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HAPPINESS IN MODERN ANGLO-AMERICAN PROVERBS: A LINGUOCULTURAL STUDY

Abstract: This study analyses a corpus of 103 Anglo-American proverbs that belong to the thematic field “happiness” found in the two most recent major Anglo-American proverb collections: *A Dictionary of American Proverbs*, edited by Wolfgang Mieder, Stewart A. Kingsbury, and Kelsie B. Harder (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), and *A Dictionary of American Proverbs*, edited by Charles Clay Doyle, Wolfgang Mieder, and Fred Shapiro (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012). The aim of the study is to outline and discuss the proverb-based popular notion of happiness in present-day U.S. culture. The research methods involve two steps: the linguocultural approach and its further part, the culturematic analysis, which are intended for explicating the proverb culturemes and messages, and a summary and discussion of the findings obtained via this analysis for outlining the cultural content of the concept of happiness in present-day American society.

Keywords: American culture, Anglo-American proverbs, happiness, cultureme, culturematic analysis, linguocultural approach, theme.

Introduction

The rich and inexhaustible treasure trove of proverbs, which unites in one complex, huge hypertext contrasting categories like the sublime and the everyday, the uplifting and the pessimistic, the didactic and the permissive, the ennobling and the cynical, the romantic and the prosaic, the tragic and the comic, the rational and the absurd, the witty and the banal—belongs to the most enduring monuments of the creative human impulse working through the ages. Proverbs are like life itself – indisputable, authoritative, and often unfathomable. They derive from the incessant urge in the soul of the creative individual to come to terms with a baffling experience, articulate an inner insight, put in human language the awe felt at seeing something breathtakingly beautiful, or commend a clever way of coping with a prob-

lem. By clothing their personal observations and insights in vivid, compact and memorable form, the generations of unknown proverb authors make possible the storing and transmission to their children and grandchildren of this constantly growing body of **precedent mini-texts**, these ready-made nuggets of wisdom gleaned directly from life's trials and tribulations in the form of witty comments or well-meaning advice, which can be learned and applied in life by many others.

Compared to all other literary genres, one striking characteristic of proverbs is that among perhaps all other types and modes of artistic creation, they seem to somehow best bridge the gap between vastly different languages, epochs, historical periods, natural landscapes, ethnic groups, social classes, religions, ideological affiliations, generations, or levels of education. Proverbs are truly unique in being the meeting ground of sublime religious revelations or philosophical reasoning and the down-to-earth, shrewd wisdom of the common folk, as Ralph Waldo Emerson noted nearly two centuries ago—in 1841 (Mieder 2014: 11; *Collected Works II*, 186–187, quoted in: Mieder 2014: 269–270). They thus serve as a perfect tool for communication, a most eloquent language that can be understood equally well by the highly educated citizens of the technological societies and the illiterate among the masses, as well as by tribesmen inhabiting some of the most remote, isolated and inhospitable parts of the earth—the desert, the jungle, the tundra, the high mountain, the barren plateau. Proverbs reach down to the most fundamental layers of the human psyche and, as if by a kind of magic similar to that found in the folk and fairy tales, they succeed miraculously in surpassing all natural and cultural boundaries, be they biological, social, or intellectual, uniting in a single, powerful embrace the whole of the human race.

A cursory glance through the proverbs in the multilingual proverb collections we are familiar with shows that “happiness” is a constantly recurring theme. The committed proverb scholar would certainly find it very rewarding to undertake the comparison of the proverb-based notions of happiness in the folklores of several different linguocultures across time and space. Should this be done, a common core would no doubt emerge, notwithstanding the diverse language and cultural differences, for the

pursuit of happiness has always been among the most basic human preoccupations.

Aims of the study, method and material

In this paper, my aim is to look at the contemporary Anglo-American proverbs about happiness. “Happiness” is one of the key words that have come to define modern American culture. This is evidenced in Paul Aron’s book *We Hold These Truths ... And Other Words That Made America*, published in 2009, where the author writes: “[a]ll men are created equal. Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness’. – These two collocations sum up the American creed as upheld by most American statesmen and politicians and the American people as a whole since the drafting of the Declaration of Independence in 1776, a document that is universally seen as the defining statement of the American identity and has become akin to holy writ” (Aron 2009: 91–96, quoted in: Mieder 2014: 151, 167). The word “happiness”, then, denotes a concept that has become very dear to every American. But what exactly does this word mean to American people? What exactly is the typically American idea of happiness like?

Answers to these questions can be yielded in a variety of ways—by conducting a sociocultural study with a specifically designed questionnaire, by studying the way happiness is presented in U.S. media, by exploring how the notion of happiness is represented in literary works by American authors, or by simply talking to people and observing them. I believe that one particularly promising and rewarding way to get very close to the American notion of happiness is through analysing the Anglo-American proverbs that are dealing with this theme. Proverbs, these “concise traditional statements of general truths with currency among the folk”, are described by Wolfgang Mieder as “short, generally known sentences of the folk that contain wisdom, truths, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed, and memorable form and that are handed down from generation to generation” (Mieder 1996: 597, quoted in Mieder 2014: 21). These short, well-familiar texts, known for their wide currency and traditionality, can therefore provide the researcher with the most authentic knowledge of this typical American value.

In linguoculturology, the concept of happiness has already been analysed in great depth in several studies and monographs by the Russian scholar Professor Sergey Vorkachev, one of the founders of linguoconceptology (Vorkachov 2001, 2002, 2004), and has received further attention in subsequent works, again in Russian (cf. Vashteulova 2012). Vorkachov's works however focus predominantly on the Russian concept of happiness, while A. S. Vashteulova's article studies happiness vs. unhappiness in American political and literary discourse, and not in proverbs or folklore. The review of much of the available literature in paremiology shows that no significant attempt at studying the Anglo-American proverbs about happiness has been undertaken so far, so I hope the present paper, by being probably the first of its kind in terms of the combination of topic, method and material (empirical data), will provide a clue not only to this specifically American concept, but also to a proverb-based, i.e. traditional and thus enduring and truthful representation of a fragment of the character of the American **linguocultural personality**. The latter term, which is beginning to acquire wide currency in linguoculturology, denotes an abstraction similar to that signified by the term "average man/woman/citizen" used in sociology. The linguocultural personality is, briefly stated, a mental construction, a "virtual" person, an artificially constructed human type, whose language and culture represent the most characteristic, invariant, basic features of a given ethnic group or nation (Maslova 2001: 120), although it may also mean a widely recognized figure, often a writer, who is generally regarded as a typical representative of a certain linguoculture (Petrova and Denizov 2014). By taking us closer to the American linguocultural personality, this study will also help us reveal the driving force and motivation behind the efforts and exploits of generations of American people, their most sacred dreams and aspirations. The proverb-based knowledge of this key value in American culture will thus additionally contribute to our understanding of happiness as an essential human value and global pursuit, particularly given the unique status of the English language (and, more particularly, its American variety) as the lingua franca of the people all over the world today and its great influence on those who speak English as a foreign language (Petrova 2012a).

The corpus we will be dealing with is made up of all the proverbs belonging to the thematic field of happiness found in the two major contemporary Anglo-American proverb collections, *The Dictionary of American Proverbs*, henceforth DAP (1992), and the *Dictionary of Modern Proverbs*, henceforth DMP (2012). The selection procedure has aimed to identify the proverbs about happiness regardless of whether or not the lexeme “happiness” was part of their wording. It consists in putting the question, “Is this sentence a proverb about happiness?” to an intuitively “suspected” text; if the answer is “Yes”, then the sentence qualifies for inclusion in the corpus. For example, if this question is put to the proverb *Happiness is a journey, not a destination* (DMP), the answer will quite simply be “Yes, it is”, while if we put it to *Only God can make a tree* (DMP), the answer will be “No, this proverb is not about happiness, it is about religion and God”. If we were to put this question to the metaphorical proverb *The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence* (DMP), the answer would again be negative—“No, this proverb is not about happiness, it is about envy”. Interestingly enough, each of the texts selected via this procedure lists the lexeme “happy” or one of its derivatives in its wording, which is not always the case when applying it to identify some other themes; as can be seen in the last example above, figurative texts as a rule do not include the corresponding thematic lexeme or phrase in their wording. A similar example is the popular English proverb *An apple a day keeps the doctor away*, which does not include the thematic word “health” in its wording.

An explanation about the sources is needed at this point. Of the two modern collections used for this study, the earlier dictionary—DAP—is based entirely on field research stretching over almost half a century across a very large area within the U.S.A. and some neighbouring territories in south-eastern Canada (DAP, Preface: xiv), while DMP, which includes proverbs that have originated in English not earlier than 1900 and for the first time has made use of Internet sources, appears to be even more global in scope (cf. DMP, Introduction: x). One might suggest that it is precisely the global scope of DMP that has dissuaded its editors from adding the usual ethnonym to the title, which would have otherwise read either *A Dictionary of Modern Anglo-American Proverbs*, *A Dictionary of Modern Proverbs in*

the English Language, A Dictionary of Modern Proverbs in Anglo-American Usage, or A Dictionary of Anglo-American Proverbs in Modern Communication Across the Globe, instead of the “nation-less” and somewhat “globalistic” title *A Dictionary of Modern Proverbs*. But I would like to draw the attention of the reader to another especially important detail. There is indeed a time lag of only two decades between the publications of these two collections, and this fact alone has some rather interesting implications. On the one hand, the two publication dates—1992 and 2012—pertain to two very close synchronic planes of the evolution of the proverb genre. Technically, they fall into the same, most recent, contemporary period of development of the Anglo-American linguoculture, which means that both collections contain “living proverbs”, texts that are “in actual use in American speech” (DAP, Preface: ix). But what is of particular importance for the present study is that in terms of the timing of the publications vis-à-vis the advent of the Third Information Revolution, which began in earnest in the early 1990s with the massive introduction of the Internet that brought in its wake the unprecedented Anglobalisation Period in human history, the years 1992 and 2012 belong to two very different periods within its modern phase, which can be termed “before the Anglo-American Globalisation” and “after the start of the Anglo-American Globalisation”. We can assume, then, that this fact is at least one of the reasons accounting for the striking differences in content, style and, most particularly, messages of many of the texts in the two collections. If we were allowed to make some broad generalisations, we would venture the opinion that the proverbs in DAP on the whole tend to belong to the old, archetypal proverb type as we know it: wise, traditional, didactic, poetic, uplifting, while those in DMP bear many of the characteristics of the anti-proverbs: witty, amusing, blunt, prosaic, sarcastic, even obscene and cynical. Some of these peculiar characteristics, especially of the DMP corpus, have already been discussed in great detail in several recent works by Wolfgang Mieder (Mieder 2012, 2014) as well as by myself (Petrova 2013a, 2013b, 2014a, 2014b, 2015), but, to the best of my knowledge, no attempt has so far been undertaken at comparing the proverbs in the two collections.

The term “culture” has already been used several times in this introduction. We are aware of the practically hundreds of definitions of this term that have arisen over the last century or so, offered by diverse schools and elaborated by representatives of a large variety of disciplines (for brief discussions of this term see: Maslova 2001: 16–23 and Petrova 2004: 25–43). **From a linguocultural perspective, in the present study culture as a social phenomenon and an intrinsic human characteristic should be understood as the dynamic set of values and anti-values that corresponds to the specific way of life of a group of people who share the same language. This set of values is stored in the structures of this language across a period of time and is handed down from one generation to the next through its precedent texts. In this context, a linguoculture is a highly specific language-cum-culture integral.**

Because we will be dealing with the cultural aspect of proverbs, we will be interested first and foremost in their axiological characteristics, i.e., in the values and anti-values making part of their semantics, hence the **linguocultural approach** we have chosen to apply. As I have demonstrated in a number of earlier works (Petrova 2002, 2003, 2004, 2006, 2007, 2010, 2012b, 2013b, 2014a, 2015), in essence, the linguocultural approach basically boils down to “reducing” the proverb (or any other language item or text) to the one (or, very rarely more than one) single major entity it comments and evaluates as positive (desirable or commendable) or negative (something to be avoided) and to relating this cultural entity to the direct or implicit advice given by the proverb (its message). Some proverbs may have more than one such major entity, and also more than one message, but this is comparatively rare. This major entity can be further decomposed into a number of constituent entities, as will be shown below. I call such a positive or negative cultural entity a **cultureme**. The cultureme has a verbal name plus a mathematical positive or negative sign (plus or minus) attached to it. Its name can be identified with the help of the question, “What does this language item or text show as positive or negative?” The cultureme obtained is thus a sign integrating a fragment of a given culture, whose content is denoted verbally by its name, and a positive or negative evaluation attached to it by this culture, denoted by its plus or minus sign. For instance, the entities in an

English-based culture denoted by the words *joy*, *beauty*, or *freedom* are represented by the same words plus a positive sign, e.g., “joy (+)”, “beauty (+)”, and “freedom (+)”, while the cultural entities *death*, *hatred*, and *traitor* are represented with negatively marked verbal signs – the nouns “death (–)”, “hatred (–)”, and “traitor (–)”. Many of the larger language items, which either recommend or criticize or condemn something, among which one-sentence auto-semantic texts, such as the proverbs, as well as larger texts, like fables, anecdotes, poems, stories, narratives, newspaper articles, essays, dramas, even scholarly discourse, etc., are also bearers of such axiologically marked entities. For instance, the major cultureme of the proverb *Love makes the world go round* is “love (+)”, while that of *You can take the horse to the water, but you cannot make him drink* is “coercion (–)” and not “horse”, “water”, or “drinking”. As the latter example shows, the name of the major cultureme of a text does not necessarily participate in the wording of this text, and, as we have seen, this is the case with figurative expressions, idioms, metaphorical proverbs, fables, myths, fairy tales, and so forth, but it nevertheless is there—in the proverb definition (explanation) – “Coercion is useless, it doesn’t work”. Explaining the figurative proverbs by giving their definitions, i.e. interpreting the surface structure of the figurative (metaphorical) sentence into its deep structure, is the indispensable preliminary step that the researcher should take in order to explicate the proverb cultureme and message.

The positive or negative sign of the cultureme can be verified via the proverb message, because **the message of the text provides the context of its major cultureme**. To find out what the message is, we need to put another question to the proverb sentence: “What does this proverb advise us to do / to be, or not to do / not to be?” The answer to this question can have either a positive or a negative modality. For instance, the message of the popular metaphorical proverb *A stitch in time saves nine*—“We must repair things on time to economise on labour, resources, etc.”— is positive, since it urges us to behave in a certain way that is regarded as good and proper, while that of *Sloth is the key to beggary*—“Do not be lazy, avoid sloth”—is negative, since this proverb tells us what we should not do or be. Similarly, the positive message of the proverb *Love makes the world go*

round—“Do things with love to participate more fully in life’s growth”—affirms the positive sign of the cultureme, “love (+)”, while that of *You can take the horse to the water, but you cannot make him drink*—“Abstain from coercion, for such behaviour is useless”—affirms the negative sign of its cultureme, “coercion (-)”. The message thus brings to light in a most clear manner the true axiological (positive or negative) characteristic of the major cultural entity and communicative focus of the proverb. As a means to revealing the hidden major cultureme of texts marked by hyperbole, irony, or sarcasm, the message is truly an indispensable tool. For example, the proverb hyperbole *No good deed goes unpunished* (DMP) advises us implicitly not to expect gratefulness from people to whom we have been good, kind, generous and sincere. Thus, its major focus, the major entity it criticizes, is not the explicitly mentioned goodness or punishment, but human ingratitude, hence its major cultureme, “ingratitude (-)”.

One great advantage of the application of the cultureme in linguocultural studies over the analysis involving the more widely used unit in linguoculturology, **the (linguo)cultural concept** (cf. Slyshkin 2000; Maslova 2001: 51; Vorkachov 2001, 2002, 2004), is that our approach frees the researcher from any preconceived ideas or expectations, making him depend for his conclusions about the hierarchy of the cultural values he is exploring entirely on the text or texts he is studying. A somewhat simplified example should make that idea clear. We can take a corpus of proverbs (or any other class or group of language items or texts) in a language that pertain to a particular historical period, knowing that the greater the corpus the more reliable our findings and conclusions, and through extracting all of the major culturemes and messages from them all and then arranging them along two separate positive and negative quantitative scales according to their **semantic density** (frequency of occurrence and cultural elaborateness), we will obtain a rigorous, data-driven, objective and legitimate representation of the hierarchy of the positively and negatively evaluated entities characterising the linguoculture under study for this particular period. In the process, we shall notice that the bulk of these entities is made up of human values and character traits – both good and bad.

The second more refined stage of the linguocultural approach is the **culturematic analysis**. It consists in further decomposing the text (hypertext, group of texts) into all of its culturemes, after having explicated the major one(s). The resultant culturemes function as components of the major cultureme, thereby providing further and much more detailed knowledge of its subject content. The total number of culturemes thus obtained from a text or body of texts can, in a similar way, also be grouped around themes and arranged hierarchically along two quantitative scales according to their semantic density. The results obtained will be an even more detailed and authentic “global” picture of the linguoculture under study pertaining to a given period. This method has been demonstrated in several of my more recent works, e.g., my monograph of the *Book of Proverbs* in the Authorised Version (King James Bible) (Petrova 2012b), my study of the English proverb *If there were no clouds, we shouldn't enjoy the sun* (Petrova 2013), and elsewhere. The example below with the proverb *Love makes the world go round* is an illustration of the culturematic analysis.

First, the proverb text should be explained, i.e., we have to provide its definition: “When acting out of love, a person (or any other agent, such as God, etc.) is empowered to make things happen, thereby increasing life's growth.”

Next, the proverb sentence is parsed into its immediate constituents. These include

- two noun phrases: *love, the world*, and
- two verb phrases: *makes the world go round*, which contains the phrase *go round*.

Then, the verb phrases are transformed into noun phrases and their imagery is interpreted, thus four more noun phrases are obtained:

- *making the world go round*, a metaphor meaning *making things happen, thereby increasing life's growth*, and
- *going round*, a metaphor meaning being alive and growing.

To the four noun phrases we add the nominalised proverb definition,

- *love as a force that makes things happen, thereby increasing life's growth.*

On the linguistic plane, the structure of the proverb sentence as a finite set of noun phrases is now the following:

- 1) *love*
- 2) *the world*
- 3) *making the world go round*
- 4) *going round*
- 5) *making things happen, thereby increasing life's growth*
- 6) *being alive and growing*
- 7) *love as a force that makes things happen, thereby increasing life's growth.*

Within the context of the proverb, apart from the neutrally evaluated collocations *the world* and *going round*, each of the other noun phrases above has a positive evaluation as part either of its denotation (dictionary meaning) or connotational (contextual) meaning. This should be marked with a positive sign, placed next to the corresponding phrase or word. As a result, we obtain **the complete set of culturemes exhausting the culturematic (cultural) content of the proverb as a complex sign of culture:**

- 1) love (+)
- 2) making the world go round (+)
- 3) making things happen, thereby increasing life's growth (+)
- 4) being alive (+)
- 5) love as a force that makes things happen, thereby increasing life's growth (+).

As can be seen, not all constituent noun phrases exhibit axiological characteristics, therefore not all function as **component signs of culture**.

The positive sign of the major cultureme, "love (+)", can be verified via the proverb message, which is with positive modality: "Act with love, and this will empower you to make things happen, thereby increasing life's growth."

Proverbs are meant to be used in real-life situations on account of the messages they put across for solving a variety of

problems. In communication, they can be used in speech acts, which makes them an object of **linguistic pragmatics**, the study of “people’s intended meanings, their assumptions, their purposes or goals, and the kind of actions (for example, requests) that they are performing when they speak” (Yule 1996: 4). But often the messages of some proverbs are not easy to find because of some hidden, implied meanings in the proverb texts, which the researcher should try to “unearth”. In semantics and linguistic pragmatics such implied meanings have been studied in great depth and described as implicatures, entailments, and presuppositions (Kempson 1992: 139–144; Yule 1996: 25). Apart from them, however, there exist other types of hidden meanings, including the figurative meanings of the images, but also meanings which can only be unravelled via knowledge about the origin, usage and cultural background of the proverb; all of these hidden meanings can be subsumed under the umbrella term **implicit meanings** (from *implicit*, i.e., “implied or understood though not directly expressed”, according to The Free Dictionary). An example of a text with an implicit meaning is the old English proverb *Happy’s the wooing that’s not long a’doing* (DAP). Its definition—“Happy is the wooing which in due time leads to a marriage proposal”—is based on the knowledge (or presumption) that “wooing should in due time lead to a marriage proposal”, which is a fact from traditional English culture. The major cultureme of this sentence is “the happy wooing (+)” since this is the main entity the proverb comments on and evaluates as positive, while the implicit meaning is found not in the proverb sentence, but in the last (third) member of the finite set of its constituent culturemes: 1) “the prolonged wooing (–)”, 2) “making a marriage proposal (+), and 3) “the happy wooing, which leads to a marriage proposal (+)”.

Our next example of a proverb with an implicit meaning is *He is happiest, be he peasant or king, who finds peace in his home* (DAP). The wording of the implicit meaning, “the social status of a person determines his happiness”, is part neither of the proverb sentence, nor of its major cultureme—“the happy person (+)”, but can be identified in the last (third) member of its finite set of constituent culturemes—1) “the person who finds peace in his home (+)”, 2) “finding peace in one’s home (+)”, and 3) “the happy person, who finds peace in his home, regard-

less of his social standing (+)". The collocation "regardless of his social standing" is part of the proverb definition—"When a person finds peace in his home, he is truly happy, regardless of his social standing" and, as we have just seen, it is also part of one of its constituent culturemes. I will call the cultureme whose wording includes the interpretation of the proverb's implicit meaning an **implicit cultureme**. In summary, when a proverb with an implicit meaning undergoes culturematic analysis, it elicits an implicit cultureme, which becomes part of the proverb definition.

The analysis shows that, in a similar way, the culturematic structure of the explicit, literal proverbs includes explicit culturemes that also participate in the wording of the proverb definition. For example, we can decompose the proverb *Happiness is more than riches* (DAP) into its major cultureme, "happiness (+)", and its two constituent ones, 1) "riches (+)", and 2) "happiness as something that surpasses riches (+)", where the latter is a nominalisation of its definition, which in this case is just a modification of the proverb sentence. Let us call the cultureme most fully representing the proverb definition an **explanatory cultureme**. As has become evident so far, proverbs with implicit meanings elicit explanatory culturemes in which are embedded the corresponding implicit culturemes, while the explicit, literal proverbs elicit explanatory culturemes which are nominalisations of the proverb sentence.

Let us now turn to the sign of the explanatory cultureme. Observations show that some proverbs may bear two variants of the same cultureme, each with a different sign, depending on two contrasting interpretations of the proverb text. An example is the proverb *Happiness in this world, when it comes, comes incidentally* (DAP), from which can be elicited two explanatory culturemes, or, rather, the same explanatory cultureme, "the sudden and incidental nature of happiness", but in two varieties—with two different signs—(+), and (-). They derive from the two different, but equally valid definitions of the proverb: "Because happiness is highly unpredictable, there is always hope that one may become happy", which is with positive modality, and "However hard you work to attain happiness, nothing guarantees that you will be happy, because happiness is highly incidental and unpredictable", which is negatively laden because of the

pessimism implied. The different signs of the cultureme can be tested against the two messages of the proverb: the positive, “Keep hoping for happiness to come into your life”, and the negative, “Do not rely on happiness as it is so unpredictable”.

Proverbs with one major cultureme bear only one explanatory cultureme, while those with two or more than two major culturemes—and such proverbs are comparatively rare—bear the same number of explanatory culturemes.

Let it be noted again that with regard to the dichotomy *literal: figurative*, to the types of culturemes listed so far we should also add the **literal** and the **figurative culturemes**. The example below will illustrate the difference.

If we subject the proverb *Happiness is a butterfly* (DAP) to culturematic analysis, we will get the following set: a major cultureme, “happiness (+)”, and four constituent culturemes—1) “happiness as a butterfly (+)”, 2) “butterfly (+)”, 3) “beauty, colourfulness, wantonness and playfulness (+)”, and 4) “happiness as something beautiful, colourful, wanton and playful (+)”, which is the explanatory cultureme of the proverb. The third, 3) “beauty, colourfulness, wantonness and playfulness (+)”, is a figurative cultureme, while the rest are not. The figurative cultureme is derived from the image of the butterfly by “translating” it into “literal” language, and incorporated into the explanatory cultureme.

Finally, let it also be noted that the name of the major proverb cultureme does not necessarily have to be the same as the word or phrase denoting **the theme** to which the proverb belongs, although there are often cases of coincidence (e.g., *Love makes the world go round*, where the thematic word “love” coincides with the name of the major cultureme, “love (+)”). For example, the proverb *No good deed goes unpunished* (DMP), quoted above, belongs to the thematic field “good”, while its major cultureme—“ungratefulness (–)”—is quite a different word.

So far we have seen that **the culturemes in a proverb sentence form a set with one (or, rarely, two or more) major cultureme making up its core, and a finite set of constituent culturemes, among which there are literal, implicit (including the figurative), and explanatory culturemes. In the case of proverbs with implicit meanings, the latter are incorporated into the explanatory cultureme.**

In the way of concluding remarks to this section let us recuperate that the major cultureme is not always found in the wording of the proverb sentence, neither is it the same as the thematic word or phrase of the proverb text. It is a sign denoting the cultural focus of the text (or texts) that serve(s) as its vehicle(s) which enables the researcher to establish quantitatively the ranking and prominence (or lack thereof) of a particular cultural entity versus all other entities stored in a text or body of texts. The constituent culturemes are extensions of the major cultureme. From them, the explanatory cultureme is the most informative one, because it incorporates not only the major cultureme(s) of the proverb text, but also its definition.

Analysis and findings

For the purposes of the study, each text of the corpus of 103 American proverbs about happiness has undergone the procedure outlined in the section above: the images in the figurative proverbs were interpreted, each proverb text was explained, the definition obtained was decomposed into noun phrases, those with axiological characteristics were identified as culturemes and then arranged into a set, the proverb message was formulated, and its sign—compared to the sign of the major cultureme. From the 103 sets of culturemes, only the explanatory culturemes have been chosen for our analysis on account of their being the most informative of all others. Their number, 108, slightly exceeds the number of proverbs under study – by five items. This is because there are a few proverb sentences containing more than one explanatory cultureme. For example, the proverb *It is neither wealth nor splendour, but tranquility and occupation which give happiness* (DAP) bears two explanatory culturemes, “tranquility as a true source of happiness (+)”, and “occupation as a true source of happiness (+)”.

This study focuses on the explanatory culturemes only. It does not deal with the subject content and semantic density of the other culturemes, the stylistic features of the proverbs or their imagery, all of which can undoubtedly provide the researcher with additional, valuable, in-depth knowledge of American culture. They will be explored separately. The present paper is only the first step of a longer project and its aim is limited to giving

an initial, general description of the proverb-based popular notion of happiness in present-day U.S. culture and society.

Below are arranged the **108 explanatory culturemes contained in the 103 proverbs** under study. Next to each in round brackets is placed the corresponding proverb. The culturemes are grouped around the **fifteen themes** that have been elicited from the proverb corpus under study. The theme headings are arranged on a cline according to their semantic density, which is determined by the number of explanatory culturemes and their variants that represent them. The themes represented by the same number of explanatory culturemes occupy the same position on the list. Theme Number One at the top of the hierarchy, “Happiness, which consists in a positive state of mind”, is represented in 19 explanatory culturemes, while the last four themes—Numbers 10.1, 10.2, 10.3, and 10.4—are represented each in a single explanatory cultureme.

1. Happiness, which consists in a positive state of mind—19

- happiness, which derives from a person’s inner life (+) (*All happiness is in the mind.* DAP)
- seeking happiness in a person’s mind (+) (*Happiness is to be sought not outside but within.* DAP)
- tranquility as a true source of happiness (+) (*It is neither wealth nor splendor, but tranquility and occupation which give happiness.* DAP)
- happiness as something that does not consist in things, but in thoughts (+) (*Our happiness does not consist in things but in thoughts.* DAP)
- happiness, which consists in peace of mind and heart (+) (*Real happiness consists of peace of mind and heart.* DAP)
- happiness, which is content (+) (*Content is happiness.* DAP)
- happiness, which is content (+) (*True happiness is in a contented mind.* DAP)
- happiness, which is content (+) (*Happy is he who is content.* DAP)
- happiness, which is an inner state of contentment and abundance (+) (*A poor man can’t be happy because a happy man is never poor.* DAP). The implication is that because the happy man always feels satisfied, he cannot regard himself as poor.

- happiness, which derives from gladness of the heart (+) (*Happiness comes from gladness as light from the sun.* DAP)
- happiness, which is a state of complete inner contentment, i.e., lack of longings (+) (*Happiness has no longings.* DAP)
- the blissfully happy man as a person who has peace of mind (+) (*The man with peace of mind is blissfully happy.* DAP)
- happiness as the art of never holding in one's mind an unpleasant memory (+) (*Happiness is the art of never holding in your mind the memory of any unpleasant thing that has passed.* DAP)
- happiness, which consists in liking the things one has to do (+) (*Real happiness is found not in doing the things you like to do, but in liking the things you have to do.* DAP)
- happiness, which consists in knowing that one still has something to lose (+) (*So long as we can lose any happiness we possess some.* DAP)
- the determination to be happy and enjoy life in spite of the wickedness of the world (+) (*There ain't no happiness in this world so we must be happy without it.* DAP)
- happiness, which is a habit (+) (*Happiness is a habit.* DAP) The implication is that a person can cultivate and maintain a habitual positive inner state.
- the happy man as someone who finds wisdom and gets understanding in the context of the Bible (The Book of Proverbs) (+) (*Happy is the man that finds wisdom and gets understanding.* DAP)
- happiness, which consists in being satisfied with oneself (+) (*One is happy when one is satisfied with one's self.* DAP)

2. Happiness as a state a person can create consciously – 17

- happiness, which is what one makes of one's chances (+) (*Happiness is what you make of it.* DAP)
- happiness, which consists in making the best of one's chances (+) (*One's chances for happiness are what he makes them.* DAP)
- happiness, which is a product of conscious work (+) (*Happiness is for those who make it and not for those who search for it.* DAP)

- occupation as a true source of happiness (+) (*It is neither wealth nor splendor, but tranquility and occupation which give happiness.* DAP)
- attaining happiness by keeping ourselves busy (+) (*To fill the hour—that is happiness.* DAP)
- hard work as a condition for happiness (+) (*Labor is the law of happiness.* DAP)
- happiness as a state of being active (+) (*Man was never so happy as when he was doing something.* DAP)
- happiness, which consists in keeping oneself busy (+) (*Busy hands are happy hands.* DMP)
- happiness as the enjoyment of the process of pursuing one's goals (+) (*Getting what you go after is called success, but liking it while you are getting it is happiness.* DAP)
- the happy man as someone who has a hobby (+) (*Happy is* DAP)
- happiness, which consists in pursuing a [worthy] goal (+) (*There is more happiness in pursuit than in possession.* DAP)
- attaining happiness by living within one's income (+) (*The happiest place in the world to live is within one's income.* DAP)
- attaining happiness by limiting one's wants to one's necessities (+) (*Happy is he who limits his wants to his necessities.* DAP)
- making use of the available happy moments in one's life (+) (*Happiness is where you find it.* DMP)
- happiness, which consists in enjoying whatever one is experiencing while pursuing a goal, regardless of the results (+) (*Happiness is a journey, not a destination.* DMP)
- concealing one's private life from others as a condition for happiness (+) (*Hidden life, happy life.* DMP)
- being happy by being simple (i.e., humble, unpretentious and sincere – The Free Dictionary) (+) (*Happy is he who is simple.* DAP)

3. Happiness, which comes from generosity – 16

- the sharing of one's happiness with others (+) (*Happiness adds and multiplies as we divide it with others.* DAP)
- those who give happiness (+) (*Happiness comes from those who give it.* DAP)

- happiness, which is something rare and precious, which one gives to others and gets some of it oneself (+) (*Happiness is a perfume that you cannot pour on others without spilling a little on yourself.* DAP)

- happiness, which comes as the result of making oneself useful to someone (+) (*Happiness is a wayside flower growing upon the highway of usefulness.* DAP)

- happiness, which consists in making oneself useful to others (+) (*If you want to be happy make yourself useful.* DAP)

- becoming happy by making oneself necessary to somebody (+) (*To be happy, make yourself necessary to somebody.* DAP)

- happiness, which is something delicious that you give to others and get some in the process (+) (*Happiness is like jam: you can't spread even a little without getting some on yourself.* DAP)

- the perfect happiness, which is shared (+) (*Happiness is not perfect until it is shared.* DAP)

- attaining happiness by making others happy (+) (*True happiness consists of making others happy.* DAP)

- being truly happy by making others happy (+) (*You're truly happy if you make others happy.* DAP)

- attaining happiness by keeping others happy (+) (*True happiness consists of keeping others happy.* DAP)

- attaining happiness by making others happy (+) (*Keeping someone else happy is the secret of happiness.* DAP)

- attaining happiness by making others happy (+) (*He is truly happy who makes others happy.* DAP)

- the blessed state of the happiness makers (+) (*Blessed are the happiness makers.* DAP)

- wishing for others everlasting happiness (+) (*May your sun of happiness never set.* DAP)

- attaining happiness through being kind to others (+) (*Kindness brings happiness.* DAP)

4. Happiness as a supreme value—12

- happiness, which is the best reward in life (+) (*Happiness is the best reward.* DAP)

- happiness, which is the true measure of success (+) (*Happiness is the true measure of success.* DAP)

- happiness, which surpasses riches (+) (*Happiness is more than riches.* DAP)
- happiness, which cannot be bought with money (+) (*Money can't buy happiness.* DAP)
- happiness, which cannot be bought with money (+) (*Money will buy everything but real happiness.* DAP)
- happiness, which cannot be bought with money (+) (*Money won't buy happiness.* DAP)
- the richest person, who is not the happiest (-) (*Call not him the happiest who is the richest.* DAP)
- happiness as something preferable to wisdom (+) (*It's better to be happy than wise.* DAP)
- happiness as something better than wisdom (+) (*'Tis more to be good than great; to be happy is better than wise.* DAP)
- happiness as something better than wisdom (+) (*Better be happy than wise.* DAP)
- happiness as something better than wisdom (+) (*Better* DAP)
- money as a factor contributing to our good life, but unable to buy happiness (+) (*Money won't buy happiness, but it will go a long way in helping you.* DAP)

5. Hindrances to happiness—11

- the lack of virtue as the reason for one's unhappy life (-) (*Without virtue happiness cannot be.* DAP)
- sin as a hindrance to being happy (-) (*Sin and happiness cannot dwell together.* DAP)
- the deliberate pursuit of happiness (-) (*Happiness is never found by pursuing it.* DAP). The implication is that a person should practice non-attachment with regard to happiness.
- depending on the approval of others for one's own happiness (-) (*He who seeks for applause from without has all his happiness in another's keeping.* DAP)
- the overlooking of happiness only because it is free (-) (*Much happiness is overlooked because it doesn't cost anything.* DAP)
- depriving ourselves of the happiness we have by selfishly keeping it to ourselves (-) (*We shall never gather happiness if we try to retain it for ourselves.* DAP)

- the loss of happiness as a result of anger (-) (*Every minute you are angry you lose sixty seconds of happiness.* DAP)
- not believing that one is happy (-) (*No man is happy unless he thinks himself so.* DAP)
- the seeking of physiological proof that one is happy (-) (*People are not always feeling their pulse to see if they are happy.* DAP)
- ruining one's happiness by taking a wife (-) (*Whoever is tired of a happy day, let him take a wife.* DAP). This exaggerated proverb may be a joke.
- the unhappy mother, who makes the whole family unhappy (-) (*If mama ain't happy, ain't nobody happy.* DMP). This proverb may be a joke.

6. Positive characteristics of happiness—8

- the long duration of happiness (+) (*Happiness goes on forever.* DAP)
- the power of happiness to make dull and ordinary things look pretty (+) (*In happiness, iron is bright; in sadness, gold is dull.* DAP)
- hope as a result of happiness (+) (*Hope is the blossom of happiness.* DAP)
- the sudden and incidental nature of happiness (+) (*Happiness in this world, when it comes, comes incidentally.* DAP) The implication is that happiness is highly unpredictable, so one can always hope to attain such a state.
- happiness, which is a good sold to humans by nature (+) (*Happiness is a good that nature sells us.* DAP). The implication is that happiness is available for all those who are determined to pay for it.
- the worldly idea of happiness, which is possessing what others can't get (+) (*Most of our happiness in this world consists in possessing what others can't get.* DAP). The implication is that everybody can be happy as long as he knows he possesses something others don't have.
- the happy men, who easily attract friends (+) (*Happy men* DAP)
- the power of happiness to generate good health and drive away disease (+) (*Happy people don't get (fall) sick.* DMP)

- the happy wife, who makes her husband happy (+) (*Happy wife, happy life*. DMP)

7. Happiness as a family-based value – 7

- the good family life, which is a condition for happiness (+) (*Happiness grows at our own firesides and is not to be picked in strangers' gardens*. DAP)

- family unity as a condition for happiness (+) (*In a united family happiness springs out of itself*. DAP)

- the happy husband, who is the happiest among all men (+) (*A happy husband is the happiest of men*. DAP)

- the happy person as someone who finds peace in his home (+) (*He is happy who finds peace in his own home*. DAP)

- being a happy man by liking one's wife although love may long have passed (+) (*A happy man will also like his wife, though love may long have passed*. DAP)

- the happy wooing, which soon ends up with a marriage proposal (+) (DAP)

- the happy wife, who makes her husband happy (+) (*Happy wife, happy life*. DMP)

8.1. Happiness as a state closely related to health—4

- happiness, which is determined by good health (+) (*Happiness makes health, health makes more happiness*. DAP)

- happiness, which is the same as health (+) (*Happiness makes health, health makes more happiness*. DAP)

- happiness as a condition for health (+) (*Happiness makes health, health makes more happiness*. DAP)

- being happy, which is the same as enjoying good health (+) (*To be happy is to be healthy*. DAP)

8.2. Happiness as a state closely related to beauty—4

- happiness, which is beautiful, colourful, wanton and playful like a butterfly (+) (*Happiness is a butterfly*. DAP)

- learning something beautiful every day as a prescription for happiness (+) (*Learn, see, do something beautiful every day is a prescription for happiness*. DAP)

- seeing something beautiful every day as a prescription for happiness (+) (*Learn, see, do something beautiful every day is a prescription for happiness*. DAP)

- doing something beautiful every day as a prescription for happiness (+) (*Learn, see, do something beautiful every day is a prescription for happiness.* DAP)

8.3. Negative characteristics of happiness—4

- the short duration of the deepest happiness (-) (*Deepest happiness is for a short duration.* DAP)

- the sudden and incidental nature of happiness (-) (*Happiness in this world, when it comes, comes incidentally.* DAP). The implication is that however hard you work for your happiness, nothing guarantees that you will attain it.

- happiness, which is a good sold to humans by nature (-) (*Happiness is a good that nature sells us.* DAP). The implication is that one may not be able to afford the price for the happiness that abounds in nature.

- the worldly idea of happiness, which is possessing what others can't get (-) (*Most of our happiness in this world consists in possessing what others can't get.* DAP). The implication is that even if someone has a lot of valuable possessions, if some other people have the same things, he is bound to feel miserable.

9.1. Happiness as dependent on pain and suffering—3

- sorrow as a condition for appreciating happiness (+) (*One does not appreciate happiness unless one has known sorrow.* DAP)

- tribulations as a road to happiness (+) (*The way to happiness is through tribulation.* DAP)

- believing that when things reach their worst, happiness will soon follow (+) (*When things look blackest, happiness is just round the corner.* DAP)

10.1. Happiness, which is verified only after death – 1

- death as the ultimate verification for a happy life (+) (*Call no man happy till he is dead.* DAP)

10.2. Happiness in the home, which depends on the faith in God – 1

- the happy home as a place where faith in God reigns supreme (+) (*There is not a happy home on earth but stands on faith.* DAP)

10.3. Being happy, which takes courage – 1

- being happy, which takes courage (+) (*Happiness is a form of courage*. DAP)

10.4. The happy bride, who has sunshine on her wedding day – 1

- the happy bride, who has sunshine on her wedding day (+) (*Happy is the bride the sun shines on*. DAP)

Discussion

Before discussing the subject content of this thematic group of proverbs, first let us look at their origin. If we refer to the introductory notes in DAP, they will tell us that many of the American texts are inherited from older, predominantly British sources: as the editors have put it, “[t]he value of this dictionary...lies in its registration of both traditional English-language proverbs, and new, indigenous American proverbs (DAP, Preface: xii– xiii). Therefore, the name “Anglo-American” introduced by Wolfgang Mieder, is the most adequate name for describing the proverbs current in America. Among the proverbs about happiness, which total 103, ninety six of which belong to DAP, the traditional British texts can be traced back to well-known sources such as *The Consolation of Philosophy* by Boethius in Geoffrey Chaucer’s translation (1391), Richard Taverner’s collection *Proverbs of Erasmus* (1539), John Heywood’s *Dialogue of Proverbs* (1546), Joseph Addison’s periodical series *The Spectator* (1712), Alexander Pope’s poetic essay *Essay on Man* (1733), Thomas Fuller’s *Gnomologia* (1732), even some works by romantic poets, e.g., *Don Juan* by George Gordon, Lord Byron (1818). All this points to a stable, enduring cultural tradition, which has never been interrupted. But apart from the British traditional texts, there is also a number of older, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American proverbs in this group which belong to works by Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne and other notable American statesmen and authors, although it is worth remembering that during this period American men (and, certainly, women) of letters were as a rule still expected to follow British literary models. Of the 103 excerpted texts, the total number of British traditional proverbs about happiness in DAP is only 18

(slightly over 19% of 96), while the ones taken from works by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American writers amount to only seven (7% of 96). So, the larger part of the texts in DAP – the 78 proverbs, which can be described as “recent” or “modern” (on account of their being recorded after the start of the twentieth century), are local American coinages that have sprung up in diverse parts of the country and continent. They constitute 81% of the corpus of 96 texts and represent the modern popular concept of happiness in American culture. These numbers and proportions come to show that the word “American” in the title (*The Dictionary of American Proverbs*) should be understood in the context of the unique historical and geographical conditions under which the American culture has come to exist. It blends traditional European and British trends with new, fresh and vigorous local American influences, which by far predominate. The high percentage of modern proverbs in DAP also testifies to the youth of the American nation.

As far as the prominence of the theme of happiness is concerned, let us now turn again to some figures and percentages. As mentioned above, the total number of proverbs about happiness excerpted from DAP and DMP is 103, and only seven of them belong to DMP, but in terms of proportion the percentages for the corresponding collections coincide almost completely: 0.64% for DAP, and 0.68% for DMP, each group thus making up less than one percent of the total number of texts in either corpus, which is approximately 15,000 for DAP and exactly 1,422 for DMP. So, if we were to make judgments about the prominence of the “happiness” theme in terms of its semantic density (i.e., the proportional representation of the proverbs about happiness versus the total number of proverbs in both corpora under study – 16, 422), we can safely assume that this theme is indeed of some significance, but, especially as far as DMP is concerned, it is not as central as some other themes according to the key words of the proverbs, such as life, man, sports, business, finance and money (cf. Mieder 2014: 110–115).

Our next focus is the axiological character of this thematic group. The ratio of positive to negative explanatory culturemes is 95 : 13, which means that happiness is defined almost completely positively. In the comparatively small number (13) of negative explanatory culturemes (e.g., “the short duration of the deepest

happiness (-)", "the loss of happiness as a result of anger (-)", "depriving ourselves of the happiness we have by selfishly keeping it to ourselves (-)", and ten more), happiness is not denied, undervalued or denigrated. On the whole, these texts only warn us of some of the hindrances to happiness and suggest ways in which they can be evaded.

Next, let us examine the subject content of the 108 "happiness" explanatory culturemes. As has been demonstrated, fifteen component thematic subgroups have been distinguished within this thematic class of culturemes, constituting the cultural content of the thematic field of happiness in modern Anglo-American culture. These subgroups occupy ten positions, where the eighth position is taken by three small subgroups of four culturemes each, while the tenth is occupied by single subgroups each represented by a single cultureme. The most dominant thematic subgroups that occupy the first three positions on the list and exhibit the highest semantic density (they are represented by 19, 17, and 16 explanatory culturemes respectively), show happiness as an inner state of the mind and the soul, most often a state of peace, contentment and joy, a desired state a person can attain through his own conscious work and a special effort of the will including change of attitude, and as a blessing that grows miraculously when shared with others. The culturemes in the next four central positions (represented respectively by 12, 11, 8 and 7 items), describe happiness as a supreme value surpassing money, riches, and even success, warn of eleven hindrances to attaining happiness, list nine positive characteristics of happiness, and stress how much happiness depends on a person's good family life. The next four thematic subgroups (represented respectively by 4, 4, 4, and 3 items each) describe some even less dominant aspects of happiness: its relatedness to health and beauty, some of its negative features, and its dependence on pain and suffering. Lastly, there are four single explanatory culturemes. They remind us of the ancient maxim that happiness can be proved only after death, that it depends on faith in God and on personal courage, as well as that a bride's future happiness depends on some good omens like the sunshine on her wedding day, a cultureme which comes from the single superstitious proverb in the corpus.

As we have seen, the American proverb-based notion of happiness has a very rich and varied subject content. Happiness is predominantly seen as a state of inner peace, contentment and serenity versus something determined by arbitrary, outward factors such as luck, destiny, God, the father, the ruling elite, political power, domination, rivalry, competition, fame, riches, worldly success, or prestige. Happiness is not shown as a privilege for the select few. Quite on the contrary, every single individual regardless of his station in life can honestly and diligently earn his share of happiness through hard work, frugality, self-discipline and intelligence. All this reminds us of the old Puritan ethics of the first American settlers and reflects the typical American individualism and the specific American vision of democracy (cf. Comager 1950; Brogan 1990; Bradbury and Ruland 1992). The happy people deeply care about their families. They are aware that they have to work consciously to make others happy if they wish to perpetuate this desired state and that they have to constantly bear in mind that it can very easily be lost through committing crime or sin, being negligent, or getting too attached to it. Virtue, beauty and good health are inseparable from happiness, almost one with it, and death is the final test for a happy life.

In summary, the ideal, proverb-based image of the happy American that can be reconstructed from the findings of this analysis then is of a person who is independent, self-sufficient, knowledgeable, inquisitive, intelligent, well-organised, hard-working, frugal, pragmatic, self-reliant, optimistic, determined, responsible, well-meaning, caring, generous and courageous. These then seem to be some of the characteristic features of the American linguocultural personality as presented in this small body of Anglo-American proverbs. All of these features certainly do not hold good for each and every American, but they are surely held as the standard and the norm to be admired and emulated by most members in modern American society.

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