

THE CREATIVE USE OF PROVERBS IN STORY-WRITING IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS FOREIGN LANGUAGE¹

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ABSTRACT

The study addressing the creative use of proverbs in story-writing in teaching English as foreign language consists of five sections. In the first section I review the incorporation of Anglo-American proverbs into the language classroom. The second section comments briefly upon my experience in teaching courses on *Anglo-American Proverbs* and *Proverbs in an American Cultural Context* in various Hungarian universities and colleges. The third section addresses two of my books treating Anglo-American proverbs. The fourth section discusses how proverbs are used in tales, fables, and short stories. Last but not least, section 5 demonstrates activities in which tales, fables and stories, along with proverbs can be incorporated into the language classroom.

KEYWORDS

proverb, exercise, book, textbook, Anglo-American, tale, fable, creativity

1. INCORPORATION OF ANGLO-AMERICAN PROVERBS INTO THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

Anglo-American Proverbs can be an especially effective pedagogical medium for the teacher of American English for many reasons. First of all, proverbs are an important part of the American cultural heritage. The person who does not acquire competence in using proverbs will be limited in conversation; will have difficulty comprehending a wide variety of media – printed matter, radio, television, songs, advertisements, comics and cartoons – and will not understand anti-proverbs, which presuppose a familiarity with a stock proverb. Furthermore, proverbs are ideally suited to pedagogical purposes because they are easy to learn. Proverbs are relatively pithy, and often contain rhyme or word-repetition which facilitate their recall (e.g., *East or West, home is best; Easy come, easy go; Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise*). Alliteration also makes them quite easy to memorize (e.g., *Money makes the man; Willful waste makes woeful want; Live and let live*). Proverbs contain frequently-used vocabulary and exemplify the entire gamut of grammatical and syntactic structures.

The best-known Anglo-American proverbs should definitely play an important role in the teaching of American English, American civilization, and American literature. Anyone wishing to communicate or read in American English should have an active knowledge of the most popular American proverbs. In this section I will concentrate briefly on my courses on Anglo-American proverbs and on how proverbs can be connected within the frame of an English

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language class. I will comment upon my experience in teaching courses on *Anglo-American Proverbs* and *Proverbs in an American Cultural Context* in three Hungarian universities and one college (Janus Pannonius Egyetem, or JPTE [Pécs]; Eötvös Lóránd Egyetem, or ELTE [Budapest]; University of Veszprém [Veszprém]; Illyés Gyula Teacher's Training College [Szekszárd]) in 1993–2000.

In spite of the fact that scholars of different language backgrounds have frequently proposed incorporating proverbs in second-language education³, foreign language teachers seldom use proverbs in the classroom. Even if proverbs are involved in teaching, they are usually introduced unsystematically and randomly selected from dictionaries that contain obsolete proverbs and miss many new ones. Teachers often insert proverbs as a time-filler at the end of the lesson, and merely ask their students to memorize these expressions without integrating them into context. Such methods ignore the fact that it is essential to learn when and how to apply a proverb appropriately. My experience in over thirty years as a teacher of English as a second language in Hungary, Slovakia and Poland has shown that even university or college students enter the classroom with almost no prior knowledge of the proverbs current in the language they are studying. Thus, in 1993, in the introductory lesson of my first course on Anglo-American proverbs at Janus Pannonius University (Department of English, Pécs) I asked my students to write down seven English or American proverbs. To my great surprise, half of them (they were mainly 4th- and 5th-year students majoring in English) could not write the required number of proverbs; moreover, seven students were unable to list even a single proverb.

2. THE COURSES ON ANGLO-AMERICAN PROVERBS IN AN AMERICAN CULTURAL CONTEXT

My courses on Anglo-American Proverbs and Proverbs in an American Cultural Context in Hungarian colleges and universities (Janus Pannonius University [Pécs], ELTE [Budapest], Illyés Gyula Teacher's Training College [Szekszárd], University of Veszprém) have been designed to study American thought, life, and philosophy through proverbs. The syllabi have covered the following topics, among others:

- What is the proverb?;
- The most powerful markers of proverbiality (metaphor, word-repetition, rhyme, alliteration, etc.);
- What constitutes a real American proverb?;
- The role of proverbs in modern American society;
- Proverbs about speech;
- Proverbs about love;
- Medical, legal, and weather proverbs;
- Contradictory proverbs;
- Proverbs in advertisements, comics, cartoons, popular songs, and poems;
- Wellerisms;
- Proverb parodies;
- Proverbs in prose literature;
- Proverbs in the language classroom;
- The use of proverbs in psychological testing.

³ See bibliography in Tóthné Litovkina [5].

3. MY BOOKS ON ANGLO-AMERICAN PROVERBS AND TALES

In this section I will focus on two of my books treating Anglo-American proverbs and tales, a collection of tales, fables and stories, “Once upon a Proverb: Old and New Tales Shaped by Proverbs”⁴ and “Teaching Proverbs and Anti-Proverbs”⁵.

“Once upon a Proverb: Old and New Tales Shaped by Proverbs”

The book “Once upon a Proverb: Old and New Tales Shaped by Proverbs”⁶ consists of two parts. In the first part, *Part I: Tales, Fables and Stories Illustrated by Proverbs*⁷, one will find the most enjoyable reading materials created by the students attending my course on Anglo-American proverbs. Along with world famous classic fairy tales and fables (e.g., “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs”, “Cinderella”, “Little Red Riding Hood”, “The Elves and the Shoemaker”, and many others) reshaped with proverbs, the book contains some absolutely new stories that my students have shaped by using proverbs. The traditional tales chosen by the students are, by and large, so well known that their status in Western culture has become nearly proverbial. Such tales as “Snow White” (which appears in 5 versions in the book⁸), “Cinderella” (2 versions⁹), “Little Red Riding Hood (2 versions¹⁰), “The Shoemaker and the Elves” (2 versions¹¹), and “The Princess and the Frog”¹² and “Hansel and Gretel”¹³ (1 version each) are known throughout the world through the collection of the Brothers Grimm, which was first published in 1812 and achieved its best-known form in the seventh edition of 1857. The students who chose to adapt “Cinderella” relied on versions of the story descended from the French adaptor Charles Perrault (1697). “The Ugly Duckling”¹⁴ (1 version) has no history in folk tradition; rather, it was penned by comes from Hans Christian Andersen in 1843. “Jack and the Beanstalk”¹⁵ is the most famous English folktale, appearing in chapbooks dating back to the eighteenth century and especially famous through its the storybook version of Joseph Jacobs (1890). Almost all of these tales have also been translated into other artistic forms. “Cinderella” and “Hansel and Gretel,” respectively, have become the subjects of operas by Rossini and Humperdinck, and “The Ugly Duckling” and “Cinderella” have been adapted into Broadway musicals. Animated films have been especially influential in spreading the tales to contemporary audiences. The Walt Disney studios, for example, has produced extremely popular animated versions of “Snow White,” “Cinderella,” and “Jack and the Beanstalk.”

The fables chosen by the students are also part and parcel of the European cultural environment. Such tales as “The Fox and the Crow”¹⁶ and “The Hare and the Tortoise”¹⁷ trace their history to Greek and Latin versions dating back as far as 2000 years. These tales are also well known in oral versions collected by folklorists throughout Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Most of these fables have been associated with a mysterious blind slave named Aesop,

⁴ See T. Litovkina [4].

⁵ See T. Litovkina [5].

⁶ See T. Litovkina [4].

⁷ T. Litovkina [4: 17–92].

⁸ T. Litovkina [4: 18–29].

⁹ T. Litovkina [4: 35–41].

¹⁰ T. Litovkina [4: 41–44].

¹¹ T. Litovkina [4: 30–35].

¹² T. Litovkina [4: 76–77].

¹³ T. Litovkina [4: 80–82].

¹⁴ T. Litovkina [4: 61–62].

¹⁵ T. Litovkina [4: 70–72].

¹⁶ T. Litovkina [4: 47–48].

¹⁷ T. Litovkina [4: 51–52].

said to live in Greece 2500 years ago. Scholars have long debated over how many, if any, of the fables can be attributed to Aesop, and most question whether such a figure ever existed, because the tales attributed to him have long been widely dispersed throughout the oral cultures not only of Europe, but also of South and East Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa.

Two of the students' tales are adapted from classics of children's literature. "How the Camel Got Its Hump"¹⁸ is a retelling from the "Just So Stories" (1902) of Rudyard Kipling, an author of British ancestry born in India. "Eeyore's Birthday Present"¹⁹ is based on an episode in the book, "Winnie-the-Pooh" (1925), by English author A.A. Milne; Milne's work, like many of the folktales earlier discussed, has become enormously popular in recent years as a result of Disney cartoon treatments.

The second part of the book, *Part II: Proverbs Explained*²⁰, contains all the proverbs used (192) in the tales, fables, and stories, together with their meanings. The *Selected Bibliography* is given at the end of the book²¹.

"Teaching Proverbs and Anti-Proverbs"

The textbook "*Teaching Proverbs and Anti-Proverbs*"²² consists of the Introduction, two parts, and Reference. In the introduction at first I discuss the topics of contradictory proverbs and people's doubts in the truthfulness of proverbs, then I review the background of anti-proverb research and terminology; and I address the proverbs most frequently parodied, as well as internationally spread anti-proverbs. Furthermore, I explore different mechanisms of proverb variation and main topics emerging in proverb alterations. In the first part of the book one will find seven sections. In the first section I discuss ways in which Anglo-American proverbs can be used in the language classroom, I also focus on some of my studies on this topic, and I explore the value of incorporating Anglo-American proverbs into language-teaching situations, and I offer various exercises which can be used in order to facilitate and promote conversational and writing skills. The second section comments briefly upon my experience in teaching courses on *Anglo-American Proverbs* and *Proverbs in an American Cultural Context* in various Hungarian universities and colleges. The focus of the third section is on four of my books on the theme under consideration. The fourth section treats proverb collections and proverbs to be used in the language classroom, and the fifth section demonstrates activities in which anti-proverbs can be incorporated into the language classroom. The last two sections address tales, fables and stories. While the sixth section discusses proverbs in tales, fables and stories, the seventh section addresses various types of activities with the help of which tales, fables and stories, along with proverbs could be incorporated into the language classroom. The second part of the book contains nine appendices, which are followed by a list of bibliographical data. Appendix 9 (pp. 238-246) includes a few tales written by the students attending my courses on *Anglo-American Proverbs* and *Proverbs in an American Cultural Context*

¹⁸ T. Litovkina [4: 90–92].

¹⁹ T. Litovkina [4: 48–49].

²⁰ T. Litovkina [4: 93–104].

²¹ T. Litovkina [4: 105–106].

²² See T. Litovkina [5].

4. PROVERBS IN TALES, FABLES, AND SHORT STORIES

This section discusses how proverbs are used in tales, fables and stories. Proverbs and traditional tales interact and complement each other in many ways. Such common American proverbs as *If at first you don't succeed, try, try again* and *The third time's the charm* reflect one of the most common structural traits of folktales: its series of threefold repetitions, through which the hero, after failing twice, finally achieves his goal. In English and Anglo-American fairy tales, the most common villain is a giant: the proverb, *The bigger they come, the harder they fall*, aptly sums up what becomes of the giant when the boy Jack chops down the beanstalk causing his much larger opponent to plunge from the sky and die. At least one of the proverbs in this collection can be traced directly to a fairy tale: *You have to kiss a lot of toads before you meet a handsome prince* refers to the famous Grimm fairy tale, "The Frog Prince." Certain features of fairy tale diction have entered the realm of proverbial. *Once upon a time* and *They lived happily ever after*, the typical opening and closing phrases of English-language fairy tales, have themselves attained the status of proverbs, applied daily in everyday conversation to situations in which life resembles a fairy tale or to comment on someone who is not being realistic, or *Living in a fairy tale world*. Similarly, fables and proverbs have gone hand in hand since ancient times.

It is typical to end a fable with a proverbial moral: for example, Aesop's fable "The Hare and the Tortoise" (see below) is usually followed by the proverb, *Slow and steady wins the race*:

Aesop: *The Hare and the Tortoise*

A Hare was one day making fun of a Tortoise for being so slow upon his feet. "Wait a bit," said the Tortoise; "I'll run a race with you, and I'll wager that I win." "Oh, well," replied the Hare, who was much amused at the idea, "let's try and see"; and it was soon agreed that the fox should set a course for them, and be the judge. When the time came both started off together, but the Hare was soon so far ahead that he thought he might as well have a rest: so down he lay and fell fast asleep. Meanwhile the Tortoise kept plodding on, and in time reached the goal. At last the Hare woke up with a start, and dashed on at his fastest, but only to find that the Tortoise had already won the race.²³

Sometimes the action of the fable itself gives rise to a proverb or proverbial phrase, as in the case of "The Fox and the Grapes" by Aesop: the fox, unable to reach the grapes, must go hungry. In his bitterness, the fox proclaims that the grapes were sour anyway.

Aesop: *The Fox and the Grapes*

ONE hot summer's day a Fox was strolling through an orchard till he came to a bunch of Grapes just ripening on a vine which had been trained over a lofty branch. "Just the things to quench my thirst," quoth he. Drawing back a few paces, he took a run and a jump, and just missed the bunch. Turning round again with a One, Two, Three, he jumped up, but with no greater success. Again and again he tried after the tempting morsel, but at last had to give it up, and walked away with his nose in the air, saying: "I am sure they are sour."

"IT IS EASY TO DESPISE WHAT YOU CANNOT GET."²⁴

Today, the proverbial phrase *Sour grapes* is used by millions of Americans, most of whom are not aware of the fable at the root of the expression.

²³ Aesop [1: 92, 95].

²⁴ <http://www.bartleby.com/17/1/31.html> (downloaded 10 June, 2015).

Aesop's fables, which contain many proverbs, are familiar to all of us. Being translated to many languages, the fables have helped to spread proverbs.

A proverb is often used to sum up the fable or tale, e.g., as in Ruth Stotter's tale anthology *Golden Axe*²⁵. In some modern fables the moral of the fable is framed as a parodied proverb²⁶.

5. Incorporation of Tales, Fables and Stories into the Language Classroom

Students might be asked to read folktales, fairy tales, or the fables of Aesop, La Fontaine, James Thurber, or Arnold Lobel and then to choose the proverbs that would make the most appropriate endings for these stories. I sometimes assign this kind of exercise when I want to test students' knowledge of proverbs and their ability to use appropriate proverbs in a context.

But what really excites and inspires my students is using proverbs to write their own stories or to rewrite well-known traditional tales. These stimulating exercises account for the genesis of the present book. Although shaping stories with proverbs is not new at all²⁷, the incorporating of this exercise into my teaching practice was inspired by one of the students attending my course on Anglo-American proverbs. Elvira Nagy (1995, Janus Pannonius University) was in a cheerful and playful mood when she used the Anglo-American proverbs that I had assigned my class to rewrite one of the most popular tales in the world, "Little Red Riding Hood." As she read her proverb tale aloud at the next class meeting, the students responded bursts of laughter.²⁸

All the students in my group found this exercise extremely exciting and volunteered to create similar rewritings of well-known fables or fairy tales, or to create their own stories, for our next class meeting. It goes without saying that this class was just fantastic. And I can't agree more with Ruth Stotter's remark that "...stories are what is in that pot of gold at the end of the rainbow"²⁹. The proverbs that stud my students' stories might even be considered the source of much of what glitters in that pot of gold. It is my wish that the magic of storytelling, combined with proverbial wisdom, could enter every classroom to transform attitudes, enhance the atmosphere, and intensify students' excitement and creativity in ways similar to those that I have witnessed in my own classes.

Since 1995 the use of proverbs to shape new stories or reshape classic fairy tales and fables has become one of the favorite activities of students attending my course on Anglo-American proverbs. If the number of students in a seminar group is larger than 15, we don't have time to read all the stories out loud; instead we post them on the walls or blackboard, thus allowing everyone to read them during the break. After students have created their stories, they sometimes replace the proverbs with blanks, provide a list of proverbs, and then ask their peers to refer to the list and insert the appropriate proverbs into the blanks in the text. Students sometimes convert this exercise into a contest: the one who inserts all the proverbs into all the stories in the shortest period of time wins. The students also become enthusiastic when discussing different versions of the same tale. What stories could be used most effectively and efficiently? My experience has shown that any story will do and that it is best to trust the students' choice, although the following classic tales are without any doubt among the ones most frequently reshaped with proverbs: "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs", "Cinderella", "Little Red Riding Hood", "The Elves and the Shoemaker"³⁰

²⁵ See Stotter [7].

²⁶ See T. Litovkina [5: 92-104].

²⁷ See Peter Curran's book "Proverbs in Action" [2], which contains stories written with the help of proverbs

²⁸ The tale was first published in Tóthné Litovkina [9: 155–156].

²⁹ Stotter [7: 24].

³⁰ See also my students' tales, fables and stories illustrated by proverbs in T. Litovkina [4: 17–92].

By transforming their favorite tales, fables, or stories in their own way with the help of proverbs, students acquire experience in creative writing; they can use proverbs in innovative ways and change their favorite stories according to their current interests, beliefs, and imagination. Rewriting existing stories or writing their own stories with the help of proverbs will work with any age level, provided a teacher supplies the students with a stock of appropriately chosen proverbs.

Students might be asked to read folktales, fairy tales, or the fables of Aesop, La Fontaine, James Thurber, or Arnold Lobel and then to choose the proverbs that would make the most appropriate endings for these stories³¹. I sometimes assign this kind of exercise when I want to test students' knowledge of proverbs and their ability to use appropriate proverbs in a context³².

Consider as an example Aesop's fable, "The Lion and the Hare"³³:

A lion found a Hare sleeping in her form, and was just going to devour her when he caught sight of a passing stag. Dropping the Hare, he at once made for the bigger game; but finding, after a long chase, that he could not overtake the stag, he abandoned the attempt and came back for the Hare. When he reached the spot, however, he found she was nowhere to be seen, and he had to go without his dinner. "It serves me right," he said; "I should have been content with what I had got, instead of hankering after a better prize." (One proverb suitable for ending this fable is *A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.*)

Students might be also encouraged to sum up fable, tales or stories by using a proper proverb. Let us have a look at the following exercise: Sum up the fable below by using a proper proverb. Proverbs to be used: *A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother. Children and fools speak the truth. Children are poor men's riches. Father knows best. An apple never falls far from the tree. Little children step on your toes; big children step on your heart. Mother knows best. When children stand quiet, they have done some harm.*

Arnold Lobel: *The Bad Kangaroo*

There was a small Kangaroo who was bad in school. He put thumbtacks on the teacher's chair. He threw spitballs across the classroom. He sat off firecrackers in the lavatory and spread glue on the doorknobs.

"Your behavior is impossible!" said the school principal. "I am going to see your parents. I will tell them what a problem you are!"

The principal went to visit Mr. and Mrs. Kangaroo. He sat down in a living-room chair.

"Ouch!" cried the principal. "There is a thumbtack in this chair!"

"Yes, I know," said Mr. Kangaroo. "I enjoy putting thumbtacks in chairs."

A spitball hit the principal on his nose.

"Forgive me," said Mrs. Kangaroo, "but I can never resist throwing those things."

There was a loud booming sound from the bathroom.

"Keep calm," said Mr. Kangaroo to the principal. "The firecrackers that we keep in the medicine chest have just exploded. We love the noise."

The principal rushed for the front door. In an instant he was stuck to the doorknob.

³¹ See Tóthné Litovkina [9]; Tóthné Litovkina [10]; T. Litovkina [3].

³² See tests in T. Litovkina [3].

³³ Aesop [1: 146].

“Pull hard,” said Mrs. Kangaroo. “There are little globs of glue on all of our door-knobs.”

The principal pulled himself free. He dashed out of the house and ran off down the street.

“Such a nice person,” said Mr. Kangaroo. “I wonder why he left so quickly.”

“No doubt he had another appointment,” said Mrs. Kangaroo. “Never mind, supper is ready.”

Mr. and Mrs. Kangaroo and their son enjoyed their evening meal. After the dessert, they all threw spitballs at each other across the dining-room table.³⁴

Another exciting task for the students might be as follows: After reading the fable below, write a narrative, fable or tale to illustrate the proverbs of this unit. Let me illustrate this task by two fables by James Thurber:

James Thurber: *The Hen Party*

All the hens came to Lady Buff Orpington’s tea party and as usual, Minnie Minorca was the last to arrive, for, as usual, she had spent the day with her psychiatrist, her internist, and her beak, comb, and gizzard specialist. “I’m not long for this barnyard,” she told the other hens. “What do you suppose I’ve got *now*?” She went about the room, giving all the hens a peck except her hostess, who pecked her, without affection.

“I’ve got blue comb,” Minnie went on.

A child had fallen upon the gathering, as it always did when Minnie Minorca began reciting her complains, old and new, real and hysterical. “Dr. Leghorn found out today that I am edentulous, and he told me so,” said Minnie, triumphantly. “Of course I’ve always had chronic coryza, Newcastle disease, and laryngotrachetis.”

“Minnie has so many pains she has given each of us one,” said Lady Buff Orpington coldly. “Isn’t that nice?”

“I love you girls,” said Minnie, “and I love to share my troubles with you. You’re such good listeners. I was telling my psychiatrist about my new ailments, including incipient dry feather, and he suddenly blurted out some of the things he has been keeping from me all these years. He said I have galloping aggression, inflamed ego, and too much gall.”

“Now there’s a psychiatrist who knows what he’s talking about,” said Miss Brahma, and she tried to talk to her hostess about the weather, and the other hens tried to talk to one another, but Minnie Minorca kept on telling how charged with punishments her scroll was. As she rambled on, describing in detail the attack of scale foot she had had in Cadawcutt, Connecticut, one of the hens whispered, “I’ve just put some sleeping pills in her teacup.”

“You must have some more tea,” cried Lady Buff Orpington, as she refilled Minnie’s cup, and all her guest repeated, “You must have some more tea,” and Minnie Minorca, delighted to be the center of attention and, as she thought, concern, hastily drank the slugged tea. After she had passed out, one of the hens suggested that they wring her neck while the wringing was good. “We could say she broke her neck trying to see what was the matter with her tail,” the conspirator suggested.

Lady Buff Orpington sighed and said, “We’ll draw lots to see who wrings her neck at the next party someone gives. Now let’s go out and take a dust bath and leave old Fuss and Fevers to her nightmares.” And the hostess and her guests went into the road, leaving Min-

³⁴ Lobel [6: 28].

nie Minorca to dream of a brand new ailment, called Minneties, or Mrs. Minorca's disease.

Moral: *Misery's love of company oft goeth unrequited.*³⁵

James Thurber: *The Father and His Daughter*

A little girl was given so many picture books on her seventh birthday that her father, who should have run his office and let her mother run the home, thought his daughter should give one or two of her books to a little neighbor boy named Robert, who had dropped in, more by design than by chance.

Now, taking books, or anything else, from a little girl is like taking arms from an Arab, or candy from a baby, but the father of the little girl had his way and Robert got two of her books. "After all, that leaves you with nine," said the father, who thought he was a philosopher and a child psychologist, and couldn't shut his big fatuous mouth on the subject.

A few weeks later, the father went to his library to look up "father" in the Oxford English Dictionary, to feast his eyes on the praise of fatherhood through the centuries, but he couldn't find volume F-G, and then he discovered that three others were missing, too – A-B, L-M, and V-Z. He began a probe of his household, and soon learned what had become of the four missing volumes.

"A man came to the door this morning," said the little daughter, and he didn't know how to get from here to Torrington, or from Torrington to Winsted, and he was a nice man, much nicer than Robert, and so I gave him four of your books. After all, there are thirteen volumes in the Oxford English Dictionary, and that leaves you nine."

Moral: *This truth has been known from here to Menander: what's sauce for the gosling's not sauce for the gander.*³⁶

But what really excites and inspires my students is using proverbs to write their own stories or to rewrite well-known traditional tales. These stimulating exercises account for the genesis of the present book. Although shaping stories with proverbs is not new at all, the incorporating of this exercise into my teaching practice was inspired by one of the students attending my course on Anglo-American proverbs. Elvira Nagy (1995, Janus Pannonius University) was in a cheerful and playful mood when she used the Anglo-American proverbs that I had assigned my class to rewrite one of the most popular tales in the world, "Little Red Riding Hood." As she read her proverb tale aloud at the next class meeting, the students responded bursts of laughter.³⁷

All the students in my group found this exercise extremely exciting and volunteered to create similar rewritings of well-known fables or fairy tales, or to create their own stories, for our next class meeting. Let us read another version of *Little Red Riding Hood*:

Orsolya Jánosik: *Little Red Riding Hood II*

Once upon a time Little Red Riding Hood was told by her mother that it was high time to go and see Grandmother. Little Red Riding Hood said *better late than never*, and off she went. But before she left her parents, her mother gave her a large basket full of food and drink, and she said: *eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die*. But she didn't put all the

³⁵ Thurber [8: 70–73].

³⁶ Thurber [8: 51–53].

³⁷ The tale was first published in Tóthné Litovkina [9: 155–156].

eggs she wanted to send to Grandma into the basket since she remembered the proverb: *don't put all your eggs in one basket*.

On her way to Grandma's Little Red Riding Hood met the wolf (as she always did and always will). The wolf was extremely hungry. When he saw that Little Red Riding Hood was coming towards him with a basket full of foods, he was really happy to see her, and he said to himself: "*Carpe diem! – seize the day!*" So he started to beg for some food. Little Red Riding Hood was a very kind-hearted little girl so she took pity on him, and she gave a sandwich to him. The wolf tasted it and he said: "Yuck! It tastes awful!" This, of course, hurt Little Red Riding Hood very much, so she answered: *don't look a gift horse in the mouth*, besides *beggars can't be choosers* – and she made a sudden movement with her arm, in true indignation. But the wolf said, reproachfully: "*There is no accounting for taste!*" Meanwhile, because of this movement the milk poured out from the bottle. It made Little Red Riding Hood very sad, so she started to cry. The wolf wanted to comfort her, so he quoted the proverb: "*Don't cry over spilt milk, dear.*" When the girl calmed down she realized how late it was and she got up with the exclamation: "*Time is money. I've got to go, but you can come with me, wolf.*" But the wolf did not want to accompany her since *oil and water don't mix*. So they parted at the next cross-road. But since the wolf was very hungry he stole a chicken sandwich from the basket, and he said to himself: "*A fool and his money are soon parted.*" When Little Red Riding Hood realized that a sandwich had been stolen, she didn't get angry with the wolf. But she thought: "Ah well, *experience is the best teacher.*" And she continued on her way.

Soon she arrived at Grandma's house. Grandma, who was by the way a mean, ugly old woman, wasn't too happy to see her grandchild so she said to Little Red Riding Hood: "Oh, here you are again: *a bad penny always turns up.*" But still, she ate and drank everything that was in the basket.³⁸

It goes without saying that this class was just fantastic. And I can't agree more with Ruth Stotter's remark that "...stories are what is in that pot of gold at the end of the rainbow"³⁹. The proverbs that stud my students' stories might even be considered the source of much of what glitters in that pot of gold. It is my wish that the magic of storytelling, combined with proverbial wisdom, could enter every classroom to transform attitudes, enhance the atmosphere, and intensify students' excitement and creativity in ways similar to those that I have witnessed in my own classes.

Since 1995 the use of proverbs to shape new stories or reshape classic fairy tales and fables has become one of the favorite activities of students attending my course on Anglo-American proverbs. If the number of students in a seminar group is larger than 15, we don't have time to read all the stories out loud; instead we post them on the walls or blackboard, thus allowing everyone to read them during the break. After students have created their stories, they sometimes replace the proverbs with blanks, provide a list of proverbs, and then ask their peers to refer to the list and insert the appropriate proverbs into the blanks in the text. Students sometimes convert this exercise into a contest: the one who inserts all the proverbs into all the stories in the shortest period of time wins. The students also become enthusiastic when discussing different versions of the same tale. What stories could be used most effectively and efficiently? My experience has shown that any story will do and that it is best to trust the students' choice, although the following classic tales are without any doubt among the ones most frequently

³⁸ The tale was first published in T. Litovkina [4: 43-44].

³⁹ Stotter [7: 24].

reshaped with proverbs: “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs”, “Cinderella”, “Little Red Riding Hood”, “The Elves and the Shoemaker”⁴⁰

By transforming their favorite tales, fables, or stories in their own way with the help of proverbs, students acquire experience in creative writing; they can use proverbs in innovative ways and change their favorite stories according to their current interests, beliefs, and imagination. Rewriting existing stories or writing their own stories with the help of proverbs will work with any age level, provided a teacher supplies the students with a stock of appropriately chosen proverbs.

SUMMARY

In the first section of the study I reviewed the incorporation of Anglo-American proverbs into the language classroom. The second section commented briefly upon my experience in teaching courses on *Anglo-American Proverbs* and *Proverbs in an American Cultural Context* in various Hungarian universities and colleges. The third section addressed two of my books treating Anglo-American proverbs and tales. The fourth section discussed how proverbs are used in tales, fables, and short stories. Last but not least, section 5 demonstrated activities in which tales, fables and stories, along with proverbs can be incorporated into the language classroom.

It is hoped that my study will encourage the creative use of proverbs in story-writing in the language classroom, and that teachers will use some of suggestions offered here, as well as find new ways to include proverbs in their curricula. Although this study focuses on the introduction of Anglo-American proverbs into second-language education, the main ideas expressed above could be easily transferred to other languages and cultures as well.

APPENDIX⁴¹

Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs I by Anita Németh

Once upon a time there lived a beautiful princess, the daughter of the king. After her mother's death she got an ill-willed stepmother who nevertheless was physically attractive in her own way. This queen had a magic mirror which was famous for telling the truth. She often had conversations with her mirror. The queen asked:

“Mirror, mirror on the wall,
Who's the fairest one of all?”

Then the mirror answered:

“You are nice my queen,
But Snow White is nicer still.
Your *beauty is only skin deep*,
But *don't cry over spilt milk*.”

After this conversation the queen's real self was revealed. She boiled over with rage and screamed at the mirror,

“*If you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything.*
Cursed be the master who made you, damned mirror!”

⁴⁰ See also my students' tales, fables and stories illustrated by proverbs in T. Litovkina [4: 17–92].

⁴¹ The tales in the Appendix were first published in T. Litovkina [4: 18–27].

The mirror quietly answered,
“Poets are born, not made.”

One day the vicious stepmother ordered the royal huntsman to kill poor Snow White. The huntsman was very talented. He could kill two birds with one stone, and his motto was, *“A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.”*

In spite of this, he was a kind person, so he took pity on Snow White and warned her to run away into the forest. And she did so.

As she was wandering in the forest, she found a little cottage. When she entered the house, she saw seven little beds and became puzzled; she could not imagine whose they could be. But when she glanced at a dead cat in the corner, she forced herself to calm down because she remembered that *curiosity killed the cat*. Then she rearranged the beds so that she could lie down and soon she fell asleep. When she woke up, she saw seven dwarfs who looked at her inquiringly. First the dwarfs behaved in a hostile way. Snow White heard such remarks as *“Seven is company, but eight is a crowd”* or *“Too many cooks spoil the broth.”* But when the dwarfs saw how beautiful and kind she was, they changed their minds and thought, *“The more the merrier.”*

The dwarfs told Snow White all about themselves. She got to know that they worked in a mine nearby and that in the course of their work they had soon come to learn that *all that glitters is not gold*. They had been living together over ten years, became fond of each other, and lived up to the spirit of the saying, *“All for one and one for all.”* Concerning their height they told Snow White that they were satisfied with it because they believed that *the bigger they come, the harder they fall*.

Snow White took to the dwarfs at once; she had no prejudice and knew that *comparisons are odious*. In the days that followed Snow White kept the cottage in order. She believed that *“Cleanliness is next to godliness.”* She went to the supermarket and bought a new broom because she was taught that only a *new broom sweeps clean*. She patched up the dwarfs' old garments while singing her favorite song: *“A stitch in time saves nine....”*

As time went by in the castle, the queen's mirror kept on answering her in the same way as before, and the queen started to suspect that the huntsman had deceived her. When her apprehension proved to be true, she decided to take revenge on Snow White. The queen worked out a thorough plan because she insisted on the Court's Privy Councilor's advice that *“If you can't be good, be careful.”*

One day when Snow White was making the dwarfs' dinner, she heard someone knocking on the door. She opened it and saw an old woman there, dressed as a Greek beggar. The old woman offered her an apple, saying: *“An apple a day keeps the doctor away.”* Snow White did not know the saying, *“Beware of Greeks bearing gifts,”* and as she felt pity for the poor woman, she accepted the apple and gave the woman some money in return. Then Snow White broke the apple into two and told the woman to choose one half of it. But the queen—because it was she in disguise—thought: *“You can't teach an old dog new tricks,”* and answered Snow White, *“Beggars can't be choosers, so eat one half you first, my dear child!”*

As soon as Snow White had a bite from the apple she felt terrible, as if *an army was marching on her stomach*. Her last thought was: *“The road to hell is paved with good intentions.”* Then she fainted.

When the dwarfs arrived home they saw poor Snow White lying on the floor. They were distraught because they thought she was dead, so they placed her in a glass coffin.

But then came Prince Charming, slowly approaching on his panting horse. He got the hairless and toothless horse from one of his friends but Prince Charming was not angry about getting such a poor present, because he grew up in the spirit of the idea: *“Never look a gift horse in the mouth.”*

When the prince looked at the weak and haggard Snow White in the coffin, he could not help making a chauvinist remark: “*Frailty, thy name is woman!*”

Prince Charming arrived almost too late; Snow White’s heart was hardly beating. Well, the truth is: “*Nice guys finish last...*” He kissed Snow White’s lips, and she woke up with *cold hands but a warm heart*.

“Be my wife, you beautiful girl!” exclaimed the Prince. But Snow White was very thoughtful and she could not be seduced so easily. She answered, “*Marry in haste, repent at leisure*. Give me some time, dear Prince, to think it over.”

Snow White and Prince Charming said good-bye to the dwarfs and rode away. Unfortunately the horse soon succumbed because the Prince *could lead the horse to water but he could not make him drink*. They had to go on foot but they did not resent it. Soon they got home, got married and lived happily ever after.

Luckily, the moral of the story is not: “*One rotten apple spoils the barrel.*”

Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs II **by Ágnes Kiss (JPTE, 1997-1998, spring term)**

Once upon a time there lived a King and a Queen, who had a baby. But unfortunately the Queen soon died. The King married another woman.

As the baby grew she became more and more beautiful. Since *familiarity breeds contempt*, her stepmother was envious of her. She didn’t know that *beauty is only skin deep*, and besides the Queen was far from being nice. So she ordered the hunter to take Snow White, as she was called, to the woods and kill her so that the girl would not be able to outshine her in beauty. But in this case *a good man was not hard to find*. The hunter felt really sorry for Snow White so he let her go.

She wandered through the wood searching for some place to hide until she arrived at the house of the dwarfs. Well, *misery loves company*. After searching the house and finding the most comfortable corner in it, she fell asleep.

When the seven dwarfs recognized her, although they were quite shocked, she soon became their friend. *The more the merrier*.

But Snow White was in serious danger of her stepmother, because the stepmother was told that Snow White was by now much more beautiful than herself. *Bad news travels fast*. The jealous Queen set off to kill her. *As all roads lead to Rome* she easily found the little house. She thought that *she could catch more flies with honey than with vinegar* so she decided on some tricks. She gave Snow White a poisoned comb that almost killed her, and a very belt that tightened around her and almost suffocated her. But the dwarfs always rescued her. Despite this the Queen *didn’t give up the ship*.

There was more than one way to skin a cat, and so *the bad penny turned up again*. The Queen’s *third try was the charm*. She offered Snow White a poisoned apple. Snow White bit into it and she swallowed—or so everyone thought—and she fell down as if dead. *The dog had his day*.

As the dwarfs carried her coffin toward her grave a prince arrived and admired the beautiful lady. But as *every cloud has a silver lining*, suddenly a dwarf stumbled and the piece of apple came up from Snow White’s throat. She woke up.

Everyone except the Queen was really happy to see Snow White back. Snow White married the Prince and they lived together happily ever after. But *all’s well that ends well*: the envious witch died of jealousy.

Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs III
by Rita Revész (IGYPF, 1996-1997, autumn term)

Long ago, in a faraway kingdom, there lived a lovely young Princess named Snow White. Her stepmother the Queen was cruel and vain. She hated anyone who was more beautiful than she. So she forced the princess to dress in rags and work in the kitchen.

Despite all the hard work, Snow White stayed sweet and gentle, because she thought *every cloud has a silver lining* and *good things come to those who wait*.

One day the Queen asked her magic mirror, “Who is the most beautiful in the world?” And the mirror answered, “You are beautiful, O Queen, but Snow White is the most beautiful in the land.”

The jealous Queen became angry and gave orders to the hunter to kill Snow White. They went to the forest, but the hunter let Snow White run away. Snow White ran on and on. Suddenly she found a little house. Nobody was at home, but she began to tidy up the house. She made the beds too, because *as you make your bed, so must you lie in it*, and fell asleep. The dwarfs, who lived in the house, were amazed to find their house so neat and clean. They were even more amazed when they saw Snow White.

When Snow White told the dwarfs of the Queen’s plan to kill her, they decided that she should stay with them. Next morning before they left, Grumpy said “*Look before you leap!* Don’t let anybody in the house!”

A few minutes later the Queen, who had learned from her mirror that Snow White was still alive, came to the kitchen window, disguised herself as an old woman, and gave an apple to Snow White. She knew that *an apple a day keeps the doctor away*, so she took the apple, took a bite out of it, and fell on the floor.

The dwarfs built her a coffin of glass and gold. One day a handsome Prince came riding through the forest. As soon as he saw Snow White, he fell in love with her, because *love is blind*, and he had always heard that *cold hands, warm heart*. After he kissed her, Snow White sat up, opened her eyes, and smiled. The dwarfs danced. The Prince carried Snow White off to his castle, where they lived happily. If you don’t believe me, just go and ask! But remember that *curiosity killed the cat!*

Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs IV
by Katalin Török (ELTE, 1996-1997, autumn term)

Once upon a time there was a young Princess named Snow White whose mother had died soon after she was born. Snow White's father, the King, married again. His new Queen was a strange woman, tall and nice, but with the powers of a witch. In a secret room at the top of the palace were hidden her Book of Magic Spells, her pot of magic potions, and her magic mirror.

The Queen was quite selfish. She thought she was the most beautiful woman in the world. She didn't know that *beauty is only skin deep*. Every day she looked into her mirror and asked it the same question: "Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the fairest of us all?" And the mirror replied: "You, O Queen, are the fairest of all." Then one day the magic mirror told the proud Queen that Snow White was the fairest in the land. The Queen couldn't accept this fact. She forgot that *comparisons are odious*, and in her rage she sent for one of her huntsmen and told him to take the girl into the forest and kill her. But the hunter couldn't do such a cruel thing. "*Live and let live*," he thought, and told Snow White to hide in the forest. Soon after he left her, Snow White came upon a little cottage among the trees. When she opened the door and looked inside, she saw seven little chairs around the untidy breakfast table. In the room upstairs, she found seven little beds, and as she was rather tired, she lay down. She was still asleep when the seven little dwarfs came home from the gold mine where they worked. They became very angry when they found a stranger in their beds. Snow White woke up and told the dwarfs her sad story. The dwarfs—as they never had enough time to clean their house—agreed on the fact that *a new broom sweeps clean*, so they let the girl stay with them. From that day Snow White became the dwarfs' housekeeper, took care of them and prepared very delicious meals for them, knowing that *the way to a man's heart is through his stomach*. Every day the dwarfs woke up early in the morning and went to work in the mine, because they knew that *early to bed, early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise*.

Soon the wicked Queen learned from the magic mirror that Snow White was still alive. "*If at first you don't succeed, try, try again*"—she thought. Keeping in mind the good advice that *if you can't be good, be careful*, she disguised herself as an old country woman and hurried to the cottage. "I have brought you a lovely red apple, pretty one"—she croaked when she saw Snow White. The apple was really very beautiful and polished, but it contained a deadly poison. Snow White forgot that *all that glitters is not gold*, and she took a bite of the poisoned apple. No sooner had she gulped it down than she fell to the ground. The seven dwarfs wept bitter tears when they came home from the mines and found her. But *murder will out*. "This is the work of the evil Queen," said one of the dwarfs, shaking his head.

The dwarfs were terribly sad, but they kept alive the hope that *time heals all wounds*. They made a glass coffin so that all who would pass that way would see how beautiful Snow White was. As *bad news travels fast*, a lot of people hurried to see the girl's beauty. One day a handsome Prince came riding through the forest. He fell so deeply in love with Snow White that he begged the dwarfs to allow his servants to take her back to his palace. And at last they agreed. Although the Prince warned his servants to be careful as they carried Snow White's coffin, they stumbled on a stone, and the coffin fell down. (*The course of true love never did run smooth!*) But *every cloud has a silver lining*, so when this accident happened, the piece of poisoned apple lodged in Snow White's throat fell from her mouth. She was alive! Overcome with joy, the Prince told Snow White that he loved her with all his heart and that he wanted to marry her as soon as possible. As the girl knew that *a good man is hard to find*, she accepted the proposal.

The seven dwarfs asked the young couple to stay with them in their cottage, but the Prince said: "*A man's home is his castle*," and he carried Snow White away on his white charger. The

little dwarfs were sad to see her go, but “*the show must go on,*” they comforted each other. The next week they danced at Snow White’s wedding. *All’s well that ends well.*

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