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*Zwei Finnen brauchen keinen Dolmetscher. Finnische Sprichwörter.* By Ingrid Schellbach-Kopra. Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2011. Pp. 285.

Proverbs in Europe form part of a widespread common spiritual tradition. Yet they are tightly bound to the language in which the thoughts they contain are expressed. Hence a non-native speaker may find it difficult to understand proverbs he or she hears or reads, especially given that they usually express their meanings metaphorically. Prof. Ingrid Schellbach-Kopra, the composer of the present work, has decades of research experience in proverbs, and as a Finno-Ugrist acquainted with the Finnish language and culture she has good credentials for composing Finnish-German works on proverbs. The first appeared in the early 1980s [*Finnisch-Deutsches Sprichwörterbuch*. Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 1980], and the second is now to hand. It is not an updated version of the earlier work, but an entirely new contribution, in which the author has gathered materials not only from archives and publications, but also from new sources, and has also included as far as possible proverbs such as have so far not made it to traditional source collections.

The work contains 1268 original (according to the author) Finnish proverbs, and fairly literal German translations of them. Thus it is not a comparative Finnish-German collection, wherein each Finnish proverb would be paralleled by a German equivalent, but one in which the content of the Finnish proverbs is communicated as accurately as possible to a German-speaking reader. Schellbach-Kopra does not clarify the bases of her choices for inclusion of these particular proverbs in the collection. She has been able to rely on her wide knowledge of the Finnish material to choose such texts as form a representative sample of Finnish traditional and modern proverbs. It should nonetheless be borne in mind that the collection of samples is chosen subjectively from the whole Finnish corpus.

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The work begins with a fairly extensive introduction, in which the author briefly presents the basis of her material and the structure of the work. In addition, she summarises the subtypes of the proverb corpus: the terminology is not entirely common between Finnish and German, since *Sprichwort* may indicate both true proverbs (Finnish: *sananlasku*) and a wider category of proverbial expressions (Finnish: *sananparsi*, to which henceforth in this review the term “proverb” applies). Schellbach-Kopra also presents Finnish research on proverbs, ideas about the age of Finnish proverbs, the typical features of style and structure and to an extent also Finnish mentality as revealed by proverbs. On the latter, she clearly relies on Matti Kuusi’s classic writing, *Esivanhempiemme kymmenen käskyä* [Our ancestors’ ten commandments], published in 1952.

The freshest contribution and perhaps the most interesting is Schellbach-Kopra’s depiction of the *Antisprichwort* category, or new, usually humorous variants of traditional proverbs, and the use of both old and new proverbs in popular culture, such as advertisements. An example is the sort of oral-written tradition born out of an advertisement slogan of its time (Rexona was a deodorant advertised in this way in the 1960s in Finland), “There’s always still room for one who uses Rexona”, which becomes “There’s always still room for one who bears responsibility” or “There’s always still room for one who uses his elbows” or “There’s always still room for one more bingo/plant/beer/pocket”. Schellbach-Kopra has obtained her material from, among other places, the humorous and often satirical repartee of the *Alivaltiosihteeri* [‘Undersecretary’] radio programme.

The author has sometimes generalised the language of the proverb texts. Although part of their charm and impact from a Finnish perspective is thus lost, the procedure is well grounded from the point of view of a German readership interested in Finland and Finnish proverbs. A generalised language text is easier for a non-native speaker to understand and appropriate. At times the author has, in addition to the German translation, sought out a German equivalent to the proverb, when the parallel is particularly interesting or is important for the comprehension of the Finnish text.

The author has also to an extent investigated the semantics and problems of translation of the proverbs. The most difficult are the metaphorical proverbs, whose obvious meanings do not necessarily reveal their real significance, despite the assistance of a precise translation into German, since a literal translation communicates the semantics only superficially. This causes problems for the reader: these are solved at times by adding an explanation to the proverb text; such explanations, however, are very rare. A Finnish reader is sometimes left with the suspicion that the exact German translation will not enable the reader to grasp the proverb's meaning and use in Finland. Proverbs using the puzzling semantics of metaphor are, however, fairly sparsely represented within the collection, so their interpretation does not form a huge problem.

On the other hand, such a literal translation as appears for proverb 356, "Hyvä paha joksikin" (lit. "good bad for something"), is problematic to interpret. Schellbach-Kopra translates it "Gut ist für manches schlecht", which corresponds literally to the Finnish as a normal-language sentence. If the first word is interpreted not as subject but as predicate, which is emphatically more likely, we arrive at a meaning which would be rendered in German as "Schlecht ist gut für etwas" ("[What's] bad is good for something"). This may be the common usage of this proverb. Matti Kuusi mentions this proverb, among others, as an example of folk paradox; additionally, this collection includes proverb 134, with similar content: "Ei niin paha, ettei jotain hyvääkin" (approx. "Nothing's so bad that there's no good in it"). In any case, this is a good example of how tricky a mere text can be to understand and how the semantics of proverbs may depend on just a few facts.

The material is arranged in a mechanical alphabetical order. Other possibilities would have been to arrange according to subject, or an alphabetic ordering based on the main word of the proverb in terms of its meaning. Every alternative has good and bad sides to it. As it is, the reader must know or guess the precise way any sought-after proverb is expressed in order to find both it and the German translation. Assistance in searching is, however, afforded by the German word index at the back of the volume. The chosen solution has consequences, in that one proverb's variants differing little from each other are scattered in different

corners of the book. On the other hand, the reader may be interested to note how texts cluster on the basis of their structures, for example, “Better x than y” in: “Parempi pyy pivossa kuin kaski/kymmenen oksalla” (900: “Better a hazelhen in the palm of the hand than two/ten on a branch”, i.e. English “A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush”), “Parempi pää pipossa kuin ilman” (902, “Better a head in a cap than [to be] without”), “Parempi pää pipossa kuin kymmenen oksalla” (903, “Better a head in a cap than ten on a branch”). The two last texts receive the comment “Antispruchwort”, or anti-proverb, indicating that they are humorous novelties formed on the basis of old proverbs.

*Zwei Finnen brauchen keinen Dolmetscher* is by nature a popular work intended for a broad German-speaking readership. Because of its briefness it gives merely a sample of Finnish proverbs, but yet it is multifaceted in including, apart from the main Finnish proverbs, also examples from other proverb corpora and new parodic proverbs. The introduction gives a lay reader some opportunity to educate himself or herself in research into Finnish proverbs, and the concluding word index and bibliography are of benefit when using the work or seeking further information.

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