

ELŻBIETA GÓRSKA

**The Image of the World in Polish and Arabic Proverbs
as a Contribution to Research in the Field of Comparative
Paremiology – a Preliminary Outline**

Summary

The phrasemes, adages and proverbs which are deep-rooted in the awareness of social groups and whole nations, constitute the best linguistic material for making observations about the way of thinking as well as the image of the world created by the native speakers of a given language. In the present article the author suggests to develop research in the field of comparative (or contrastive) paremiology in the context of Arabic studies in Poland. Assuming that the language in the most obvious way reflects cultural both differences and similarities, she would like to open a debate about information transmitted by means of the language of proverbs and idioms, and a classification which – when it will be applied to a considerably larger number of examples in the future – would enable us to determine the zones of similarity and dissimilarity in the perception and description of the external world represented by various societies. One of the possible ways of classifying expressions of this kind is performed by means of a small sample of thirty proverbs and adages which are popular in Poland and in Arab countries – as a basis of the lexical and semantic analysis and further conclusions of sociolinguistic nature.

Keywords: Arabic / Polish proverbs, comparative / contrastive paremiology, linguistic image of the world

The content of the present article merely outlines the problem which I would be eager to elaborate in a more comprehensive monograph in the future. It is certain that this problem also belongs to the area of interest of the Honourable Professor Ewa Machut-Mendecka, whose outstanding works in the field of Arabic scholarship, which involves both literary and cultural studies, represent invaluable socio- and pragmalinguistic merits

(cf. e.g. “Współcześni Arabowie. Próba typologii psychologicznej” [The contemporary Arab people. An attempt at a psychological typology], 2004 or “Expression of Attitudes and Emotional States in Egyptian Arabic”, 2009). Here I suggest to develop research in the field of comparative (or contrastive) paremiology in the context of Arabic studies in Poland which, in my opinion, constitute an exceptionally rewarding object of study. The latter engages to an equal extent both linguistic skills as well as the knowledge and imagination of the researcher in the interdisciplinary scale – it is another important feature which characterises the Honourable Professor’s scholarly works.

In the most obvious way language reflects cultural differences, and the phrasemes, adages and proverbs which are deep-rooted in the awareness of social groups and whole nations constitute the best material for making observations and analyses of this kind. The Arab society is not an exception in this context, which is confirmed by M.M. Dziekan: “For the Arab people [proverbs] until today constitute a significant element of the system of inter-human communication both in the literary language as in the dialects”¹, and “the manifestations of paremiological creativity have accompanied the Arab culture since its very beginnings and they were appreciated very early on by the Arabs themselves”². Arabic literature possesses an immensely comprehensive collection of expressions of this kind, which were collected since the medieval period (9th–12th c.) in the written form and developed by both Arab and European specialists³. However, researchers concentrate upon above all the origins of the proverbs and their interpretation in the context of the native language also by carefully analysing their syntactic as well as semantic and stylistic aspects, with special reference to the figures of speech that are applied there⁴ whereas the research in the field of comparative paremiology which extracts from the linguistic material contained in the proverbs the way of representing reality by the societies of differing cultural backgrounds still does not enjoy popularity and it remains on the margin of the interests of Arabic scholars. As of today, this work is performed in practice by translators who apply in their target languages the pragmatic equivalents of the proverbs of the source language and thus bring the reader at least a little closer to the understanding of the way the users of the language of the original perceive the world. It is also difficult to overestimate the role of the authors of collections and the bilingual or multilingual dictionaries where even a simple juxtaposition and translation of a version provides an inspiring material for inference of a cognitive nature (e.g. Józef Bielawski, Franciszek Machalski, Edward Tryjarski, *W oazie i na stepie. Myśli muzułmańskiego Wschodu*, 1967; *The Adornment of Speech: A Dictionary of English and Arabic Proverbs*, 1987; Mohammed Ben Cheneb, *Proverbes de l’Algerie et du Maghreb*, 2003; Dobrosława i Andrzej Świerczyńscy, *Słownik przysłów w ośmiu językach*, 2004). The thought that I would like to develop in the present article was inspired by a collection of the kind mentioned above: a brilliant

¹ Marek M. Dziekan, *Dzieje kultury arabskiej*, PWN, Warszawa 2008, pp. 431, ll.28–30.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 429, ll. 35–37.

³ Cf. Avishai Shvitiel, *Proverb*, in: K. Versteegh et al. (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics*, vol. III., Brill, Leiden-Boston 2008, pp. 730–736.

⁴ *Ibidem*.

supplement-appendix to the English-Arabic dictionary *Al-Mawrid*, published in 1989 in Beirut. The author, Munir Ba'albaki, gave the following title to this part: *The Lamps of Experience. A Collection of English Proverbs with Origins and Arabic Equivalents* and included there 187 proverbs with a comprehensive commentary. This is a very worthwhile collection, although it is still descriptive rather than analytical. However, in the Polish scholarly literature there is a very interesting work which moves the research in this field a step forward: Anna Radwańska's unpublished MA thesis entitled *A Contrastive Semantic Analysis of Proverbs with Animal Lexemes in Arabic, Polish and English*, which was written at the Silesian University under the supervision of Krystyna Warchał, PhD, in 2005. The object of the analysis that was conducted was to present the differences between the proverbs of three dissimilar cultural areas on the basis of a limited but very significant material furnished by proverbs that contain lexemes referring to animals. The author aptly remarks that the animals which are most popular and best known in all three areas (e.g. the dog, the sheep, the horse, the hen) appear also in the proverbs in each language⁵. However, it is not necessarily so that the proverbs carry the same content. As noted by A. Radwańska: "The cultural difference very frequently influences the content of the proverb and the images that are contained in it, in this case animal images"⁶. However, it is difficult to agree with the excessively narrow statement that "the existing differences and similarities between Arabic, Polish and English proverbs are associated with the use of a given animal lexeme"⁷, for this difference (or lack of such a difference) certainly goes beyond the limited thematic range that was studied by the Author of the dissertation. However, there is no doubt that the direction of research which is indicated there and the attempt at classifying the linguistic material, which – with some modifications – may be suggested as a general method of the semantic and lexical analysis of proverbs, without the limitations resulting from the original thematic premises, is the right direction. In the present article I would like to suggest and open a debate about such a way of thinking about cultural information transmitted by means of the language of proverbs and idioms, and a classification which – when it will be applied to a considerably larger number of examples in the future – would enable us to determine the zones of similarity and dissimilarity in the perception and description of the external world represented by various societies which develop in dissimilar historical and cultural conditions. I am aware that a more extensive study would require a thorough critical historical analysis that would allow to differentiate between the genetic congruencies of the proverbs and their typological similarities, but the scope of the present article, which merely introduces and defines the problem, compels the author to leave the bulky investigation out. I shall focus here exclusively on the language material of utterances, since I assume that, whatever the causes and conditions of the emergence of the analysed

⁵ Anna Radwańska, *A Contrastive Semantic Analysis of Proverbs with Animal Lexemes in Arabic, Polish and English*, Uniwersytet Śląski, Katowice 2005 (an unpublished MA thesis written under the supervision of K. Warchał), p. 68.

⁶ *Ibidem*, ll.20–22.

⁷ *Ibidem*, ll.14–16.

sayings and proverbs, they belong to the common consciousness of a community and constitute an element in the linguistic image of the world.

I present below one of the possible ways of classifying expressions of this kind as a basis of the semantic analysis and further conclusions of sociolinguistic nature. The classification will be performed by means of a small sample of thirty proverbs and adages which are popular in Poland and in Arab countries.

I. Identity of content and metaphor at the lexical level

- (1) Kuj żelazo póki gorące (PL) – “Strike while the iron is hot; lit. strike the iron while it is hot”
iḍrib al-ḥadīd wa-huwa sāḥin (AR) – “strike the iron while it is hot”
- (2) Góra urodziła mysz (PL) – “To make a mountain out of a molehill” [lit. a mountain gave birth to a mouse]
tamaḥḥada l-ġabal fa-walada fa’ran (AR) – “the mountain made an effort [= was in labour] and gave birth to a mouse”
- (3) Szewc bez butów chodzi (PL) – “The cobbler’s wife is the worst shod /The shoemaker’s son always goes barefoot” [lit. the shoemaker goes around without any shoes on]
al-iskāfi ḥāfi (= *ḥāfin*) (AR) – “the shoemaker is shoeless/barefoot”
- (4) Psy szczekają, karawana idzie dalej (PL) – “Dogs bark, but the caravan goes on”
al-kilāb yanbaḥ wa-qāfila taṣīr (AR) – “Dogs bark and the caravan goes on”
- (5) Nie ma dymu bez ognia (PL) – “There’s no smoke without fire”
lā duḥḥān bi-lā nār (AR) – *ut supra*
- (6) Wśród ślepych jednooki jest królem / Na bezrybiu i rak ryba / Lepszy rydz niż nic (PL) – “Any port in a storm” / Half a loaf is better than no bread” [lit. among the blind the one-eyed man is king / when there’s no fish a crayfish is fish / a mushroom (saffron milk cap) is better than nothing]
al-a’war malik al-’umyān (AR) – “a one-eyed man is the king of the blind”
- (7) Kota nie ma, myszy harczą/tańcuja (PL) – “When the cat’s away, the mice will play” [lit. the cat is away, the mice frolic/dance]
ġāba l-qitt fa-l’ab yā fa’r (AR) – “the cat is away, [so] play, little mouse!”
- (8) Prawdziwych przyjaciół poznajemy w biedzie (PL) – “A friend in need is a friend indeed” [lit. We recognise true friends when we are in trouble/poverty]
aṣ-ṣadiq ’inda ḍ-ḍiq (AR) – “a [true] friend appears when you are in trouble/poverty”
’inda š-šadā’id tu’rafu l-iḥwān (AR) – “it is in difficult circumstances that you recognise brothers/friends”
- (9) Kto z kim przestaje, takim się staje (PL) – “He that lives with wolves learns to howl” [lit. one acquires the qualities of the person that one associates with]
qul lī man tu’āšir aqūl la-ka man anta (AR) – “tell me with whom you associate / mix, and I will tell you who you are”

- (10) Wszystko w swoim czasie (PL) – “All in due time”
kull šay'in fi awāni-hi (AR) – “everything/all in due time”

This group of examples does not require separate commentaries. It contains proverbs whose metaphorical meaning was transmitted by means of identical lexemes. We are accustomed to think that the vast majority of the proverbs of the nations of dissimilar culture are varied but there are frequent and equally important proverbs which manifest a complete or partial similarity of metaphor and vocabulary for they attest the existence of certain universal values, collective experience and the community of the perception of certain phenomena which translate themselves in the same manner of expression. The proverbs presented attest the fact that both communities perceive and express the following ideas in the same way: (1) the necessity of taking the opportunity, of quick reaction to the possibilities which life offers; (2) an ironic attitude to excessive efforts and pretentiousness, which brings miserable results; (3) the fact that one thinks about oneself after something happens; (4) a neutral attitude to negative comments, when one fulfils his or her duty right; (5) the belief that each instance of rumour or hearsay has some justification; (6) the belief that any small, even unsatisfactory thing is better than nothing; (7) the belief about using the absence of a supervisor or an ominous person in order to indulge in a free way; (8) the value of true friendship; (9) the belief about the strong mutual influence on the characters of people who are friends; (10) the conviction that there is the right time for every endeavour and that there is an incentive to exercise patience.

II. Similarity of content and metaphor, with lexical variation

- (1) Tonący brzytwy się chwyta (PL) – “A drowning man will grasp at straws” [lit. a drowning man grasps a razor]
al-ġarīq yata'allaq bi-l-qašša (AR) – “a drowning man grasps [even] a straw/a blade of grass”

In both cases the proverb indicates the desperate predicament of the one who drowns, who in the “awareness of desperation will use all means, even the thing about which he knows that it will be of no avail”⁸. The Polish metaphor is more pointed; it emphasises more strongly the doubts associated with the solution that is embraced; it stresses in a more explicit way our conviction about the lack of any chances in a given situation⁹.

- (2) Kłamstwo ma krótkie nogi (PL) – “A lie has no legs” [lit. a lie has short legs]
ħabl al-kaḏb qašīr (AR) – “the rope of a lie is short”

⁸ Jerzy Bralczyk, *500 zdań polskich*, AGORA, Warszawa 2015, p. 434, ll. 34–36.

⁹ Cf. *ibidem*.

In both cases there is an indication of a short-term positive influence of deceptive words, which in Polish is emphasised by personalisation and which in Arabic suggests a string of further lies (as in another Polish proverb: “jedno kłamstwo pociąga za sobą drugie” – one lie leads to another).

- (3) Kto sieje wiatr, zbiera burzę (PL) – “Sow the wind and reap the whirlwind” [lit. who sows the wind reaps a storm]
man yazra' aš-šawk yağnī l-ğirāḥ (AR) – “who sows / cultivates thorns, he will receive wounds”

In both cases there is a warning against spreading confusion, chaos and, generally speaking, wrongdoing as well as against the negative consequences of this kind of action. The Arabic metaphor emphasises the turning of misdeeds against their perpetrator in a clearer, physically more severe way.

- (4) Wiódł ślepy kulawego (PL) – “The blind leading the blind” [lit. the blind one led the lame one]
a'mā yaqūdu a'mā (AR) – “the blind one leads the blind one”

An ironic attitude to the collaboration of two people who are ignorant in a given field, whereby “such help is of little avail to either of them”¹⁰ is expressed more acutely in the Arabic version – it is certain that a blind person will not show the right way to another blind person.

- (5) Odmierzyć tą samą miarką / Odpłacić pięknym za nadobne (PL) – “Measure for measure / To pay back in kind” [lit. to pay back with a beautiful thing for a comely thing]
kāla ṣ-ṣā'a ṣā'ayn (AR) – “to measure out a thing twice”

Both cases have to do with revenge, repayment for the harm that was done. The Arabic metaphor is stronger here; the proverb suggests a repayment with interest, which is consistent with the tribal spirit of Arab communities which attached great importance to vengeance as an important requirement of the code of honour.

- (6) Kto rano wstaje, temu Pan Bóg daje / Im wcześniej, tym lepiej (PL) – “The early bird catches the worm / The sooner the better” [lit. who gets up in the morning, the Lord gives him something]
al-barakatu fī l-bukūr (AR) – “God’s blessing [is given to the one] who is /arrives early”

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 468.

The indication of the advantage which results from the early engagement in action seems to be more general in the Arabic proverb and in this respect it corresponds rather with the second variant of the Polish adage. The first variant, however, similarly as the Arabic one, is reinforced by a reference to the divine authority which blesses such a course of action. The Polish variant is additionally intensified by the rhyme and the Arabic variant is intensified by alliteration within the framework of roots (*b-r-k* / *b-k-r*).

- (7) Co dwie głowy, to nie jedna (PL) – “Two heads are better than one”
ra'yāni ḥayrun min ra'yin (AR) – “two opinions are better than one opinion”

The Arabic version of the proverb is basically devoid of metaphor and it expresses the essence of the content in a literal, even legal, way. The Polish metaphor is described in a picturesque way by Jerzy Bralczyk: “if two heads think about something, they will come up with more. And if they do so we may further infer that they will come up with wiser, improved and more effective things – better things anyway. And hence, from this thinking further better action will probably result”¹¹.

- (8) Nie ma tego złego, co by na dobre nie wyszło (PL) – “All’s well that ends well”
rubba dārratin nāfi'atun (AR) – “how many calamities (damages, losses) turn out to be useful”

The content of both proverbs conveys a message of consolation to people who are afflicted with loss, disappointment, calamity; they tell us that there is a good side to each situation although this may appear to be so after a while. The Polish variant states this idea in a quite explicit way and the Arabic one embraces a more reflective attitude by indicating a considerable number of such cases, without making a generalisation. It also does not speak directly about the change of a bad situation into a good one – it does speak rather about the advantage which results from such an event, which may be linked with the benefit of personal instruction, the earning of a painful experience and the eventual maturity and self-development. Therefore it seems that more prudence and realism is expressed by the Arabic version.

- (9) Mądry głowie dość dwie słowie (PL) – “A word to the wise is enough” [lit. two words to the wise is enough]
al-labīb min al-iṣārati yafham (AR) – “a wise person will understand /comprehend owing to one hint”

The content of both proverbs mentions the fact that “if someone is smart, he or she will quickly understand. Two words will be sufficient for him or her, and if he or she is

¹¹ Ibid., p. 68, ll. 14–19.

still smarter, perhaps one word will be sufficient. They will get the point right away”¹². Therefore the Polish languages uses “two words” in the early dual form in order to preserve the rhyme, and the Arabic language uses a single hint. However, the intensity of the message is more or less balanced here.

- (10) Kochajmy się jak bracia, a liczmy się jak Żydzi (PL) – “Short reckonings make long friends” [lit. let us love ourselves like brothers, and let us reckon as Jews] *ta'āšarū ka-l-iḥwān wa-taḥāsabū ka-l-ġurabā'* (AR) – “get together like brothers but reckon as strangers”

In both cases the content of the proverbs recommends a harmonious co-existence among people, which should resemble good family relations and which should not be disturbed by contentions caused by financial questions. Any financial obligations should therefore be regulated among people who are close to each other in such a way as it is done in reference to strangers. These “strangers” (contrasted with the members of one’s own community) who are generally expressed in the Arabic proverb appear as “Jews” in the Polish proverb – it is a specifically stated nation which once in the Polish lands was synonymous with ruthless men of business, usurers who were careful of every penny they spent and who mercilessly executed the obligations from their debtors.

III. Similarity of content and complete dissimilarity of metaphor and vocabulary

- (1) Kto się na gorącym sparzył, ten na zimne dmucha (PL) – “Once bitten, twice shy” [lit. who burnt himself with a hot thing, he blows (air with his mouth) on a cold thing] *al-malsū' yazunnu l-ḥabl af'an* (AR) – “the one who was bitten thinks that a rope is a viper / takes a rope for a viper”

Both proverbs mention the “circumspection, perhaps even excessive or superfluous circumspection but one that is eventually quite commendable and results from our experience. Now we are careful about the things that we do not have to be careful about, if were not careful about the thing that we should have been careful about”¹³. In the Polish metaphor the one who burnt himself is afraid of fire, therefore he blows (air with his mouth) on the cold thing for the sake of carefulness; in the Arabic metaphor, the one who was bitten by a viper is afraid even of a rope which resembles a viper.

¹² Ibid., p. 234, ll. 21–24.

¹³ Ibid., p. 217, ll. 11–17.

- (2) Niedaleko pada jabłko od jabłoni (PL) – “The apple does not fall far from the tree”
inna hādā š-šibl min dāka l-asad (AR) – “this lion cub is the descendant of a lion”

In the Polish proverb the similarity of a child to its parents is referred to by a metaphor which is strictly associated with the most common tree in this area (the apple tree – an apple), whereas in the Arabic proverb there is a completely different animal metaphor (a lion – a lion’s cub), also strictly associated with the geographical area of this language.

- (3) Cicha woda brzegi rwie (PL) – “Still waters run deep” [lit. silent water tears away the river banks]
[huwa] miṭla l-ḥayya tahta t-tibn (AR) – “he is like a viper (lurking) in the hay”

A person who appears to be calm and silent may surprise us unexpectedly, even in a disagreeable manner, which is emphasised especially by the Arabic variant of the proverb. The image of a rapid current of water under the calm surface is replaced by the image which corresponds to the realia of the Arab countryside – a viper which lurks in a bundle of hay. The Arab metaphor seems to be more acute; the evaluation of a person who is referred to in such a way is more negative than in the Polish cultural sphere.

- (4) Brakuje (komuś) tylko ptasiego mleka (PL) – “One has everything he needs to make oneself happy” [lit. someone lacks only bird’s milk]
al-ḥudratu wa-l-mā’ wa-al-waḡh al-ḥasan (AR) – “greenness, water and a beautiful face”

This saying means that someone has everything that he or she wants, that he or she lives in affluence and prosperity¹⁴, and what follows is that someone has everything to make himself or herself happy. “Ptasie mleko” in Polish is a synonym of something that does not exist (cf. the English expression *hen’s teeth*), a thing that may be desired only in one’s dreams. It is a figment of one’s imagination, whereas in the Arabic metaphor a representation of excessive happiness and the climax of one’s dreams has to do with the possession of three things at the same time: greenery, water and a beautiful face – three elements which in our reality seem to be goals which may be quite easily attained. The use of a metaphor of this kind in a given context tells a great deal about the geographical realia of the Arab communities as well as about their more practical approach to life which makes people set themselves difficult goals but ones that exist and that may be realised.

- (5) Kropla dziegciu w beczce miodu (PL) – “A fly in the ointment / The rotten apple spoils the barrel” [lit. a drop of tar in a barrel of honey]
dassa s-samma fi d-dasam (AR) – “he added poison to fat / to a titbit / to plum”

¹⁴ Władysław Kopaliński, *Słownik mitów i tradycji kultury*, PIW, Warszawa 1987 (2nd ed.), p. 702.

The metaphorical image of a drop of tar in a barrel of honey, which is an undesirable admixture to the delight and pleasure and which poisons and spoils its taste corresponds exclusively with the realia of Polish (or Slavic) culture. It is associated with forest settlements in early Poland and with the occupation of the so-called *dziegciarze* who distilled tar from birch¹⁵. In the Arabic metaphor, a small amount of a specific poison may spoil any titbit or plum (the latter word in the specialised meaning of ‘a choice morsel of food’).

- (6) Zakazany owoc najlepiej smakuje (PL) – “The forbidden fruit tastes the sweetest” [lit. forbidden fruit tastes the best]
al-mamnū‘u margūbun (AR) – “the thing that is forbidden is [always] desirable”

The Arabic saying conveys the idea in a general, non-metaphoric way. The Polish proverb makes reference to a Biblical tradition – the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil which was eaten by Adam and Eve against God’s interdiction¹⁶. According to a Muslim tradition, it was the fruit of the fig tree, of whose leaves the first people made loin coverings when they learned that they were naked¹⁷, although this tradition is not that well-established in the social awareness as in the Polish Christian context.

- (7) Uciekał aż się kurzyło (PL) – “To run as fast as your legs can carry you” [lit. he was running away so fast that he kicked up a cloud of dust]
sabaqa l-ġazāla wa-lam yafut-hu l-arnab (AR) – “he overtook a gazelle, and a hare also failed to catch up with him”

In the Polish proverb dust that is kicked on the road during the rapid movement of people, animals and vehicles is the sign of a quick or even desperate escape. The Arabic metaphor uses the image of a common run or even a chase with animals which in that area are considered the fastest ones: the gazelle and the hare. In the Polish context the latter one is rather a synonym of shyness, timorousness and cowardice, as in the Polish expression “człowiek zajęczego serca” [a hare-hearted man].

- (8) Przyjdzie koza do woza (PL) – “I shall catch you some day, carrying corn to our mill” [lit. a goat will come to the cart]
sa-ya tī ḥabbu-ka li-t-tāḥūn (AR) – “your grain will reach the mill”

The content of both proverbs involves a consolation for oneself and a veiled threat directed to those who “associate certain victories, profits or at least self-satisfaction with our failure”¹⁸. We expect that the situation will be reversed and that this person will

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 579.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 1322.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 1322–1323.

¹⁸ J. Bralczyk, op. cit., p. 374, ll. 4–6.

need our help. One utters this saying also in the context of a person who by force of circumstances addresses a request about his or her case to another person or institution with which previously he or she did not want to have any association, from which he or she distanced himself or herself¹⁹. The Polish metaphor refers to the image of a goat, which is initially reluctant to do something but after a while it is attracted to some dainties located in the cart²⁰ – perhaps cabbage? – and it will surely get to it. The Arabic metaphor is more concrete and realistic – grain surely has to be ground into flour (lest it be wasted), and therefore the possibility of the appearance of a reluctant person “in a mill” is much greater than the Polish wish associated with the hypothetical behaviour of a goat.

- (9) Wpaść z deszczu pod rynnę (PL) – “To jump/leap out of the frying pan into the fire” [lit. to jump from rain under a rainwater pipe]
istağāra min ar-ramḍā’ bi-n-nār (AR) – “to escape from a hot pan into the fire”

The metaphor related with rainwater pipe as an element of the housing construction is practically absent in Arabic proverbs. Therefore a way out from a difficult situation and the eventual finding oneself in an even worse situation is expressed by the metaphor of an escape from a hot pan into the fire – in contradistinction to the Polish image of the rain and water which pours profusely from the pipe. This distinction aptly illustrates the dissimilarity of the geographical and social area of both communities as well as the possibility of the genesis of both metaphors.

- (10) Raz na wozie, raz pod wozem (PL) – “To have one’s ups and downs” [lit. sometimes (you are) on the cart, other times (you are) under the cart]
yawm la-ka wa-yawm ‘alay-ka (AR) – “sometimes the day is favourable to you, other times it is against you”

Both proverbs mention the “vicissitudes of fortune whose spinning wheel sometimes brings good things to people, sometimes bad”²¹. The Polish version, attested in the 17th c.²², refers to the rural-agricultural reality which is frequently referred to in the metaphors of this area. The tenor of the personification of the day in the Arabic proverb is slightly simpler: sometimes the situation is good, sometimes it is bad. In both cases prudence advises one to come to terms with this fact.

The sample of linguistic material presented above, accompanied by a semantic and lexical commentary, merely constitutes a preliminary proposition and it cannot provide a basis for drawing general conclusions. However, it is certain that even this limited and sketchy survey indicates the common nature of life experiences of the communities of both cultural areas, a similar perception of the phenomena and the similarity in drawing

¹⁹ W. Kopaliński, op. cit., p. 531.

²⁰ J. Bralczyk, op. cit., p. 374.

²¹ Ibid., p. 380, ll. 19–21.

²² Ibid.

conclusions that is manifested in the content of proverbs, which is frequently expressed by means of a completely dissimilar metaphor and vocabulary. At this stage of research I will not endeavour to introduce the category suggested by A. Radwańska i.e. the group of proverbs which do not have semantic equivalents in other languages and which represent a reality peculiar to their culture²³. In this context an obstacle is associated with the limited acquaintance with the proverbs of both areas because only advanced research may provide a basis for a firm statement of the lack of an equivalent – not so much a semantic equivalent but a conceptual one, which for me is a more substantial determinant. Therefore I cannot be sure whether the proverbs classified within this group by the Author²⁴, e.g. the Arabic proverbs: *idā ra'ayta nuyūb al-layl bārīzatan fa-lā tazunnu anna l-layl yabtasimu* (“when you see the bare teeth of a lion, do not think that the lion smiles” or *inna l-ba'ūḍatu tudmī muqallata l-asad* (“a mosquito can bleed the eye of a lion”) or the Polish proverb: “Baba z wozu, koniom lżej” (“It is good riddance to bad rubbish”, lit. “when the woman is off the cart, the horses have less weight to draw) or “Nie dla psa kielbasa” (“It’s too good for the likes of you”, lit. “the sausage is not for the dog”) have no content-related and conceptual counterparts in the area of the culture that is compared. For also in these cases the point is about a universal message: a warning against excessive credulity and trusting appearance, indication of the fact that the strong must reckon with the weak, the construal of woman as an obstacle in the activities of men and the belief that not all things are intended for everyone. Therefore the distinguishing of this kind of a peculiar category may take place only after a considerable extension of the analysed material in the literary language and a confrontation of the great bulk of dialectal material which heretofore has not been sufficiently researched.

The translation of the present article into a foreign language, in this case the English language, brings to light another sphere of similarities and dissimilarities in the representation of the world by a community with a different cultural background. We may envisage further elements of such a peculiar puzzle, in which the lexical and semantic analysis of the proverbs of the particular peoples would constitute an exceptionally interesting panorama of the way of perceiving and experiencing reality, the way of thinking about the world and its translation into the language of metaphor in distinct social and cultural variants. The research perspectives of comparative paremiology are indeed limitless and they should, in my opinion, engage to a much greater extent the specialists in the field of the languages and cultures of all areas of our globe.

²³ A. Radwańska, op. cit., p. 68.

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 60–61.