

Why and How to Present Proverbs in English Classes at Albanian Schools



Linguistics

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Abstract

This paper focuses on reasons, possibilities and ways to present English proverbs to Albanian children in a secondary level class.

On the basis of their correspondence, the English and Albanian proverbs that can be dealt with in a secondary level class are classified into three groups. Proverbs that share a. the same or nearly the same lexicon and structure (be them metaphorical or not); b. their messages, but either the English, or the Albanian proverb is apothemic while its counterpart is metaphors; c. their messages, which built on different metaphors.

Once classified, they are presented class activities. Pupils are invited to find proverbs that suit certain situations and stories, make drawings that illustrate proverbs, write dialogues and dramatize. The activities evidence the effectiveness of the comparative use of proverbs in the English classes. The pupils show fewer comprehensive problems with the apothemic variants as compared to the metaphoric ones, especially to those that convey the same message though different metaphors.

1. Introduction

The development of the conception of culture has highlighted the importance of incorporating cultural elements, such as proverbs, in foreign language classes. Presently, foreign language teachers are well-aware that they have to be cultural intermediators, but Albanian teachers of English may be confronted with discouraging statements, such as that of Miles Kington in *The Independent* of the first of September, 2004: “Today I am bringing you some more Albanian proverbs. If you have not met these before, you will soon realize that they are very different from other kinds of proverb” (Kington, 2004).

This assertion is particularly dispiriting in view of the fact that Albanian students prefer to consider their cultural heritage as a stronghold of their European belonging, and English as a means that contributes to their European integration. Their expectations can be supported by the teachers of English are in the favored position not only to motivate their students to study English, but also to encourage them to consider their paremiological values, as treasures that unite them with the other European nations.

1.1 The Problem of Research

Proverbs are a means of transmitting linguistic and cultural values, which when compared, not only facilitate the pupils’ understanding of the foreign language, but also stimulate them to accomplish topic related tasks. Consequently, while the pupils are involved in activities, they get motivated to know more about the English language and culture.

1.2 The Research focus

The research offers advice on how teachers may make a comparative analysis of English and Albanian proverbs intending to plan their effective integration into the foreign language classes. Activities to identify proverbs that suit situations and stories, to make illustrations and dialogues enjoy the students' appreciation and contribute to noticeable learning achievements.

2. Methodology of Research

2.1 General background of the research

The English and Albanian proverbs can be classified into three groups on the basis of their word-choice and structure. The corresponding proverbs that share: 1. the same or nearly the same lexicon and structure (be them metaphorical or not); 2. their messages, but either the English, or the Albanian proverb is apothemic while its counterpart is metaphoric; 3. their messages, but built on different metaphors.

2.2 Group I.

The key-word correspondence can be the first clue to bringing the proverbs together. E.g. "Time flies", is in Albanian: "Koha fluturon". However, the teacher cannot decide immediately to include as correspondent, proverbs that share their wording, because of the "denotative infinitiveness of proverbs" (Kirkman, 1974). The theme and the message they convey is also to be considered. For example, the English proverb: "An empty sack won't stand alone" is parallel to the Albanian proverb: "Thesi i zbrazët s'qëndron në këmbë" (An empty sack will not stand) and to its variants "Thes' i ngjeshët rrin në këmbë" (A stuffy sack stands alone), "Thesi plot rrin si top" (A filled sack stands like a ball), but the citations and the explanations of the meaning of the English "An empty sack cannot stand" in the Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs (Smith, 1970) as well as Trench's interpretative assertion that: "poor men can scantily be honest" (Trench 1959, 2003) deviate from the meaning that the proverb has in Albanian, that is "Hungry people are not energetic".

Meanwhile, Krikmann's paraphrasing of the meanings of this proverb: "A sick man cannot work", "A hungry man will die", "A fool forfeits his reputation" (Kirkmann, 1974) and Ridout and Witting's (1977) explanation of its meaning: "The sack here is a sack of flour, from which bread is made. Just as the sack is kept upright by the flour, so is man supported and kept alive by bread" highlights the comparability of this proverb to the Albanian counterpart.

2.3 Group II.

A second step is to try to find cases of equivalence when the Anglo- American and Albanian proverbs share their messages and one of the variants is apothemic while its counterpart is metaphoric. To make sure the proverbs share their messages, which are not easy to define since the proverbs in the proverb collections are generally quoted out of context, excluding the English

proverbs that Ridout and Witting present in their dictionary of *English Proverbs Explained* (1977), the teacher can follow Grigas's (2002) advice "to try and decipher their (the proverbs') meaning by analyzing their surface structure- the lexicon and syntactical forms". His advice is especially helpful in comparing apothemical English proverbs to Albanian fully metaphorical parallels. For example, the message of the English proverb "A friend to all is a friend to none" (English) corresponds to that of the Albanian: "Preshtë sa më shumë rrallohen, aq më shumë trashen" (The fewer the leeks, the thicker they get) and "Sa vetë i rruen berberi, kush kumarë nuk thotë se e bëri" (The barber shaves many people, but none says that he made him be his "Godfather").

The lexical analysis can be intertwined with the syntactic analysis in the case of the corresponding quadripartite proverbs. One can follow Milner's (1987) suggestion that in order to analyze them, one has to divide their structure into two halves, each consisting of two quarters. He added that "It is possible to allocate plus or minus values to each quarter in such a way that the combined values of the quarters and their segments match the values of each half" and called the first half, which consists of the first two quarters, "the head" of the proverb, and the second half, of the last two quarters, "the tail". According to his explanations, the minus value of one of the two quarters results in a negative value of the whole first half, and of the whole proverb if the tail is positive. His definitions of the values suit their algebraic reckoning.

The English proverb "A friend to all is a friend to none" and the translated Albanian counterpart: "The fewer the leeks, the thicker they get" are analyzed on the basis of Milner's formula. They are segmented in two halves and four quarters each, as presented in the table below.

The English Proverb		The Albanian Proverb translated into English and transformed to suit the quarters the English proverb	
- The fewer	+ the leeks	+ A friend to all	+ is
+ the thicker	+ they get	+ a friend	- to none

Table I shows the analysis of two corresponding proverbs that convey the same message in spite of their lexical and stylistic differences.

The two proverbs have a negative element in one of the quarters that renders the whole meaning of each proverb negative.

2.4. Group III.

A more difficult task is to analyze fully different metaphorical correspondents that convey similar messages. The corresponding proverbs have to be analyzed semantically, syntactically and pragmatically. Information related to the pragmatic function of the proverbs is of special

importance, because as Abrahams (1987: 181) asserts: “proverbs are difficult to define by external characteristics, but they are immediately recognizable when used in proverb context”. With regard to the Anglo- American proverbs, Albanian teachers may rely on the few explanations and of the many citations that the common dictionaries of proverbs provide. With regard to the Albanian proverbs, teachers may count on their personal experiences with proverbs as well as on the experience of the different Albanian communities: mainly the aged (the retired) and the young (the students), because the Albanian proverb collections offer very few clues to the interpretation of their meaning or meanings.

The English proverb: “Appearances are deceitful” is a near equivalent of the Latin proverb: “Decipit frons prima multos” (Tosi, 2000) (Appearances lead many to deception), while the Albanian “Edhe malet me shkëmbinj nga larg të duken të bukura” (Even the rocky mountains look beautiful from the distance) expresses a similar message, but by employing the concrete noun “mountain” instead of the general abstract noun “appearances”. The other Albanian variants of this proverb: “Jashtë djalë Shkodre, mrena rajp lodre” (Judging him by his appearance, he is a Shkodra fellow; judging him by his qualities, he is a drum’s leather) and “Për hije e për t’a pa, lum kush e ka, për të tjera “mjer dera!” When one looks at him/her, he says: “Lucky should be the one who has him/ her”; yet concerning other matters: “Poor him!”), which appear to be descriptions of the seemingly individual experiences, impart an implicit generalizing morale.

2.5. *Sample of research*

The research was organized into two stages. During each stage, 50 pupils of “Martin Camaj School” and 50 others from different schools participating at summer games of Don Bosco Oratorio were asked to accomplish three kinds of tasks: to find proverbs that suit the situations provided by the teacher, make illustrations, and form dialogues. It was only during the second stage that they were introduced to Albanian counterparts to English proverbs that belong to the aforementioned groups.

Task I. Initially, the teacher provided a list of five proverbs: “Time flies”, “Better late, than never”, “Laughs best who laughs last”, “United we stand, divided we fall” “Appearances are deceitful” and then delineated an experience the pupils lived through and asked them to provide the proverb that suited the situation:

Teacher: I have brought a picture of Lake of Shkodra with its surrounding mountains and rivers that flow into it. Look how beautiful the Drini River looks with its fresh and clean. Look at the Taraboshi mountain too. As Fishta said: “It has put on its white cap”. When the snow melts we will see its rocks clearly.

However, do not forget. Last month Drini flooded Ornela’s village and the lake waters flooded the pedestrian walk. Help me express what I mean in my last two sentences by using one of the Proverbs: The pupils picked “Appearances are deceitful” out of the list that they were shown.

They were introduced to three more situations and stories, for which they had to select a proverb out of five other ones. The same subjects during the second stage were introduced to the Albanian corresponding proverbs.

Task II. The second and third tasks were creative. After being introduced to another list of 20 English proverbs, which were chosen on the basis of their comprehensibility, didactic value and rich rhetoric, the pupils were required to pick one proverb to compile dialogues. The following dialogues are sample of what the students wrote and acted.

The first dialogue: Mother: Come and have breakfast.

Son: I have no time. I must run to school.

Mother: *An empty sack cannot stand.*

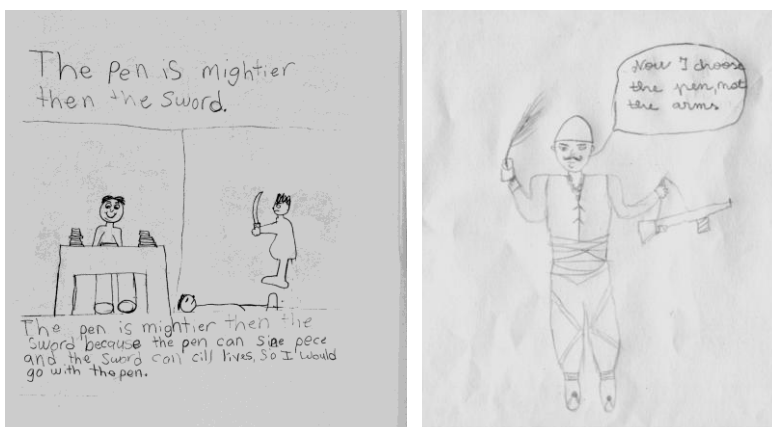
The second dialogue: Brian: You promised to help me with my homework, Ajli.

Ajli: Yes, but I promised to help Andrea and Krisa, too.

I have to write mine, too.

Brian: *A friend to all is a friend to none.*

Task III. The pupils were required to make illustrations. After making their own pictures, the pupils were offered the chance to compare their drawings to those made by American pupils of the 4th form of Milton School, Vermont, Usa. Below, there is the illustration that an American student offered to the proverb “The pen is mightier than the sword” (Mieder, 2000), as well as that of the Albanian one, who was also introduced to the Albanian counterpart: “Me divid e me kalem zaptoi Elbasanë; me armë e jataganë do puthish kalldramë (Elbasani was conquered by pen and pencil, while the ones who tried to conquer it with their weapons had to kiss its cobble-stones).



3. Data analysis

Each pupil submitted three papers, one for every task, divided into two sections that corresponded to the two stages of the research. The first paper consisted of proverbs that suited situations and stories; the second contained dialogues; the third, illustrations.

Every single paper was classified either as successful or not, depending on the pupils' performance of their understanding of the proverbs as well as of their knowledge of English. Spelling mistakes that lead to no comprehension problems did not affect the results. They became part of later discussions with the pupils.

4. Results of Research

All the students were impressed by the idea of considering proverbs in their English classes. During the first stage, when presented to explained English proverbs their achievements depended on the comprehensibility of the proverbs as well as on the tasks assigned, to identify proverbs that suit stories and situations, draw pictures, or illustrate the meaning of proverbs by making dialogues, named task I, task II and task III, respectively, as shown below:

Table 2. The first-stage results based on 3 tasks with the three proverb groups

	Task	Task II	Task III	Average
Group I	81%	54%	65%	66.6
Group II	76%	43%	56%	58.3
Group III	67%	34%	51%	52
Average	74.6	45	57.3	58.96

During the second stage, the students were introduced to the Albanian counterparts, too. The results, depended on the tasks again, but obviously improved with regard to all tasks.

Table 3. The second-stage results based on 3 tasks with the three proverb groups

	Task I	Task II	Task III	Average
Group I	96%	65%	87%	82.6%
Group II	94%	57%	83%	78%
Group III	81%	53%	76%	70%
Average	90.3%	58.3%	82%	76.86 %

The results depend on the groups of proverbs, as well as on the tasks. In both of the stages, the students had the highest percentage of attainment in identifying the proverbs that suit situations and stories (74.6 and 90.3) and the lowest percentage in forming dialogues (45 and 58.3). The percentage of the latter task in the first stage is below 50%.

Concerning the groups of the proverbs, the highest outcomes are related to the proverbs that correspond in the two languages (66.6 and 68.6), while the lowest ones are related to the proverbs that are metaphorically different.

5. Discussion

The Albanian students enjoyed having English and Albanian proverbs presented in class. They were involved in the activities willingly and had good results. However, their achievements are conditioned by the metaphorical complexity of proverbs, especially in case of proverbs that convey the same message via different metaphors in the two languages. The results are more promising with proverbs of group I and II, because the wording is either corresponding or one of the equivalents is transparent.

All the results of the second stage are higher. The average improvement of 17.9% is effected by the introduction of the Albanian equivalent proverb. With regard to the accomplishment of task I, the rise ranks from 15% with proverbs of group I, to 18% and 24 % with the proverbs of group II and III, respectively. Concerning task II, the percentage span starts with 11%, continues with 14%, to concludes with 19%.

The percentage of improvement mounts higher with task III. The rise of 22% with proverbs of group I, reaches the climax of 27% with those of group II, and slopes down no lower than to 25% with proverbs of group III.

The escalation of the percentage from group to group during the second stage evidences that the presentation of the native language equivalents improves the pupils' performance. The highest percentage of growth by 27% pertains to group II, task III, because group II consists of proverbs that are apothemic, and task III, drawing, requires no foreign language skills. However, this task is worth including because it facilitates pupils' correct understanding and nourishes their wish to express themselves through pictures.

6. Conclusions

Teachers of English can present English and Albanian proverbs in their classes after having established the degree of the proverb correspondence on the basis of their wording, structure and message conveyed.

The students will make greater efforts to understand English proverbs, if the introduction of the explained English variants precedes the presentation of the Albanian counterparts.

The comparative presentation of the proverbs in the two languages is a good incentive to Albanian pupils to motivate them to learn not only about the English language and culture, but also to get engaged in creative activities.

The presentation of the Albanian corresponding proverbs affects the pupils' learning outcomes in English depending on the tasks assigned.

The successful accomplishment of task I, which requires students to suit situations to proverbs, contributes to the improvement of their comprehension skills.

The better accomplishment of task II, which requires students to make dialogues and act them, reinforces their writing, reading, and speaking skills.

The highest degree of improvement, evidenced in the completion of task III, which consisted in making drawings, affect their expressive skills very positively.

The pupils' enthusiasm at realizing the Albanian paremiological lore is rich enough to enable them to draw comparisons adds on the sustainability of their knowledge and performance.

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