In summary, although some historically-important-but-out-of-vogue proverbs may not be familiar enough to be cliché, the most prototypical proverbs, as commonly-known fixed-form phrases, do meet the requirements of broad-sense clichédness. However, not everything familiar is deemed cliché, presumably because some disrespect is intended when a text is called cliché. Thus the next question is whether those proverbs that meet the criterion for clichédness in the broad sense are also cliché in the narrow sense.

Proverbs and Clichédness in the Narrow Sense

The question of whether proverbs are wise or trite long predates the invention of the term cliché. Although the designation of a speech act as cliché has apparently almost always indicated a derogatory stance, the much longer history of the proverb shows their popularity waxing and waning. Following the 16th century, a period during which proverbs were quite popular, skepticism replaced enthusiasm in the late 17th and into the 18th century (Ob-

elkevich, 1988). More than 100 years before the term cliché was coined, Lord Chesterfield was writing to encourage his son to avoid "old sayings, and common proverbs" (1741, quoted in Mieder, 2000, p. 25) as "proverbial expressions and trite sayings are the flowers of the rhetoric of a vulgar man" (1749, quoted in Mieder, 2000, p. 25). Although there was a brief resurgence in the popularity of the proverb in the 19th century, the proverb was soon replaced in the affections of the educated by the quotation, with both forms declining in status (whether or not in the frequency of their actual usage) into the 20th century (Obelkevich, 1988). Proverbs, like clichés, after all, are familiar prefabricated phrases; they are, by definition, not original—and if intellect is defined by originality, then proverbs, like clichés, will be deemed unintellectual, unscholarly, uneducated, and unfit for the educated. As one social historian argued, in an era of the "apotheosis of the creative self, there is no role for the anonymous, impersonal proverb" (Obelkevich, 1988, p. 59)—except, perhaps, to be perverted into a clever, witty, and original anti-proverb (Obelkevich, 1988; see also Mieder, 2004).

It is not surprising that proverbs might sometimes be categorized as clichés, given that both categories refer to fixed-form phrases in relatively widespread use; the question, though, is whether proverbs are, by virtue of this fact, always cliché, whether some proverbs are cliché, or whether proverbs and clichés are two different types of phrases that happen to share these two key features. Although a number of scholars have included at least some proverbs in the ranks of the cliché, others who have attempted to define the cliché have explicitly distinguished between proverbs and clichés (e.g., Pickrel, 1985; and, ostensibly, Partridge, 1942). Such a distinction would be difficult if the primary criteria for the designation of clichédness were fixedness of form and familiarity, suggesting that at least some scholars have considered other criteria as being of at least equal importance in characterizing the essence of the cliché.

Narrow-sense clichédness, as defined in this article, requires that the invocation of the potentially cliché phrase elicit a negative reaction on the part of an audience in a way that undermines communicative intent. Haberer (2005-2006), for example, argued that:

> the "cliché effect", when experienced, interrupts what had been established as an interlocutory exchange between addresser and addressee. When I say or think "Cliché!" to what I hear or read… that utterance [is] assessed as worthless and rejected…. Instead of lending my ear to what is being said of the other's truth through what he or she is trying to say, I stop listening. (p. 145)

For this reason, authors and speakers are urged to avoid clichés as nothing more than "linguistic gaucherie" (Suhor, 1975, p. 159) that "weaken your writing" and "are an insult to the intelligence of your readers" (*Webster's*, 1989, p. 250). Several lines of evidence, however, suggest that proverbs invoked in communicative acts are not necessarily cliché in this narrow communication-inhibiting sense.

The Association of Proverbs with Wisdom Suggests Proverb Use Is Not Cliché Per Se

One essential characteristic that distinguishes prototypical proverbs from prototypical clichés is their function, inasmuch as proverbs have long been argued to be statements of truth and wisdom while clichés have generally been argued to be superfluous. Although many definitions of the proverb have emphasized their structural rather than their functional characteristics,[5] a number of scholars have explicitly noted the tendency of proverbs to express "common sense…wisdom, and above all truth" (Mieder, 1993, p. 5). The importance of the truth-function of proverbs was evident even in early definitions of the proverb such as Hulme's 1902 description of proverbs as a part of a culture's "heritage of sound wisdom and good working common-sense" (p.3) and Whiting's 1932 observation that a proverb "expresses what is apparently a fundamental truth" (p. 302). Importantly, this association is shared by non-specialists. For example, when a sample of lay people was asked to define the term "proverb," the word that appeared most frequently in their responses was the word "wisdom" (Mieder, 1993). Likewise, when college students were asked to choose the "best" proverbs in a sample, their choices were highly correlated (r = .86) with the truth scores for the proverbs given by students in a separate group (Teigen, 1986). This wisdom function may also help to explain why proverbs are often accorded a kind of status as cultural touchstones. Such a status is evident in the fact that Hirsch et

al. (1988) included a full chapter on proverbs in their listing of references that "every American needs to know." Certainly it is possible that people may differ in their opinions as to what cultural literacy entails and one man's wisdom may be another man's cliché,[6] but it is equally clear that the term "proverb" does not necessarily carry the negative connotation that is almost universally ascribed to the term "cliché". It may, in fact, be exactly this element of wisdom and/or truth that makes proverbs "stick" in our minds and in the culture; that is, it may be the conjunction of simplicity and profundity that makes them the ideal exemplar of a "sticky" idea that may persist for centuries or even millennia (Heath & Heath, 2007). In this analysis, it is not merely that proverbs are short that makes them stick, but that they are short and meaningful; because they are meaningful, proverbs can serve as helpful behavioral heuristics and because they serve this heuristic function well, they persist.

This emphasis on the truth or wisdom function of proverbs echoes the defining distinction Norrick (1985) made between proverbs, to which he assigned at least the potential of a didactic function, and clichés, which are, in his system, by definition, not didactic.[7] Prototypical proverbs do not merely label situations; they tell the audience, directly or indirectly, how to respond to those situations—that is, they are invoked to "direct future activity" or to "alter an attitude toward something that has already occurred" (Abrahams, 1972, p. 121; see also Basgoz, 1990; Haas, 2013; Lau et al., 2004; Norrick, 1985; Whiting, 1932). They serve "as rules for identifying new and previously unknown situations and choosing the relevant line of behavior" (Rozhdestvensky in Permyakov, 1979, p. 272). In fact, in distinguishing between prototypical proverbs and the arguably much more prototypically cliché formulaic intensifiers (e.g., "sly as a fox, "slow as molasses in January," and "so dumb he couldn't pour piss out of a boot even if the instructions were printed on the heel"), Abrahams (1972) noted that "proverbs… are self-contained units; they have a moral weight of their own and an argument that is virtually self-sufficient" (p. 123) as opposed to providing only dramatic or humorous hyperbole.

The didactic function of proverbs may further explain why parents, elders, and peers are more likely to be the purveyors of proverbs than those cast in more subordinate roles; by using a proverb, a speaker indicates that "he wants to or at least is willing to assume the role of teacher/advisor for his hearer" (Norrick, 1985, p. 29).

Although this didactic function, whether direct or indirect, is not necessarily present every time a proverb is used, Norrick argued that "…all proverbs should be usable as directly didactic in some context" (pp. 42-43) and argued that "sayings lacking didactic potential entirely are clichés rather than proverbs" (p. 43). This didactic nature explains why as early as 1902 Hulme referred to proverbs as "counsels," "hints," and "warnings" (p.3)—functions highly unlikely to be ascribed to prototypical clichés. It is also consistent with the fact that the Yoruba proverb usages described by Arewa and Dundes (1964) included letting a child know about a cultural norm (p. 74), reprimanding (p. 74), indicating displeasure with conduct (p. 75), informing a person of a mistake (p. 75), urging parents to alter their behavior (p. 76), conveying an opinion (p. 77), chastising and censuring (p. 77), and explaining and defending another's behavior (p. 78)—didactic usages all.

The situation is, of course, quite different for the prototypical cliché, which many scholars have decried specifically because clichés are seen as incidental to the message. To the extent to which clichés are an attempt to convey humor or drama (Copperud, 1970) rather than wisdom, their intended function is quite different from that generally ascribed to proverbs (although anti-proverbs—Mieder, 2004—are often employed for witty and humorous purposes). This may help to explain the admonition to avoid clichés, which clearly implies that the omission of the cliché would strengthen rather than undermine the message. It explains why scholars have urged writers to ask themselves whether they could "put it more shortly" (Orwell in Orwell & Angus, 1968, p. 135). Already pithy statements of wisdom cannot be shortened, but the elimination of pseudo-wit may well be an advisable rhetorical choice.

It seems clear, then, that the wisdom-function of proverbs may be a criterion by which proverbs can be differentiated from clichés. A designation of "cliché," in the narrow sense, implies that the indicated phrase can and should be omitted because it undermines the message. Often, however, when a speaker or a writer uses a proverb, the proverb *is* the message[8]—and to the extent to which the proverb effectively communicates this message, the use of the proverb is not cliché in the narrow sense regardless of how frequently it is invoked.

Rules for Proverb Use Suggest Proverb Use Is Not Cliché Per Se

It has long been noted that there are rules, often tacit, that govern the use of proverbs. It is in this sense that Arewa and Dundes (1964) argued for considerations of proverb use that acknowledge this "ethnography of the speaking of folklore" (p. 71) by considering not only the texts but also the contexts of their use—who uses proverbs, to whom, when what others are present, in what situations, by what mediums, in private or public ways, with respect to what topics, etc. For example, in most contexts the invocation of proverbs occurs when older people address younger people or when peers address each other and not when youngsters address their elders (e.g., Arewa & Dundes, 1964); this pattern has, in fact, even been noted to hold in contemporary fictional contexts (Haas, 2011). Specific rules for how to use proverbs, though, would not be necessary if proverb use were simply *verboten*; if there are rules for how to use proverbs, then the act of invoking a proverb must itself be an acceptable communicative strategy as long as the relevant performance rules are not violated. The existence of performance rules suggests that proverbs are not objectionable merely because they are familiar fixed form phrases (i.e., cliché in the broad sense) although they may be deemed cliché in the narrow sense in certain contexts (e.g., in formal academic writing, when performance rules about when, how, and to whom proverbs can be used are violated).

The Use of Explicit Proverb Markers Suggests Proverb Use Is Not Cliché Per Se

Not only is proverb use bound by (generally implicit) performance rules, but the use of proverbs is also often explicitly marked. In a written text, for example, markers may include italicizing the proverbs, enclosing them in quotation marks, beginning the proverbial phrase with a mid-sentence capital letter, or, historically, indicating them with pointing hands printed in the page margins (Obelkevich, 1988). In both spoken and written contexts, the proverb user may preface the proverb with an introductory phrase (i.e., Norrick's 1985 "proverbial affixes") like "you know what they say…," "as they say…," "as it is sometimes said…," or "as the old saying goes…" (Arora, 1984) or by employing a "proverbial infix" such as the "proverbial" in the sentence "The proverbial pen is mightier than the sword" (Norrick, 1985). Among

the Yoruba, some proverbs are marked with the affix "a kii…," which has been compared to "the Biblical injunction of 'thou shalt not…'" (Coker & Coker, 2008). Moreover, in Yoruban culture, younger people are also expected to employ a proverbial affix as a prefatory apology that says, essentially, "I don't claim to know any proverbs in the presence of you older people, but you elders have the saying…" before using proverbs in the presence of their elders (Dundes & Arewa, 1964, p. 79). The relatively common reliance on these kinds of cues to mark the use of a proverb suggests a goal-directed, if perhaps largely unconscious, act on the part of the speaker or writer to help to ensure that the text is perceived as proverbial and is interpreted as such.[9] The given course of action proposed is, the marker indicates, not merely the user's preferred course of action, but rather is the course that the community as a whole has endorsed as proper.

It is potentially instructive, in this context, to note that Lord Chesterfield, would-be nemesis of the proverbial utterance, used proverbs regularly despite his condemnations of their vulgarity. This is clearly evident in the notably didactic context of providing lessons about etiquette and life in his letters to his son (Mieder, 2000, which is the source from which the subsequent references are drawn). Chesterfield clearly recognized the tendency of speakers to mark proverbs as proverbial. He noted, for example, that when a "vulgar man" wishes to indicate that "men differ in their tastes" he "both supports and adorns that opinion by *the good old saying, as he respectfully calls it*, that what is one man's meat, is another man's poison" (quoted in Mieder, 2000, p. 25, italics added). Chesterfield also often marked his own invocations with proverbial affixes, e.g., "the vulgar have a coarse saying…" (p. 29), "according to the vulgar saying…" (p. 29), "in that respect, the vulgar saying is true…" (p. 28), and "it is a vulgar, ordinary saying, but it is a very true one…" (p. 29). In these frames, Chesterfield adapts several common proverb frames (e.g., "we have a saying…," "according to the saying…," and "in that respect the saying is true…") in ways that allow him to distance himself from the expressions he deems vulgar (Mieder, 2000, p. 29) while nonetheless endorsing their sentiments. Chesterfield also occasionally introduced English proverbs with neutral frames (e.g., "It is a saying…," p. 31; "It is said that…," p. 35; "Every virtue, they say, has its kindred vice…," p. 32), although his use of neutral affixes appears to have been more

likely when he introduced proverbs in languages other than English—e.g., "there is a Spanish proverb, which says very justly…" (p. 36), "There is good sense in the Spanish saying…" (p. 36), "remember the French saying…" (p. 37), "for you know the French saying…" (p. 38), and, in introducing Latin proverbs, "It is said that…" (p. 35), "There is nothing truer than the old saying…" (p. 36), and "It has been long said…" (p. 36).

The most reasonable rhetorical choice for a critic like Chesterfield, who deems proverbs vulgar and cliché, would seem to be to forgo their use. Should occasional use be warranted, perhaps as a cautionary example, it would be reasonable to mark the text with a dismissive frame to ensure that the audience would perceive that the use was intentional. Allowances might even be made for an occasional unmarked use, which could indicate nothing more than distraction or hurry on the part of the user or that the phrase was not recognized by the user as proverbial. But why would a critic of common sayings not only use the sayings but explicitly mark them as such in neutral or even approving ways? In this case, Chesterfield's actions speak louder than his words. Despite his protestations to the contrary, it appears that Chesterfield does not deem proverbs to be merely vulgar ornamentations of speech; instead, his actions suggest that he understands proverbs to be potentially effective rhetorical and didactic devices whose effectiveness may be further magnified by ensuring recognition of their proverbial status.

The Rhetorical Effectiveness of Proverbs Suggests Proverb Use Is Not Cliché Per Se

Folklore has been argued to comprise "a collection of texts of cultural value and significance" (Rozhdestvensky in Permyakov, 1979, p. 268). By this definition, although proverbs and similar folkloric materials are cliché in the broad sense, they are clichés notable for their "eternal significance" (Rozhdestvensky in Permyakov, 1979, p. 266). In invoking the issue of "eternal significance," Rozhdestvensky differentiated folkloric clichés like proverbs from other texts, like amusing anecdotes, which "cannot be told twice to the same person" (p. 266) without losing much in the telling. Proverbs, on the other hand, like many other forms of clichéd folklore, "are potentially immortal" (p. 266) because they "can be repeated to the same person any number of times" (p. 268). In fact, it is not just that a proverb *can* be repeated, as need-

ed, even to the same audience, but that unless it is perceived as having exactly that repetitive quality of echoing from the past, the performance of a proverb text will not succeed. Quite in contrast to a proverbial invocation being dismissed because it is unoriginal, "what is… essential to the success of any proverb performance, is evidence that the utterance in question was 'not made up' by the speaker; that it belongs to the category of 'they say,' not 'I say'" (Arora, 1984, p. 7); to be accepted as proverbial wisdom, a phrase must be recognized as belonging "to the people as a whole and to no one in particular" (Rozhdestvensky in Permyakov, 1979, p. 269). In short, "the success of a proverb performance as such must depend ultimately on the listener's ability to perceive that he is being addressed in traditional, i.e., proverbial, terms. If the listener does not reach that conclusion, the performance of the proverb as a proverb must fail, although the speaker's opinions, comments, etc., may have the desired effect for other reasons" (Arora, 1984, p. 4). Although such an analysis does not preclude the possibility that a proverb might be so frequently used as to undermine its effectiveness as a rhetorical device, it does caution that it is the audience's response to the proverb, and not merely the familiarity of the phrase, that must be established before a characterization of cliché, in the narrow sense, can be justified. Claiming that a proverb is commonly used and therefore cliché (with an implication of rhetorical impotence) is not tenable when it may well be exactly that familiarity of the phrase to the audience that gives the proverbial invocation its rhetorical power.

Such an analysis could help to explain Lord Chesterfield's begrudging use of proverbs, as he may well have understood (at least implicitly) that invoking a proverb was likely to be rhetorically effective even if also subject to disapprobation within his social circle. Chesterfield was no doubt aware of the tacit social rules that warned of negative consequences for the voicing of "vulgar" proverbs but he also almost certainly knew, from personal experience, that apt proverbs can win arguments. Occasionally these two sets of contingencies would be in conflict—using a proverb may be censured but it might also be the best rhetorical tool to make a given point. As is clear from Mieder's (2000) analysis of Chesterfield's letters, in at least some cases the contingencies favoring proverb use won out. As behavioral psychologists might say, Chesterfield's verbal behavior was shaped by its consequences; he

continued to use proverbs because they worked, while often prefacing his invocations with additional verbal behavior (i.e., apologetically dismissive proverbial affixes) that were likely to minimize the adverse social consequences of those proverbial references. The fundamental tenet underlying this operant conditioning analysis is that behaviors (including proverb use) recur because of the reinforcing consequences they have had in the past; behaviors that are not reinforced, at least occasionally, would not be maintained. Thus Chesterfield's continued use of proverbs (even despite the apparent existence of concurrent negative social consequences of their use) suggests that their use must have been followed by reinforcing consequences. Although it is not possible, without a full functional analysis, to determine what those reinforcing consequences were, it seems reasonable to suggest that they might well have involved indicators from the audience that the communicative attempt had been successful (e.g., head nods, smiles, statements of affirmation, echoing of the proverb, or evidence of a desired change in behavior).[10]

With respect to the issue of clichédness, at least in the narrow sense, the effectiveness of the rhetorical act is a key. Capturing this kind of evidence, however, falls beyond the scope of even most exemplary ethnographic fieldwork methods (as per Arewa & Dundes, 1964) because it requires recording not only the immediate situational context of the proverb use but also the audience's response to that use. Better evidence, then, may come from the study of written communications which, at least in some cases, preserve both the original proverbial act and the response. Thus the work of researchers who have analyzed written correspondence to see what proverbs were used and to find themes in those invocations also provides some evidence of the effectiveness of those communiqués. Abigail Adams, for example, used a number of proverbs and proverbial phrases in her letters (Mieder, 2005). One of these illustrates this criterion of effectiveness. In a letter to Abigail, John Adams wrote, "…your Words are as true as an oracle 'God helps them, who help them selves'…" (in Mieder, 2005, p. 62). Clearly, in John's own mind, that proverbial phrase, apparently initially invoked by Abigail, provided the appropriate encapsulation of the situation; it is not merely that he was swayed by her argument but that those words of proverbial wisdom rang true and stuck with him, enough so that he repeated the message back to

her verbatim. This pattern is also evident in the correspondence between Franklin D. Roosevelt and Winston Churchill.[11] The most striking example occurred after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Churchill later recalled Roosevelt calling to inform him of the development. When Churchill asked if the reports were true, Roosevelt confirmed them and said, "They have attacked us at Pearl Harbor. We are all in the same boat now…" (in Mieder, 2005, p. 199). After his message to Congress the next day, Roosevelt sent Churchill a telegram saying, "Today all of us are in the same boat with you…" (p. 199). The following day Churchill replied, saying "I am grateful for your telegram of December 8. Now that we are as you say 'in the same boat'…" (p. 199). This echo of Roosevelt's own framing of the situation in proverbial terms clearly seems to indicate that it was not just the general argument but the proverbial framing of that argument that survived the trip across the Atlantic. The meeting of the minds is evident not in a mere restatement of the same general idea, but in the echoing of the very same proverb that was originally used to convey the message.

However, although proverbs have often been presumed to be effective rhetorical devices and although folklorists and others have, in fieldwork and in the analysis of written records, noted a number of examples in which communicators employed proverbs in seemingly effective ways, these lines of evidence are limited because it is nonetheless possible that the communicative efforts might also have been effective had the proverbs not been used. That is, Abigail Adams might have swayed her husband's thoughts, and Roosevelt Churchill's, even without using the proverbs quoted above, making the proverbs incidental rather than essential to the effectiveness of the communication. Likewise, Messenger (1959) carefully limited his analysis of the role of proverbs in the Anang judicial system only to those cases "in which at least one justice admitted being swayed" (p. 68) by the citation of the proverb. Even this conservative analysis, however, does not preclude the possibility that the same arguments might still have carried the day even had these proverbs not been invoked. With no control condition it is impossible to demonstrate conclusively that the invocation of any given proverb was the decisive rhetorical factor in a successful communicative act. What's more, it is also acknowledged that full ethnographic analyses of proverb use are unfortunately rare (e.g., Arewa & Dundes, 1964), and even where

they have occurred it is possible that investigators might have emphasized in their reports the proverb performances that were deemed effective relative to those that were not, resulting in an impression that the invocation of proverbs in communicative acts is a more frequently effective strategy than is, in fact, the case. A more controlled and systematic approach to the question of the effectiveness of proverbs in altering attitudes and behavior would, then, be a useful complement to traditional folkloric research, allowing researchers to disentangle the effects of the proverb use from other rhetorical elements.

Fortuitously, psychological studies conducted for other purposes sometimes use proverbs as stimuli and several such studies are relevant to the question of the rhetorical impact of proverb exposure. One such study comes out of the literature on the differences between "entity" theories of traits and abilities (i.e., you either have it or you don't) and "incremental" theories (i.e., in which traits and abilities are seen as malleable behavior patterns that can be developed). Although different people may hold different beliefs (e.g., while some people may believe that intelligence can be increased with effort, others may believe that you have a certain level of intelligence and there is little you can do to change that), many people may actually hold both sets of beliefs with their responses to a given situation depending on which belief system is activated. Although these construct systems could be activated in a number of ways, Poon and Koehler (2006) reported the results of one study in which they used exposure to proverbs to prime activation of these belief systems. In their study, they randomly assigned college students to one of two conditions. Participants in the entity prime condition were presented with the proverbs "You cannot teach an old dog new tricks," "Old habits die hard," and "A leopard cannot change its spots." In the incremental prime condition, participants were presented with the proverbs "It is never too late to learn," "Experience is the best teacher," and "When in Rome, do as the Romans do." Participants in each condition were asked to rate their familiarity with the proverbs, explain the meanings of the proverbs, describe situations in which the proverb could be applied, and think about a person who exemplified the meaning of each proverb. For the purposes of the present analysis, the key finding was that participants who were primed with exposure to proverbs indicating that you are what you are and there's

not much you can do to change it were more confident in ascribing dispositional judgments to a target (i.e., they were more confident in inferring traits from behaviors). They were also more pessimistic about the possibility of personality change. Those participants who were primed with exposure to proverbs indicating that people can change, on the other hand, were less confident in ascribing personality traits on the basis of behavioral cues and more optimistic about the possibility of personality change. In short, even in a highly controlled situation in which people were randomly assigned to conditions (meaning that some students assigned to the entity prime may have been naturally inclined to the incremental view of ability and vice versa), exposure to proverbial wisdom had predictable proverb-consistent effects on behavioral responses.

A second illustrative psychological study relevant to the question of whether proverbs can affect attitudes and action tendencies is drawn from the literature regarding the way that people draw dispositional (i.e., trait) inferences from behavior. Psychologists have long recognized that observers tend to leap to trait inferences without fully considering the role that situational factors may play in determining behavior (e.g., a teacher confronted with a student who fails to submit a homework assignment is likely to assume that the student is lazy and unmotivated rather than to consider the possibility that the student was required to work much later than expected to cover for a co-worker who was ill). This tendency, moreover, appears to be even more likely when people are under conditions of cognitive load (i.e., busy thinking about other things). In one study of this phenomenon, Trope and Gaunt (2000) presented half of their college student participants (from Tel-Aviv University) with four proverbs related to the influence of situational factors on behavior (e.g., "When in Rome, do as the Romans do") and the other half with proverbs not relevant to this issue. All the participants were asked to reflect on the proverbs, restate them, explain them, and give examples. The participants were then presented with an essay ostensibly written by a student in a different study and asked to rate how much the essay revealed the writer's true attitude. Half of the raters, though, were told that the writer had been assigned a position (i.e., prolegalization of marijuana) and the other half were told that the writer had been free to choose the position advocated. Although it seems logical that raters would assume that the essays written by authors in the

free choice condition would express their true attitudes but avoid this inference for writers they knew had been assigned to a position, more than 50 years of psychological research shows that raters often ignore this kind of situational information and instead draw dispositional conclusions. One of the key findings of this study, however, was that this tendency was attenuated by the situational proverb primes. Participants who had been induced to consider the influence of situations on behavior via the presentation of relevant proverbial wisdom were less likely to draw attitude inferences on the basis of the essay and this was true even when the participants were under cognitive load. Thus, again, exposure to proverbial wisdom had predictable proverb-consistent effects on the participants' responses.

Although scientific analyses of the effects of proverb exposure are artificial in a way that folkloric performance studies are not, their advantage is their ability to disentangle the effects of different elements of the performance and to establish causal relationships. Thus scientific studies can provide a useful complement to the real world observations of folklore scholars. Although it is possible that the effects observed in both of these studies were created or exaggerated by the significant elaboration of the proverbs the subjects were induced to do (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) rather than by the presentation of the proverbs per se, this experimental evidence nonetheless converges with theoretical speculation, ethnographic reports, and case study information in suggesting that exposure to proverbial wisdom can in fact alter attitudes and action tendencies—which is evidence of the potential effectiveness of the invocation of proverbs in rhetorical acts and contrary to a characterization of these phrases as being merely cliché.

Consideration of Factors that Affect the Perception of Clichédness

If a designation of clichédness is to be ascribed merely on the basis of frequency of exposure (i.e., broad-sense clichédness), then proverbs will almost always be deemed cliché. If, however, clichédness is dependent on adverse rhetorical impact (i.e., narrow-sense clichédness), then the effects of the invocation of the proverb are the key consideration. Here, though, there is little agreement; while some, including Lord Chesterton, would clearly advise us to avoid vulgar sayings, other lines of evidence suggest

that proverb use can be an effective rhetorical choice. One possible resolution results from reframing the question. That is, rather than attempting to determine *whether* proverbs are cliché, we might instead ask *when* proverb performances are likely to be deemed cliché. Recall, for example, that Miller & Villarreal (1945) reported that phrases were more likely to be marked as cliché if they were presented in a list—outside of any meaningful context—rather than in the context of a speech. This suggests that the perception of clichédness depends on contextual and performance factors and not just on the familiarity of a given phrase. This possibility also recalls Haberer's observation that when the addressee of an interlocutory exchange perceives clichédness, the utterance is likely to be "assessed as worthless and rejected" (2005-2006, p. 145). Although Haberer suggested that the perception of "cliché" leads to the assessment of worthlessness, however, the other possibility is that the assessment of the statement as worthless leads to the perception of clichédness. By this analysis, the perception of clichédness is a function of the failure of the proverb performance and a successful proverb performance is unlikely to be deemed cliché. Although an unsuccessful performance could fail for many reasons (e.g., a perception that the source was ignorant, was lying, or was manipulating the audience for his or her own ends), one of those reasons could be the perception that the performance was flowery or folksy but vacuous (i.e., cliché).

It is here proposed that the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM; e.g., Petty & Cacioppo, 1981, 1986) may provide a useful framework for considering the likely impact of proverb use in performance situations. Like traditional analysis of performances in many different subfields of folklore, the ELM considers the role of source, message, recipient/audience, and contextual factors in performance situations, but the ELM is explicitly intended to help to provide a general explanation of how communications effect attitude change (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981) and, more generally, how they influence evaluative judgments (Petty & Wegener, 1999)—a topic that is perhaps even more germane to the field of paremiology than to most other folkloric genres.

The Elaboration Likelihood Model grew out of the persuasion literature in social psychology. Researchers in the field had long been frustrated that apparently simple variables (e.g., the expertise of the source of a persuasive message) had inconsistent effects,

sometimes increasing the persuasiveness of a communication, sometimes decreasing it, and sometimes having no effect. Petty and Cacioppo (1981) argued that these discrepant findings could be reconciled by distinguishing between two different paths to persuasion. In the central route to persuasion, the available information is analyzed carefully according to its merits (i.e., the issue-relevant material in the appeal is "elaborated"). Importantly, however, the central route requires considerable cognitive resources and is used only when the recipient of the message has the motivation and the ability to carefully consider the issue at hand. When recipients are tired, distracted, or lackadaisical about the importance of the message, they do not attend carefully to the message or reflect thoughtfully about the issues, relying instead on persuasion cues to guide their judgments about the likely validity of the message (assuming, for example, that "she's an expert so she must be right" or "he's been talking forever, so he must know what he's talking about"); this is known as the peripheral route to persuasion because judgments are based on factors peripheral rather than central to the issue at hand.[12] Importantly, although research has often emphasized conditions under which the central and peripheral routes are especially likely to operate, the two types of processing actually mark two ends of a presumed elaboration continuum, such that mid-range values of elaboration likelihood are also possible.

It is also important to emphasize that persuasion may occur as a result of processing via either route; careful analysis of the merits of the arguments is not a requirement for persuasion to occur and, in fact, when the persuasive appeal is weak, its persuasiveness is likely to be greater the less carefully it is processed. Persuasion achieved via the central route, though, appears to have several important advantages, presumably because of the more elaborated cognitive processing it entails. First, persuasion achieved via the central route appears to be more lasting and more resistant to counter-persuasion attempts. Second, persuasion achieved via the central route appears to be more likely to result in behavior consistent with the persuasive appeal.

The Relevance of the ELM to Proverb Performance

To the extent to which the invocation of a proverb can be conceptualized as a persuasive act (or, more generally, an act with the aim of affecting social judgments on the part of the audience/re-

cipient; Petty & Wegener, 1999), the Elaboration Likelihood Model is relevant. If, as has been argued, all items of expressive culture, including all folkloric texts that are performed, are "implement[s] of argument" and "tool[s] of persuasion" (Abraham, 1968, p. 146), then the ELM is presumably relevant to analyses of all folkloric performances. Whether or not this is equally true of all expressive folk genres, however, certainly most prototypical proverb usages can probably be categorized as essentially persuasive in nature (although there are exceptions, e.g., the use of anti-proverbs). Certainly many scholars have concurred that proverbs "attempt to persuade" (Abrahams, 1972, p. 121; see also McGlone & Tofighbackhsh, 1999) by presenting "an argument" (Abrahams, 1972, p. 123) or by "amplify[ing] an argument" (Obelkevich, 1988, p. 55) in order to "shape attitudes and action" (Goodwin & Wenzel, 1979; see also Abrahams, 1972). In the extreme, one folklore scholar even went so far as to argue that proverbs are even "to some extent aggressive in purpose; the speaker is, after all, attempting to impose his ideas and his will upon his audience" (Abrahams, 1968, p. 152). It is in this sense of the invocation of a proverb as an inherently persuasive act that St. Jerome was said to reference "liars should have good memories" to "clinch an argument" in the fourth century (Hulme, 1902, p. 18). It is also in this sense that the invocation of proverbs has been studied in legal settings (e.g., Arewa & Dundes, 1964 and Messenger, 1959 discussed legal uses of proverbs in African cultures and Fock, in Abrahams 1963, among the Mataco Chaco in Argentina). It has long been noted that proverb performances are a means to the end of effecting changes in attitudes or behavior (e.g., Abrahams, 1972; Goodwin & Wenzel, 1979; Obelkevich; 1988), a goal which subsumes all the usages Arewa and Dundes (1964) described for Yoruba proverbs (i.e., conveying opinions; informing people of norms; chastising, censuring, and reprimanding; urging changes in behavior; and explaining and defending another's behavior). Likewise the often-noted didactic function of proverbs is also a persuasive function; when proverbs are used to teach, they are used to attempt to produce particular actions or attitudes on the part of the audience.

If indeed proverbs are intended to persuade, then the success of a proverb performance is determined by how effectively they do so, but the ELM suggests that the effectiveness of a perfor-

mance may be a function of a number of other variables that characterize the performance situation. In the ELM, variables (whether related to the source, the message, the audience, or the mode of the communication) can serve as information relevant to the determination of the merit of a communication (i.e., as arguments processed via the central route), can serve as simple cues as to the likely validity of the message (i.e., as heuristics processed via the peripheral route), or can affect the extent to which a message is elaborated (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). A key feature of the model is that a single variable may operate in any or all of these ways depending on the circumstances. As per Petty and Cacioppo's analysis, for example, the number of people who endorse a position may serve as a simple peripheral cue (e.g., "if everyone agrees, it must be right"), may serve as an impetus to generate relevant arguments via the central route (e.g., "I wonder why everybody seems to be agreeing with this speaker—is this a biased sample or is the speaker really on to something?"), or may affect the likelihood of elaboration (e.g., "although I wasn't sure this issue really had any relevance for me, an awful lot of people seem to think it's important so I'd better at least consider the issue"). Proverbs, as fixed-form phrases with considerable currency in the culture, might similarly elicit agreement because they function as peripheral cues (e.g., "it's a common saying so it must be true"), as arguments of substance (e.g., "it really has been my experience that this proverb often holds true so I had better consider whether it might also hold true in this particular case"), or as variables that affect the likelihood of elaboration (e.g., "if this belief is so common that it has been codified in proverbial form, then it really might be worth considering"). Thus the issue of apparent consensus is one way in which proverbs could act as cues, arguments, or variables affecting the likelihood of elaboration, but it is not the only one and several additional possibilities will be reviewed briefly here.

Proverbial Invocations as Arguments Processed Via the Central Route

For a person who has the ability and motivation to consider the issue and process the persuasive appeal carefully (i.e., for someone who is processing by way of the central route), the content of the proverb comprises an argument that will be either ac-

cepted or rejected on its merits. In central route processing, then, an apt proverb may be a persuasive argument in and of itself. For example, the proverb "better to have it and not need it than need it and not have it," may be all the argument it takes to convince a hearer to carry an umbrella on a cloudy day; after all, the input cost of taking the umbrella is quite low even if the umbrella is not needed, and the benefits of having it are high if it is needed. For a person who is carefully processing the merits of the arguments, though, the invocation of "boys will be boys" may not be a persuasive argument for forgoing punishment for a broken lamp after warning the boys three times not to play ball in the house if the person decides that boys may be boys when they are boys, but boys grow up to be men and to do so they need a little discipline. In the central route to persuasion, the quality of the argument conveyed by the proverb is the key to its persuasive impact.

It is possible, in fact, that proverb-based arguments may be quite likely to generate central route processing because their open, often metaphorical, and sometimes vague counsels, often typified by multiple layers of connotation and implication, may require hearers to self-generate arguments about the applicability of the counsel to the particular instance at hand—and self-generation of arguments is clearly associated with persuasion via the central route (Petty, Wheeler, & Bizer, 1999). It seems quite possible, for example, that the argument "boys will be boys" may come loaded with considerably more cognitive baggage (e.g., boys act differently than girls do, boys are prone to rough-housing, boys don't always listen to their parents, boyish behavior should be tolerated), at least for many hearers, than a more literal rephrasing, such as "young boys are often rambunctious and such behavior must be tolerated," would have been. Even more cognitive processing may be required if the proverbial argument were presented, as is often the case, in elliptical form, e.g., "You know what they say about boys…"—which would require the recipient not only to self-generate arguments for the applicability of the invocation of the proverb but also to complete the proverb itself.

Conventional wisdom might argue that proverbs could never serve convincingly as arguments for audiences utilizing central route processing because proverbial wisdom is messy and self-contradictory; it is all too often the case that for every instance of "look before you leap" there is a parallel instance of "he who hesi-

tates is lost." This messy inconsistency is evident in the finding that subjects often rate both members of apparently antonymous proverb pairs as true or as false, rather than (as logic would seem to dictate) rating one as generally true and the other as generally false (Furnham, 1987). Moreover, when unfamiliar descriptive proverbs were reversed to create contradictory pseudo-proverbs, there was essentially no relationship between the truth ratings of these unfamiliar proverbs and their opposites—sometimes both were rated true, sometimes both were rated untrue, sometimes only the authentic proverb was rated true, and sometimes only the reversal was rated true (Teigen, 1986). The existence of antonymous proverbs is not necessarily reason to dismiss their arguments, however, as their logical inconsistency may simply indicate that the truth or advice they suggest is contextual (e.g., Furnham, 1987). And, of course, it is not just in the proverb literature that truth depends on context; in fact, some scientific findings also come down to an "it depends" clause (Teigen, 1986). Any scientific finding, for example, that entails a U or inverted U function between two variables describes a pattern in which the correlation between two variables is sometimes positive and sometimes negative and thus, when describing the direction of the correlation, we must say that "it depends." Although the explicit description of the U (or inverted U) obviously has the significant advantage of acknowledging both halves of the pattern and describing the relationship between them, accomplished proverb users might well also recognize important situational limits to the applicability of the proverbs that appear in apparently opposing pairs. To investigate this possibility, Furnham (1987) asked participants to rate the extent to which antonymous proverb would each be true in a given context. The results confirmed that participants recognized specific elements of context as key determinative factors in their assessments of the truthfulness of the statements. For example, "absence makes the heart grow fonder" was rated as true in the context of close friends, but "out of sight, out of mind" was rated as true for casual acquaintances and the length of the time apart also mattered. Likewise, the relative merits of being wary of Greeks bearing gifts versus not looking gift horses in the mouth depended both on whether the gift was big or small and whether it was given by a close acquaintance or a comparative stranger. Thus the real question when we are confronted with apparently antonymous proverbs is not whether they can both be true, but whether they can both be

usefully applicable to some sets of circumstances (Gibbs & Beitel, 1995). Those who are familiar with the proverbs probably learn these contextual limits, however implicitly, as a part of their proverb literacy, much as students of social psychology learn the contextual limits that constrain central route processing. More important to the issue at hand, however, is that the key to central route processing is not that the arguments made are true, but that they are considered thoughtfully. It is important to note, for example, that although Teigen (1986) showed that students rated both unfamiliar proverbs and their reversals as true in some cases (e.g., "Wise men makes [sic] proverbs and fools repeat them" and "Fools make proverbs and wise men repeat them"), this cannot be interpreted merely as evidence of mindless yea-saying because raters rated only half of the statements (authentic and reversals) to be more true than not, which clearly suggests that the raters were considering the arguments made and discriminating between them.

Although it would be easy to dismiss the arguments made by common proverbs as naïve or overly simplistic, in making social judgments and in determining appropriate social behaviors, social mores, which are often encoded by proverbs, may be quite relevant. If the recipient of a message has the necessary ability (e.g., time and energy) and motivation, a proverb-based argument should be treated as any other argument and processed according to its merits.

Proverbial Invocations as Heuristics Processed by the Peripheral Route

The invocation of proverbs might also impact audiences who are responding to the message via the peripheral route to persuasion. Recall that the peripheral route is most likely to be operating when the audience lacks either the ability or the motivation to process the merits of the message carefully. Thus although critics have decried the careless users of clichés, it would perhaps be even more reasonable to criticize those who succumb to clichéd rather than well-wrought persuasive appeals. Although Orwell argued that "every such phrase anaesthetizes a portion of one's brain" (in Orwell & Angus, 1968, p. 137), the more important consideration may be that such appeals are likely to be persuasive only to a partially anaesthetized brain—i.e., when the audience is tired, distracted, lacking in necessary background, or is simply not

motivated or not interested; when the brain is on autopilot, the ELM suggests that we are more likely to be persuaded by peripheral cues than by the soundness of the central arguments of the message. Thus, in the peripheral route the content of a proverb would not be the key determinant of its persuasiveness. Instead, the mere invocation of the proverb would serve as a cue by which the validity of the speaker's appeal would be judged.

One way in which a proverbial invocation may act as a peripheral cue is by increasing message length (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Research has indicated that a "longer is better" heuristic may enhance the persuasiveness of long-winded appeals when the audience is processing via the peripheral route. Thus if the audience is unable or unmotivated to attend carefully to the merits of the message, including proverbs in the argument may result in a more persuasive appeal simply by virtue of the appeal's increased length.

Second, research has indicated that previous exposure to a stimulus generally increases liking of and positive associations to the stimulus. This effect also apparently extends to the perception of truth. Early research, for example, showed that the apparent truth value of factual "trivia-like" statements (e.g., "Lithium is the lightest of all metals") increased if the statements were presented multiple times over the course of several weeks—and this occurred whether or not the statement was actually true (e.g., Bacon, 1979; Hasher, Goldstein, & Toppino, 1977). Although these findings are specific to the apparent truthfulness of factual statements, they are consistent with the premise that a sense of familiarity may act as a cue during peripheral route processing of persuasive messages (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) and thus we might likewise expect that the invocation of a proverb may make a persuasive message more appealing simply by virtue of the familiarity of the proverb text. This may be why advertisers frequently employ proverbs or adaptations of proverbs, as doing so results in ads that "have a familiar ring that lures the customer into regarding the advertised product as one which has withstood the test of time" (Mieder & Mieder, 1977, p. 308), creating "a feeling of positive identification and trustworthy authority" (Mieder & Mieder, 1977, p. 310). Although no research appears to have tested this possibility directly, several studies are suggestive. First, researchers have reported that statements about human behavior are rated as more accurate when they are presented in their familiar proverb form

(e.g., "opposites attract") than when the same ideas are paraphrased (e.g., "people with divergent interests and personalities tend to be drawn to one another"; McGlone & Hecker, 1998 in McGlone and Tofighbakhsh, 2000). Second researchers have demonstrated an inverse relationship between ratings of proverbs' perceived truth value and quality and their perceived originality (i.e., higher ratings of originality predicted lower ratings of truth and quality and lower ratings of originality predicted higher ratings of truth and quality; Teigen, 1986). Thus when it comes to evoking the ring of truth, it appears that sometimes the old ways are best. That said, however, research does also put some limits on this tendency for familiarity to positively affect the perception of truth. Researchers have observed that the effect of repetition on persuasion tends to form an inverted U (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). This dual tendency is also recognized in the proverb record, accounting for both the observations that "familiarity breeds contempt" and that "familiarity breeds content." This suggests that the familiarity of proverbs may produce a boomerang effect in some cases, decreasing persuasive effectiveness, exactly as we might expect if the phrases were deemed cliche.[13] Whether the familiarity of the phrase increases or decreases persuasion, however, the fact that it is the familiarity of the message rather its merit that determines its impact suggests that peripheral route processing rather than central route consideration is at work.

The tendency for familiar texts to seem true has, of course, also been noted in the proverbial record itself, in the observation of the folk that "if you say something often enough, it becomes true." Some research, however, suggests that the belief that a statement has been heard before is actually a more important determinant of the increased perception of truth than its actual repetition per se; that is, statements that are perceived as having been repeated show an increase in believability even if the statements are entirely new or actually contradict earlier statements (e.g., Bacon, 1979). Thus the perception of a statement as familiar (whether the judgment is correct or not) has been called "an heuristic basis for the ring of truth" (Begg & Armour, 1991, p. 197). Further, telling respondents that the statements are merely being repeated does not seem to undermine the tendency to perceive repeated statements as more truthful (Bacon, 1979) and neither does presenting the facts initially with negative biasing statements (e.g., "few people be-

lieve that…"; Begg & Armour, 1991; Begg, Armour, & Kerr, 1985). Although the existing studies have focused on people's acceptance of factual statements rather than persuasive appeals, this research suggests a possible heuristic advantage of employing a proverbial affix (e.g., "You know what they say…" or "As the old saying goes…"), as such a frame may act as an affirmative biasing statement, further increasing the credibility of the statement (in this case, the proverb) that follows. What's more, given that presenting texts with negative biasing statements nonetheless leads to greater rated truthfulness when the statement is again encountered later (compared to statements never before encountered), the advantage to structuring the proverb performance to maximize the perception of a ring of truth may well outweigh the possibility that an audience member might, as a result of the frame, be more likely to consider the performance cliché—especially as evidence suggests that people actually show very little memory for negative biasing information present at the time a statement was first encountered (Begg & Armour, 1991). Unfortunately, very little research appears to have addressed the impact of biasing statements above and beyond the impact of repetition of the statement, and what little evidence exists is somewhat contradictory (Begg & Armour, 1991). Certainly however it seems at least worth considering the possibility that although these kinds of biasing statements "are not in and of themselves evidence for truth,... they may be circumstantial evidence that provides a reason for believing" (Begg & Armour, 1991, p. 197). In persuasion contexts, of course, a persuasive impact of the "merely circumstantial evidence" of a biasing statement (or a proverbial affix) would be consistent with peripheral route processing.

Fourth, studies of factors that affect persuasion have long emphasized the potential importance of apparent consensus; although groups may be wrong and individuals may be right, people who are not carefully processing the content of the message may use an "everyone believes it so it must be true" or "two heads are better than one" heuristic to guide their judgments. Given this, the invocation of a proverb may act as a kind of consensus claim, or argument from authority (Goodwin & Wenzel, 1979), asserting that the argument represents not merely the wit of one but the wisdom of many. In this sense, "utterances of proverbs are acts of quoting. But the speaker does not quote an individual author; he quotes the linguistic

community itself" (Norrick, 1985, p. 26). In short, speakers may reference proverbial wisdom (e.g., "Not only do I believe this, but it is what we all know—proverbially—to be true") much as they reference expert opinion (e.g., "Not only do I believe this, but the experts say it is true") or empirical evidence (e.g., "Not only do I believe this, but the data support me") in forming their arguments. The corpus of proverbial wisdom has, in fact, been argued to serve as "the common folk's equivalent of a logic textbook" (Goodwin & Wenzel, 1979), a "proverbial philosophy" (Obelkevich, 1988, p. 50), and "a kind of protoscience" encapsulating "naïve generalizations about man's adjustment to his physical, biological, and cultural environment" (Bain, 1939, p. 433). Although proverbial wisdom lacks the rigor of formal logic or scientific research, it may act nonetheless "to guide ordinary persons in reasoning and arguing about their mundane affairs" (Goodwin & Wenzel, 1979, p. 289) by codifying relevant folk beliefs.

The possibility that invocations of proverbs work in part by establishing the appearance of consensus also suggests another possible rhetorical function for the proverbial frame, as the frame itself could serve as a peripheral route cue that an argument should be heeded merely in deference to existing consensus. In this case, "You know what they say…" may serve a function much like "As the Bible says…," "As Benjamin Franklin used to say…," or "As research shows…". Regardless of the actual validity of the argument, the argument may be made more compelling by the explicit invocation of the wisdom of the group.

Finally, although they are not explicitly referenced in the standard ELM literature, several other features of proverbs may also serve as peripheral route cues affecting the response to persuasive appeals. First, the archaic language, phrasing, and metaphors invoked by proverbs might serve either to enhance persuasive appeal (e.g., "ah yes, this is the old way and the old ways are best") or, for other audiences or in other contexts, immediately reduce the persuasive appeal of an argument (e.g., "Justice depends on whose ox got gored? Who even owns oxen anymore?!"). Second, the humor that sometimes characterizes proverbial wisdom (e.g., "Why buy the cow when you can get the milk for free" or "Why buy the pig when all you want is a little sausage?")—and that almost always characterizes anti-proverbs—may itself serve as a peripheral cue. Although this possibility has not been empha-

sized in the ELM literature itself, the possibility has been raised when the ELM has been applied in advertising (e.g., Chung & Zhao, 2003; Zhang & Zinkhan, 2006) and in educational contexts (e.g., Wanzer, Frymier, & Irwin, 2010). Third, the poetic elements that commonly characterize proverbs—e.g., cadence, meter, rhythm, rhyme, assonance, alliteration, parallelism, personification and metaphor (e.g., Abrahams, 1972; Arora, 1984; Gibbs & Beitel, 1995; Hulme, 1902; Mieder, 1993; Norrick, 1985)—may also function as peripheral route cues. Many of these poetic devices can act as mnemonics and during the time in human history when knowledge was communicated orally rather than in print, they no doubt served a very important purpose in enhancing the memorability of messages (Goldfine & King, 1994; Ong, 1999). Thoughts that cannot be recorded must be recalled to be of any use, so as Ong (1999, p. 62) wrote:

> How could you ever call back to mind what you had so laboriously worked out? The only answer is: Think memorable thoughts. In a primary oral culture, to solve effectively the problem of retaining and retrieving carefully articulated thought, you have to do your thinking in mnemonic patterns, shaped for ready oral recurrence. Your thoughts must come into being in heavily rhythmic, balanced patterns, in repetitions or antitheses, in alliterations and assonances,…

Thus it is not surprising that phrases that successfully stick with us even today—e.g., proverbs and clichés—are also often characterized by these same features.[14] Nietzsche (1887/2006), for example, argued that "even now… the very wisest of us occasionally becomes the fool of rhythm, be it only that one *perceives* a thought to be *truer* when it has a metrical form" and noted the irony in the fact that "the most serious philosophers, however anxious they are in other respects for strict certainty, still appeal to *poetical sayings* in order to give their thoughts force and credibility" (p. 65). Unfortunately, however, the extent to which these kinds of poetic elements serve as peripheral cues has not yet been the subject of much empirical investigation. The best studied appears to be a "that which rhymes is true" heuristic, described in the literature as the "rhyme as reason" heuristic (McGlone & Tofighbakhsh, 1999, 2000) or the Keats heuristic, after Keats's observation that "beauty is truth, truth

beauty" (McGlone & Tofighbakhsh, 1999). In this research, McGlone & Tofighbakhsh (1999) showed that rhyme appears to grant a phrase an air of validity, even when the phrase is unfamiliar. When unfamiliar proverbs were presented in both their original rhyming form and a semantically-equivalent non-rhyming form (e.g., "Men should first thrive before they wive" and "Men should first thrive before they marry"), the rhyming versions were rated as more accurate even though the non-rhyming versions were rated as equally comprehensible—and even though raters showed no conscious insight into their tendency to rate rhyming versions as more valid. Although their research focused specifically on raters' judgments of the accuracy of proverbs, the researchers suggested that this "rhyme as reason" heuristic may well also operate outside paremiology, citing Johnnie Cochran's famous argument to the jury that "If the gloves don't fit, you must acquit!" as an example of rhyming plea that appeared to be rhetorically effective despite being logically dubious (McGlone & Tofighbakhsh, 1999). Importantly, however, later research (McGlone & Tofighbakhsh, 2000) demonstrated that the truth advantage for the rhyming form was attenuated when raters were explicitly warned to base their assessments of accuracy only on the content of the phrase and not on its poetic qualities, suggesting that people can inhibit the effects of this peripheral route cue when they are motivated to do so—exactly as the ELM would predict.

Although persuasion via the peripheral route has generally been shown to result in attitude changes that are more transient, more susceptible to counterpersuasion, and less predictive of subsequent message-consistent behavior, even low-elaboration processes may have important impacts in some circumstances, as might happen, for example, with repeated presentation of a peripheral cue, as this could increase the accessibility of the associated attitude (Petty & Wegener, 1999). This pattern may be particularly relevant to contexts in which proverbs are invoked in persuasive appeals, given that such invocations probably often entail multiple peripheral cues being presented simultaneously (e.g., presentation of a familiar stimulus, invoking a sense of consensus with a proverbial affix, and invoking a proverb that uses archaic language or rhyme). What's more, the fact that many culturally important ideas are encoded by a number of different proverbs (e.g., the admonition to be careful with one's money is encoded by

"a fool and his money are soon parted," "money doesn't grow on trees," "save for a rainy day," and "waste not, want not") means that proverbs may be presented together in a persuasive appeal as variations on a theme, quite possibly increasing attitude accessibility and the persuasive effects of the exposure (Petty & Wegener, 1999). In short, the rhetorical impact of proverbs may be multiplied when multiple peripheral cues occur in the same performance situation and/or when multiple proverb-based messages are invoked together.

The possibility that proverbial invocations might operate via the peripheral route is consistent with the assessment of proverbs as "the oldest class of naturally sticky ideas" (Heath & Heath, 2007, p. 11), as the idea of "natural" stickiness suggests that retention of the message requires limited effort on the part of the audience.[15] It is important to emphasize, though, that peripheral cues may also undermine the effectiveness of proverb-based persuasive efforts. Some people, for example, may utilize an "it is common, so it's bad" heuristic that leads them to reflexively dismiss all arguments framed in familiar forms, including all familiar proverbs or phrases prefaced with proverbial affixes. This may, in fact, be related to the inverse U function observed between familiarity and persuasiveness; once a phrase is perceived as "too familiar," that extreme level of familiarity may result in rejection via the peripheral route (for recipients who are not carefully attending to the message) regardless of how apt the argument. This reaction, of course, requires no more thought than rejecting all arguments made by Democrats, all arguments made by Republicans, all arguments that reference statistics from government agencies, or all arguments that invoke Bible verses, but peripheral route cues appear to act in exactly this way, allowing us to pass judgment without much actual consideration of the message. Hearing others deem a message cliché could also act as a peripheral route cue leading to reflexive dismissal of the message. Although no research regarding the extent to which proverbial status is likely to operate in a message-reinforcing versus message-undermining way appears to have been conducted to date, certainly it seems possible that a "proverbs are cliché" heuristic could exist and could undermine the persuasive power of proverb-based arguments for at least some audiences.

The Effects of Proverbial Invocation on the Level of Elaboration Given to an Argument

The invocation of a proverb may also affect the way a given message is elaborated. Petty and Cacioppo (1986) discussed a number of variables (e.g., distraction, repetition, personal relevance, personal versus group responsibility for making a decision, and prior knowledge and forewarning of the persuasive appeal) that appear to affect the way a message is elaborated. These and other factors may also affect the processing of proverb-based appeals. For example, as the ELM posits that distraction is likely to result in a default to peripheral route processing, any act that increases the likelihood that the source will be able to gain or maintain the audience's attention should also increase the likelihood of central route processing—and many of the common structural characteristics of proverbs (e.g., rhyme, meter, alliteration, metaphor, or parallelism) may function to focus attention on the appeal. For any number of reasons, then, it seems possible that the invocation of a proverb may affect the recipients' likelihood of attending to the message and therefore of engaging in critical evaluation of it.

Other aspects of proverb performance, not generally highlighted in the ELM literature, may also affect the likelihood of the elaborative processing of proverb-based arguments. The humor that characterizes the invocations of some proverbs and anti-proverbs may, for example, affect the audience's motivation to process the message, much as it has been argued to do for audiences responding to humorous ads (e.g., Zhang & Zinkhan, 2006, who predicted that humor would increase message scrutiny—an hypothesis that received mixed support), for audiences responding to political commentary (e.g., Young, 2008, whose results suggested that humor decreases the critical scrutiny given to these texts), and for students responding to humorous messages in a classroom setting (where the impact of the humor may depend on the humor's appropriateness and relevance to course content; Wanzer, Frymier, & Irwin, 2010). Relatedly, metaphorical proverbs (e.g., "a stitch in time saves nine" versus "haste makes waste") may require more processing (although see Kemper, 1981 and Gibbs & Beitel, 1995). Finally, the audience's familiarity with a cited proverb might also affect the audience's ability to interpret the proverb and to assess its applicability to a given situation. Despite evidence of considerable consistency in proverb familiarity across different groups (e.g., Haas, 2008), there

are also clear individual differences and these differences may be a function of personality. For example, people high in Restraint may well have a history of greater exposure to proverbs like "don't rock the boat," "don't play with fire," "look before you leap," "think before you speak," "don't bite off more than you can chew," "if you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all," and "don't start what you can't finish" than those lower in this dimension (Haas, 2002; Haas & Rouse, 2012), either because the trait was molded by significant others who used these proverbs in their persuasive appeals or because people high in this trait have adopted these trait-relevant proverbs as personal mantras and recite them to themselves in self-focused persuasive appeals. In either case, the increased personal relevance of this type of appeal or the increased knowledge base about this mode of behavior (because of its match to a defining character trait) may affect the degree of elaboration likely to occur in response to the message (Petty & Wegener, 1999).

Research also suggests that cultural factors may impact whether particular variables serve as peripheral cues or substantive arguments. In one study, for example, students from Hong Kong who were induced to engage in central route processing were shown to be significantly more likely to be influenced by the extent of perceived consensus about a product than students in the U.S. were, even to the point of discounting relevant attribute information inconsistent with the consensus information (Aaker & Maheswaran, 1997). This suggests that the perception of consensus may itself serve as an argument worthy of thoughtful consideration in collectivist cultures (i.e., those characterized by high levels of interdependence and an emphasis on the importance of fitting in to larger social structures), while being more likely to be dismissed as a peripheral red herring in more individualist cultures (i.e., those characterized by high levels of independence and an emphasis on the importance of individuality). It also raises the possibility that even within individualist cultures, individuals higher in traits such as Traditionalism (Tellegen & Waller, 2008) or Group Ties (Haas, 2002; Haas & Rouse, 2012) may be more likely to treat proverbs as touchstones of cultural wisdom worthy of central route consideration.

Finally, it is also important to note that variables affecting the extent of elaboration may interact in important ways. Research suggests, for example, that arguments by consensus lead to greater

processing if the message is counter to one's current attitudes, but to less elaboration if the message is proattitudinal (Petty & Wegener, 1999); thus, to the extent to which proverbs are interpreted as statements of relative consensus, invocations of proverbs may be more likely to be processed via the central route when they are invoked in counterattitudinal appeals. Research also suggests that incorporating rhetorical questions into a persuasive appeal may increase elaboration. The effects of the rhetorical question, though, apparently depend on whether they introduce or summarize the arguments, whether the key arguments are strong or weak, and whether the audience is already inclined toward elaborative processing (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Summarizing strong arguments with a rhetorical question, for example, appeared to increase elaboration only for people who were otherwise disinclined to elaborate; for those already processing via the central route, the rhetorical question intervention had little effect (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). However, when rhetorical questions were used to introduce the material rather than to summarize it, and were presented in a printed rather than an audio form (allowing more time for message processing, Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), argument elaboration was enhanced (producing stronger agreement when the arguments were strong and decreased agreement when the arguments were weak) both for an audience that was led to believe that the issue had personal relevance and for an audience who believed it did not. Because some proverbs exist as rhetorical questions (e.g., "With friends like that, who needs enemies?" or "If everyone else jumped off a bridge, would you?" see Haas, 2013), this research may well be relevant to how these proverbial interrogatives function in persuasive contexts. Similar questions might also be raised, however, for more traditional proverbs, which might well operate quite differently in the context of otherwise strong or weak arguments or when prefacing versus summarizing persuasive appeals (especially given evidence that unfamiliar proverbs, at least, are more readily interpreted when presented after longer paragraphs than shorter ones, Kemper, 1981, and the tendency for idiomatic expressions to be used as a means of summarizing comments related to a current topic of discussion before changing topics, Drew & Holt, 1995).

WHEN Are Proverbs Cliché?

Although there is no consensually recognized definition we can use to ascertain clichédness unambiguously, two elements of clichédness seem to be key and it is on this basis that broad-sense and narrow-sense clichédness are distinguished here. In the broad sense, the cliché encompasses all that is commonly used, highly recognizable, and formulaically predictable—and by that criterion, all commonly used proverbs could be considered to be cliché in the broad sense (although historical proverbs, no longer in wide distribution, would not). But a narrower reading of clichédness also exists in the literature, one that is defined not just by frequency of use but by a negative reaction on the part of the audience to the clichéd message which, as a result, undermines its communicative impact. With respect to this more stringent standard of clichédness, there is considerable reason to question whether prototypical proverbs are truly cliché. Paremiological theory has generally assumed that proverbs are used to convey truth or to direct action in a way that calls on the power of the "wisdom of the ages" as a means of increasing the likelihood of achieving the intended rhetorical end, and this function of proverbial invocation seems fundamentally inconsistent with the perspective that clichéd speech is meaningless, superfluous, and rhetorically impotent or even counterproductive. That assumption is bolstered by evidence that proverb use can be an effective rhetorical strategy.

Somewhat paradoxically, unless a proverb is perceived as cliché in the broad sense, it cannot possibly succeed as a proverbial performance because it will not be interpreted as a traditional text; however, having succeeded as a proverbial performance, a proverb cannot be cliché in the narrow sense because rather than creating a negative reaction that undermines the communicative effort, the successful invocation of the proverb demonstrates that the proverb has achieved its aim thus evading the criterion of clichédness in the narrow sense. Thus the perception that a proverb is cliché presumably can only be argued to occur when the invocation of a familiar proverb fails in a performance situation—a possibility that could occur in at least two different ways according to the Elaboration Likelihood Model.

In the central route to persuasion, the arguments in a persuasive appeal are carefully considered. Inasmuch as proverbs present arguments, the ELM predicts that when people have the ability to

consider the arguments carefully and have the motivation to do so, the arguments (presumably including proverbial invocations) will be judged on their merits. This consideration may result in either a successful proverb performance (i.e., one that persuades in the way that it was intended to) or in a failed performance. If the performance fails because the proverb was judged to offer nothing particularly insightful to the consideration at hand and thus was not worthy of the time and consideration given to it, then the proverb may well be dismissed as cliché.[16] In such cases the proverbial invocation is perceived as a clichéd insult to the intelligence of the audience, much as an advertisement's representation of beautiful people in beautiful places doing fun things while beautiful music plays in the background is a clichéd insult to the intelligence of an audience looking to find a good credit card.

The ELM suggests, though, that this kind of reasoned central route processing is likely only if the audience has the ability and the inclination to consider the persuasive appeal carefully, and the likelihood of central route processing may be quite different in the real world than it is in the lab (Petty and Cacioppo, 1981). First, many of the persuasive appeals made in the real world (e.g., whether to buy one brand rather than another) are not about highly involving issues and they are therefore unlikely to trigger central route elaboration. Second, in contrast to lab settings in which "facts" can be fabricated to pad a persuasive appeal, in the real world it may often be challenging to create highly convincing persuasive appeals (e.g., how much does it really matter what brand of dish soap we buy?). More generally, processing is more likely to proceed via the peripheral route when the audience lacks time, lacks background knowledge, or is distracted and all of these are probably more likely to characterize persuasion in real-life contexts. Thus it is not surprising that sources in everyday life may often play to the peripheral route, with or without presenting a strong central route appeal. Such is surely the case with the men's hosiery ad copy reading, "Introducing patterned Supp-hose Socks. Because feet cannot live on solid colors alone" (in Mieder & Mieder, 1977, p. 313). Clearly the advertiser is not intending for the ad to be processed via the central route, and for consumers who just want to buy socks without spending too much time thinking about it, the play on proverbial wisdom may make the message more attention-getting, more memorable, and more convinc-

ing. What's more, such an approach may ultimately be effective because personal behavior can become an argument in and of itself—i.e., once people engage in a behavior (e.g., buying Supphose Socks) they often generate their own reasons to justify their actions; these self-generated arguments may then effect attitude change via the central route, with all its attendant advantages. In short, "what begins… as a temporary change via the peripheral route, may end up being a more permanent change via the central route" (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981, p. 267). Thus the importance of peripheral route processing in our daily lives should not be underestimated. Although, as previously noted, peripheral cues associated with proverb invocations could undermine persuasion (by way of, say, an "it is common, so it's bad" heuristic), the fact that many proverb performance situations entail many of the persuasion-enhancing peripheral route cues discussed in the literature (e.g., increased message length, increased number of arguments, apparent consensus, previous exposure to the message, and the presence of rhyme) suggests that many proverb-based appeals—whether in formal advertising or in everyday communication—may be successful when the recipients of the message are processing via the peripheral route.

The ELM research literature also reveals several other patterns that may have implications for the perception of clichédness in proverb performance situations. First, research suggests that message recipients who are personally responsible for evaluating the quality of a message are more likely to engage in central route processing than are message recipients whose response to the message will be decided as a group; thus, the theory suggests, peripheral cues may be more important determinants of outcomes when persuasive appeals are addressed to a group rather than to an individual (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Second, because audio presentations of material allow less time for message processing than print presentations, it appears that central route processing is more likely in response to print presentations and peripheral cues may often play a more important role in response to oral appeals (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Finally, some people may be more dispositionally likely to use central route processing; these people, often identified in the personality literature as high in the need for cognition, seem to be inclined to undertake effortful cognitive work (e.g., central route processing) even at times when others

wouldn't and, in fact, generally report relishing the opportunity (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Thus the ELM would seem to suggest that objections related to the clichédness of a message would arise more often when messages are presented to highly invested individuals rather than to groups, to those high in the need for cognition, and when the messages are presented in written form rather than orally. This is intuitively consistent with the observation that the admonition to avoid clichés seems especially strong in academic circles, populated by people high in the need for cognition, and is apt to be applied most strictly in the context of formal academic writing, another context in which reasoning via the central route would be expected to be especially likely.

This analysis suggests that using proverbs orally to address a group may well be a reasonably effective technique; this is a context in which there is likely to be a default to peripheral route processing, which may play to the strengths of proverbs given the high number of peripheral heuristics associated with the genre. Using proverbs in individual exchanges, and particularly in written communications, may be, however, a double-edged sword. On the one hand, proverb use may be especially liked to be rejected as cliché in such contexts; audiences who are carefully analyzing arguments (proverb-based or not) are more likely to find the arguments lacking. On the other hand, when such performances are successful in these contexts, their persuasive impact should also be greater (i.e., resulting in greater persistence, greater resistance to counter-persuasion, and greater alignment with post-message behavior) because the effects were achieved by the central route (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Notably, it was in exactly this kind of a context (a written communication addressed to a single individual) that we see John Adams and Winston Churchill echo the proverbs that embodied the arguments that were presented to them.

The Elaboration Likelihood Model appears to provide a helpful framework for addressing the question of clichédness by reframing the issue to focus less on whether a particular text is cliché and more on the conditions under which a performance of the text is likely to be perceived as cliché. From this perspective, the criticism of the cliché may have been somewhat misplaced. If the goal of an appeal is persuasive, and if a cliché (or the invocation of any peripheral route cue) attains that end (much to the dismay of the high in the need for cognition and defenders-of-the-central-

route academic critics), then the fault lies neither with the source nor with the message but with the processing of the recipient. That is, the invective should be hurled not at the user of the cliché nor at the cliché itself, but at the audience that falls for it. Despite the argument that "there is no bigger peril to thinking or to education than the popular phrase" (Binder, 1932 in Partridge, 1947, p. 59), the real concern is not the invocation of the clichéd phrase itself but its effectiveness; to some extent, the cliché is not so much a peril to thinking or education as the test of it. To identify a phrase or image or assertion as a cliché is to argue that it should, on its merits, fail as an argument—and because the academe so values central route reasoning, arguments that succeed via the peripheral route are anathema. But although writers and speakers who are addressing able and motivated audiences should be aware that clichés and other peripheral route cues will add little to the persuasiveness of their communications and may, in fact, undermine it, they should presumably also be aware that in some cases peripheral route cues (quite possibly including clichés) might well be effective. Thus whether or not clichés work by way of the central route, they "continue to serve a useful rhetorical task" because in a fast-paced world with too many messages and too little time "they require little time or effort… to compose and a similar level of effort to interpret" (Goldfine & King, 1994, p. 349).

In summary, an analysis of proverb performance with reference to broad and narrow-sense clichédness and from the perspective of the Elaboration Likelihood Model suggests that although proverbs are not immune from valid charges of clichédness, neither are such charges necessarily appropriate. Successful proverb performances are, by virtue of their effectiveness, not cliché in the narrow sense as defined here. Unsuccessful proverb performance, though, may fail on the grounds of clichédness and this can happen in either of two ways. First, the invoked proverb may fail to offer any worthwhile insight into the issue at hand; if this occurs, those who are carefully processing the message (i.e., using central route processing) may well cry cliché (in the narrow sense) and the argument will be rejected. Alternatively, those who are not carefully considering the message conveyed by the proverb may reject its wisdom merely because it takes a familiar form, relying on mere familiarity (i.e., broad-sense clichédness) as a peripheral route cue. Thus studies of the rhetorical impact of proverb perfor-

mances may benefit from consideration of psychological research on variables that affect the effectiveness of persuasive appeals. Whether proverb-based arguments are processed as clichéd or non-clichéd may depend as much on the processing style of the audience as on the presence of the proverb, suggesting that, in a sense, cliché is as cliché does.

Notes:

[1] Although many authors at least implicitly limit the category of cliché to speech acts—sometimes including in that category not only stereotyped phrases but also single words—the term is also applied more broadly in ways that encompass themes that recurrently emerge in non-linguistic domains (e.g., clichéd illustrations, visual images, dance elements, urban renewal movements, and political campaigns are referenced in *Webster's*, 1989; see also Haberer, 2005-2006). In the context of this article, however, the focus will be on clichéd language.

[2] As, perhaps, when "awesome" ceased to refer to an event that inspired awe and began, instead to refer to especially good French fries, and when "kiss of death" lost its Biblical overtones and began to be used to refer to a diet undone by the doughnuts brought to the teacher's lounge.

[3] Mieder (2012) reported that the proverbs included in *The Dictionary of Modern Proverbs* averaged about 7 words and Kemper (1981) reported an average of 7.1 words for the proverbs in her research sample. This suggests that proverbs may generally be longer than clichés, as the main entries in Partridge's (1942) list of clichés averaged only 3.7 words in length.

[4] This is evident, for example, in Gallacher's definition of the proverb as "a concise statement of an apparent truth which has [*had*, or *will have*] currency among the people" (in Mieder, 1993, p. 14, italics added). Such paremiologically recognized proverbs, however, may not function as proverbs in performance situations, as the lack of perceived proverbiality may undermine the phrase's impact as reflecting the wisdom of the people.

[5] Although Dundes (1975) is no doubt right that "purely functional definitions are inadequate" (p. 961), it does not necessarily follow that "the critical question is thus not what a proverb does but what a proverb is" (p. 962). It may instead be the case that both structural and functional considerations are important determinants of the perception of proverbiality—and other considerations (e.g., the frequency with which the phrase is used in a group) may be important too (Arora, 1984; Haas, 2013).

[6] Notably, a number of the same proverbs that Hirsch et al. (1988) included as references essential to cultural literacy have also been included in the ranks of the cliché (e.g., Partridge's 1942 listing of "any port in a storm" and "am I my brother's keeper?").

[7] It is, in fact, this requisite didactic function that most distinguishes the proverb from the related genres in Norrick's (1985) analysis. Norrick argues that proverbs are by definition didactic, while riddles, tales, songs, slogans, and aphorisms may be, and proverbial phrases, clichés, jokes, curses and wellerisms are not.

[8] The fact that the proverb itself is the message is clearly evident in the "drummed" proverbs of the Yoruba. In this culture, specially trained drummers broadcast proverbial messages to the community by means of drummed sequences that conveyed the rhythm and tonal variations of proverbs. Some of these proverbs, in fact, appeared to be more commonly presented in their drummed forms than in their spoken forms (Arewa and Dundes, 1964).

[9] Norrick (1985) noted that these kinds of proverbial frames are not used nearly as frequently with the arguably more prototypically cliché proverbial phrases, which also are not used for didactic purposes. Although people sometimes frame clichés with an affix such as "that old cliché," the intent in such cases appears to be an acknowledgment on the part of the speaker that the phrase is being used despite an anticipated negative reaction on the part of the audience. When proverbial affixes are employed, they appear to be intended to draw attention to the utterance in anticipation of a positive response.

[10] In operant conditioning, the frequency of a verbal (or any other) behavior is a function of the contingencies (i.e., situation-behavior-consequence links) in a speaker's history. It was, notably, this same kind of contingency analysis that B.F. Skinner (1974, 1980) used to explain the presence and persistence of proverbs themselves. To Skinner, a proverb is a statement (even if in metaphorical form) describing a contingency. For example, he translated the proverb, "If you want fire, do not fear the smoke," to mean, "Do not draw away from the aversive features of behavior that will be reinforced" (1980, p. 326). The proverb thus states the contingency, assisting the audience in assessing the likely consequences of a given behavior (especially when those consequences are delayed, Skinner, 1974) and, therefore, altering the audience's likelihood of responding to the situation in a particular way (i.e., in the way advocated by the proverb user).

[11] Mieder (2005) also commented on the relative paucity of proverbs in the Roosevelt-Churchill exchanges, however. This may, as he noted, have been in no small part due to the very practical and tactical nature of their communications, but it might also be true that "folk wisdom or sententious remarks might have added too much of a didactic or authoritative tone…" (p. 205).

[12] The ELM is one of a number of "dual-process" models in psychology, all of which emphasize a distinction between a careful conscious mode of processing and a more automatic and heuristic mode. The ELM in particular, though, has engendered a good deal of related research in a variety of fields and thus seemed to be especially applicable to paremiological scholarship.

[13] Teigen (1986) found no evidence of such a curvilinear relationship in his sample of university students and considered the possibility that older raters or those with greater educational attainments might be more discerning, although he noted that there are few good reasons to believe that a student sample would be less accepting of novelty and originality than the population at large. Teigen's sample of proverbs was, however, biased toward unfamiliar proverbs and thus was not well-suited for investigation of the impact of perceived clichédness.

[14] Clichés also often involve poetic elements such as alliteration, rhyme, simile and metaphor (Partridge, 1966—e.g., "safe and sound," "fair and square," "cool as a cucumber," or "fit as a fiddle") and it may be the presence of these features that helps to explain why "time alone, repetition alone, familiarity alone—none of these can make a cliché out of just any old piece of language" (Pickrel, 1985, p. 254).

[15] Heath & Heath (2007), however, also argue that proverbs—in their somewhat extended sense of the term—are essentially profound, and thus presumably by their definition proverbial invocations are also likely to succeed when processing occurs by way of the central route.

[16] Not all arguments that fail to offer insight will necessarily be dismissed as cliché, of course. Some messages, for example, may be dismissed as sound bites rather than as clichés. Both clichés and sound bites are likely to fail to be persuasive to central route processors because they are perceived to be vacuous, vague, or pithy to the point of being misleading, but they can be distinguished because sound bites lack the fixed familiar form that typifies clichés.

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