

# Where cognitive linguistics meets paremiology: a cognitive-contrastive view of selected English and Croatian proverbs

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# Where cognitive linguistics meets paremiology: a cognitive-contrastive view of selected English and Croatian proverbs

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## Abstract

This paper emphasizes the theoretical and empirical rewards of a rapprochement of Cognitive Linguistics and paremiology. Since earlier attempts at Cognitive Linguistic inroads into the paremiologist's domain met with some resistance, it is important to reassess the potential of their cross-fertilization. By contrastively analyzing a selection of English and Croatian proverbs from a cognitive linguistic point of view, we intend to show that this combined agenda might actually be a win-win situation for both sides. The quest for universality/shared conceptual motivation typical of Cognitive Linguistics does not need to detract from the paremiologist's folkloristic concerns. In fact, we propose cognitive linguistics as the framework for an integrated approach to studying both the universal and the culture-specific in proverbs. In this we join the large and growing number of cognitive linguists who advocate equal attention to the universal and the language-specific in cognitive linguistic scholarship (e.g. Brdar, Raffaelli, & Fuchs, 2012).

**Key words:** proverbs; Cognitive Linguistics; universality; variation.

## 1. Introduction

One question that has been hotly debated in paremiology is whether proverbs should be accounted for by mental theories of proverb comprehension or they should be considered a social phenomenon that can only be studied within its cultural matrix. The crux of this dilemma is the question of whether one should look for universal principles of proverb interpretation, or abandon any such endeavor on the grounds of its futility. This has created a bit of a gulf between cognitive theories of proverb comprehension (Honeck and Temple, 1994; Honeck & Welge 1997; Temple & Honeck, 1999; Honeck, Sowry & Voegtler, 1978; Lakoff &

Turner, 1989; Gibbs, Colston & Johnson, 1996a, 1996b; Sullivan & Sweetser, 2010<sup>1</sup>) and folkloristic proverb scholarship (Arewa & Dundes, 1964; Bauman & McCabe, 1970; Mieder, 1982<sup>2</sup>). Simplifying things somewhat, we may say that the former lay stress on the universal aspects of proverb comprehension and their psychological functions such as categorization (Honeck & Welge, 1997: 608). They argue that proverbs should be studied in abstraction, for theoretical purposes, because “the mental structures and processes of *Homo sapiens* are explainable on the basis of the same theoretical principles” (Honeck, 1997: 37). The latter studies proverbs in their cultural envelope from which they cannot be abstracted without serious distortion (Bradbury, 2002: 263). This camp emphasizes proverbs’ traditionality and their role in creating and maintaining social meanings.

The essential complaint against cognitive theories is that they insist on abstract, universalizing theories, sidelining the rich cultural detail which lies at the heart of proverbs. The picture is, admittedly, far from black and white, since even cognitivists such as Honeck and Welge (1997) assert that one must embrace both the cognitive and the cultural to account for proverb creation/comprehension. However, they still claim that, before doing any social work, proverbs have first their basic psychological function to fulfill: “they categorize events and motivate thoughts and behavior” (Honeck & Welge, 1997: 608). The gulf between the cognitive and the cultural camps, in other words, seems none the smaller for the occasional pronouncements in favor of a holistic approach.

We understand the reasons behind this push towards cognitive-psychological explanations and agree that proverb use involves important cognitive work based on the universals of human cognition. This aspect of proverb use, namely their role in categorizing our experiences and providing interpretive short-cuts to similar new stimuli, will be acknowledged in our analysis. However, we also agree that the cultural side of proverb study must not be eclipsed by the search for theoretical explanatory principles.

In the remainder of this paper we will suggest an approach to the study of proverb comprehension which is intended to bridge some of this gap. We will propose that different cognitive tools, such as conceptual metaphors and metonymies, image schemas and conceptual integration can build some common ground between these extremes. We do not claim that all paremiology should turn cognitive or that no other agenda can be pursued in proverb scholarship (for instance, an important topic of research is the establishment of the paremiological minima in different speech communities, or the study of proverb familiarity, proverb fre-

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<sup>1</sup> There is also a significant gap between theories *within* the cognitive camp. For details see Bradbury (2002).

<sup>2</sup> The references listed are just a random selection from a vast array of this kind of paremiological scholarship, cf. classic articles in Mieder and Dundes (1981) and recent bibliographies in Mieder (2001) and *Proverbium: Yearbook of International Proverb Scholarship*.

quency, antiproverbs etc. (Mieder, 1982, 1989)). We merely suggest that the rift between the two camps need not be as large.

In this paper we will also suggest an improvement on an earlier cognitive linguistic attempt to account for the universal aspects of proverb interpretation, viz. Lakoff and Turner's (1989) use of the Great Chain Metaphor as the explanatory mechanism in this domain; at the same time, we will also explain why this metaphor should not be completely cast aside and which of its aspects can be fruitfully integrated into a more holistic approach. Weighing in favor of a culturally-sensitive account of proverbs is our belief that, beyond the universal categorizing function of proverbs, explained by some authors by the workings of the GENERIC IS SPECIFIC metaphor,<sup>3</sup> there may be further conceptual similarities between proverbs, which reside in local pockets of (partial) similarity at different levels of the conceptual architecture.

The paper is structured as follows. Sections 2 and 3 lay out the theoretical background and methodology of the study. The analysis of our database is presented in Section 4. The paper ends with a conclusion in Section 5.

## 2. Theoretical background

### 2.1. *Cognitive Linguistics on universality and variation*

When Lakoff and Turner (1989) proposed the Great Chain of Being metaphor, and especially its central ingredient, the GENERIC IS SPECIFIC metaphor, as the universal explanatory principle of proverb use (see 2.2.), Cognitive Linguistics was still largely dominated by the quest for the universal. Human embodiment, experiential grounding, preconceptual image schemas, etc. are some of the concepts that were, and still are invoked to provide deeper motivations and explanations for the systematic and the universal in language. Given the universal nature of the bodies that we have, and arguably universal patterns of our physical interactions with the world, it is unsurprising that much attention in Cognitive Linguistics has gone to what is universal or at least widely shared among languages.

However, many of these universalist assumptions have had to be modified in the face of the many forms of diversity that now meet cognitive linguists. It is the diversity that one finds in authentic language data of usage-based models, corpus linguistics, sociolinguistics, etc. While this does not undermine the universalist ideological assumption that a large swath of language is indeed motivated by how we interact with the world around us, it has drawn attention to the language diversity that must also be accounted for. In their introduction to the 2012 volume *Cognitive Linguistics: Between Universality and Variation* Brdar, Raffaelli and Fuchs

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<sup>3</sup> Lakoff and Turner (1989), see below.

give an illuminating overview of the developments that have taken place in Cognitive Linguistics in this area. In that volume, and many other publications and conferences (many of which are mentioned in the introduction to the mentioned volume: e.g. the theme session at ICLC 2001 *How universal are conceptual metonymies?*, which resulted in a special issue of journal *Jezikoslovlje* in 2003; the special issue of the *International Journal of English Studies* in 2003, devoted to the interaction between Cognitive Linguistics and contrastive linguistics; Kövecses's 2005 monograph entitled *Metaphor and Culture, Universality and Variation*, etc.) we witness a series of valuable papers showing how easily Cognitive Linguistics can accommodate cross-linguistic diversity. The principles by which we organize our linguistic categories (prototypes), extend well-entrenched patterns towards novel uses (via metaphor, metonymy, etc.) may well be shared, as are probably some of the particular conceptual metaphors and metonymies. But at the same time these universals/principles provide the background against which we can more easily appreciate and accommodate cross-linguistic diversity. With its emphasis on the encyclopedic nature of meaning, on the emergence of meaning from our experience with both the physical *and* the social world, idealized cognitive models, frames, and hierarchies from the most general to the most (culture) specific concepts and patterns, Cognitive Linguistics seems like a perfect place to anchor one's culture-sensitive study of proverbs.

In our analysis we shall use several cognitive tools to account for the meaning and use of proverbs: conceptual metaphor and metonymy (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Lakoff, 1987; Panther & Radden, eds. 1999) as the two basic cognitive models which can account for much proverbial imagery (e.g. the metaphor KNOWING IS SEEING in the proverb *Love is blind*, and the metonymy CONTAINER FOR CONTENTS (HEART FOR EMOTION) in *Home is where the heart is*).<sup>4</sup> Image schemas (Johnson, 1987; Lakoff, 1987; Hampe & Grady, 2005), such as the schema of SCALE, which will be used in our analysis of proverbs on GREED. Finally, we will also use the principles of the Blending Theory (BT), developed by Fauconnier and Turner (1998, 2002), Turner and Fauconnier (2000) as a model of on-line meaning construction. The advantage of this approach is that it explains meaning in terms of assembling and making conceptual connections between small, dynamic packets of very local, variable, and potentially culture-specific conceptual content. In our first case study, the analysis of proverbs on FEAR (4.1.), we will see how a single conceptual architecture can easily accommodate diversity in a series of related proverbs.

In our analysis we will draw on all these cognitive models to account for our cross-linguistic data. But before we proceed with the methodology and the analysis of our database, we need to express our view on one of the most debated cognitive theories of proverb interpretation, the Great Chain Metaphor by Lakoff and

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<sup>4</sup> Cognitive linguists are far from unanimous in matters of definition, typologies and demarcation of these two phenomena (cf. Barcelona, ed. 2000; Dirven and Pörings, eds. 2003), but a discussion of these intricacies is beyond the scope of this paper.

Turner (1989). This is important since the theory was proposed by two very influential cognitive linguists and specifically invokes a special type of metaphor to account for proverb comprehension.

## 2.2. *Cognitive theory of proverb interpretation: The Great Chain Metaphor*

Lakoff and Turner (1989) proposed that proverb comprehension involves the activation of a set of interpretive procedures that have come to be known as the Great Chain Metaphor (GCM). This theory subsumes four cognitive tools which help interpret proverbs in the context.

First, the *GENERIC IS SPECIFIC* metaphor, a generic metaphor distinct from the common conceptual metaphors such as *LIFE IS A JOURNEY*, which allows proverb users/interpreters to use their knowledge about the specific scenario coded in the proverb in understanding many analogical situations when they share generic-level structure. For example, in *One gown does not make a friar*, they would apply specific knowledge about friars, their attire, their expected roles/behavior in contrast to their actual behaviors, in interpreting situations such as e.g. academics who look smart, but fail to meet academic standards, or the so-called “wiggers”, white American teenagers unsuccessfully styling as African Americans.

Second, there is a set of beliefs epitomized in the cultural model of the Great Chain of Being, which forms our understanding of ourselves and the world we populate. This model, coupled with the third part of the system, our practical knowledge about “the nature of things”, allows us to form theories about how the world works. The Great Chain ranks entities on a hierarchy, such that each entity in the chain possesses all the salient characteristics of the entities ranked below, plus some higher-order attributes. Topping this hierarchy are human beings, who possess the attributes of reason and speech and thus outrank lower-ranked complex physical objects, plants and animals.

The final piece of the theory is the principle of verbal economy, which holds that when an entity at a particular level in the hierarchy is mentioned, the speaker must be referring to its highest-order properties, unless there is other information which precludes such an inference. In addition to all that, once we recognize proverbs, we know that they apply to human affairs (Lakoff & Turner, 1989: 175).

There have been a number of objections to this theory. Honeck and Temple (1994) argue that the GCM is at the same time too complicated and too restrictive. It is too complicated because its complex machinery is specifically set up to account for things already explained by more general principles of interpretation, i.e. that the discourse context determines what units of a linguistic expression refer to and how they are interpreted. It is too restrictive since discourse contexts allow proverbs to apply to other than just human affairs, i.e. to animals contexts (cf. Nor-

rick, 2007: 389). In other words, rather than attending to the specific principle that proverbs apply to human affairs, we simply apply the proverb scenario directly to the immediate discourse context to develop the target interpretation. Norrick adds that, since proverbs are by definition items of folklore, “the GCM becomes irrelevant in the face of [such] story allusions and rich cultural associations” (ibid. 389). For example in Aesop’s well-known fable “The tortoise and the hare”, we find the moral *Slow and steady wins the race*. The tortoise and the hare are personified, but still stand as stereotypes for slow and fast animals respectively. Even when the moral appears in a truncated binomial form, *Slow and steady*, this is not without “resonance from the story”. Norrick concludes: “In cases where a story lends meaning to a proverb or smaller phrase and to their applications, there is no need to invoke a Great Chain of Being for their interpretation, indeed it is hard to see how the GCM comes in at all” (ibid. 389ff).

We do not want to take issue with the GCM theory itself or its critics, but would like to propose an alternative account aiming to integrate the cultural and the cognitive in proverb use. In so doing, we will take from the GCM theory what we believe to be worth pursuing, viz. the categorizing function of the GENERIC IS SPECIFIC metaphor and integrate it into our approach.

### 2.3. *Categorization: the universal aspect of proverb use*

Essentially we propose that all use of proverbs, be they literal or figurative, involves a universal categorization process whereby the scenario linguistically coded in the proverb acts as the categorizing structure which sanctions (in the sense of Langacker, 1987: 65ff<sup>5</sup>) novel target events. For this categorization process to be effective, there must be some degree of similarity (analogy) between the categorizing/sanctioning unit and the target structure (the actual situation), where the similarity may range from almost complete identity (categorization by elaboration) to relative difference (categorization by extension). The latter case is the Cognitive Grammar analogue of the GENERIC IS SPECIFIC metaphor, but the Cognitive Grammar interpretation supersedes the GENERIC IS SPECIFIC metaphor since it simultaneously accounts for categorization by extension (i.e. cases covered by this metaphor), and for categorization by elaboration (where similarity is too striking to warrant the metaphorical interpretation). For example, both *The gown does not make the friar* and *Every man has his faults* code a scenario analogous to a situation in the immediate context. However, unlike the former, where there is an analogical asso-

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<sup>5</sup> According to Langacker, categorisation involves a process of cognitive matching, or comparison between aspects of the conventional linguistic unit, which functions as the standard of comparison, and novel usage events, which may match this unit to different degrees and thus be considered as its elaboration (with complete match) or extension (where some discrepancy is detected), cf. Langacker (1987: 369ff).

ciation between two very different conceptual domains (see examples above), the latter case strikes one as far less metaphorical. After all, in standard definitions of conceptual metaphors, metaphor involves two distinct conceptual domains, and one would be hard-pressed to accept the latter as metaphorical at all. For this reason we prefer an account in terms of categorization where the sanctioning structure is the conventional scenario coded in the proverb and the structure to be categorized is the analogical situation in the context which may be *more or less* conceptually distinct from it. For convenience we could refer to this universal aspect of proverb interpretation as the contextual meaning of proverbs. However, this will figure far less prominently in our analysis, because we are far more interested in the specific imagery behind the proverbs' linguistic form, i.e. in the conceptual architecture of the proverb itself. In sum, while the universality of the categorizing aspect of proverb interpretation will be assumed in all proverbs studied here, in our analysis we will specifically focus on locating further imagistic similarities (e.g. shared metaphors such as KNOWING IS SEEING: *Love is blind = Ljubav je slijepa*, or shared metonymies such as BODY PART FOR PERSON: *Absence makes the heart grow fonder, Daleko od očiju, daleko od srca* 'Far from eyes, far from heart'), but also culturally salient contrasts in the wordings of our English and Croatian proverbs. Since the imagery will be accounted for by cognitive mechanisms and models already well-established in Cognitive Linguistics, we believe that we have introduced no undue complexity into our account.

### 3. Methodology

In our paper we focus on selected proverbs dealing with the emotions of FEAR and LOVE, and the character trait GREED. We trimmed this database somewhat more, so that of all the LOVE proverbs, we only focused on the LOVE AND PERMANENCE and LOVE AND ABSENCE part of the repertoire; and in the domain of FEAR, on proverbs dealing with EXCESSIVE FEAR. Space prevents an analysis of a larger database, but we hope that our studies will show the merits of Cognitive Linguistics in unifying the shared and the culturally distinctive aspects of proverbs.

Further, we have only analyzed *figurative* proverbs because we are not as interested in the categorizing aspect of proverbs (their contextual meaning, see above) as we are in their specific imagery. The proverbs have been selected from authoritative sources, viz. Litovkina (2000) and *Oxford English Dictionary* for the English examples, and Croatian proverb collections for the Croatian examples.



## 4. Analysis

### 4.1. English and Croatian proverbs on FEAR

The following EXCESSIVE FEAR proverbs have been selected for our analysis:

- (1) *He who has once burned his mouth always blows his soup*
- (2) *A burnt child dreads the fire*
- (3) *Once beaten twice shy<sup>6</sup>*
- (4) *Once bitten twice shy*
- (5) *Fear has a quick ear*
- (6) *Tko se jednom opeče i na hladno puše*  
(‘He who got burnt once, will blow even on things cold’)
- (7) *Kog jednom zmija ugrize i guštera se boji*  
(‘He who was once bitten by a snake fears the lizard’)
- (8) *Lanjskoga se snijega nije bojati*  
(‘Last year’s snow needs not be feared’)
- (9) *U strahu su velike oči*  
(‘Eyes are big in fear’)

Before we present a more detailed contrastive analysis of specific clusters of these proverbs, we will first explain the schematic conceptual framework (in the terms of conceptual integration theory) which we presume unifies them all.

The proverbs in (1) to (9) all share the central inference that a person’s reaction to a current situation is exaggerated. However, there is also the understanding that this overreaction is caused by his past experience with a similar, but much more harmful event. This past event had caused him harm and resulted in lasting, and perhaps irrational fear. We propose the following conceptual architecture to account for this conventional proverb scenario<sup>7</sup>.

In Figure 1, Input 1 represents a schematic representation of a past event that had caused harm and fear. In this space there is a strong physical force (CAUSE) which caused damage (IMMEDIATE EFFECT) considerable enough to instill fear and provoke some kind of action to remedy the harmful effects (REACTION). Input 2 represents events that are analogous in type and topology to those in Input 1, but are not so harmful as to cause long-lasting fear. However, the central inference of the proverb; viz. that a person’s reaction is exaggerated, derives from the blended

<sup>6</sup> This is an opportunistic (phonetically inspired) modification of the more firmly established proverb in (4).

<sup>7</sup> We do not represent here the role of this blend in sanctioning (i.e. making sense of) new, analogous situations. We will represent this with the more specific blends in Figs 2, 3, 4, and 5.

space. There we see a juxtaposition of the non-extreme cause (which cannot cause any harm and would not normally require remedial action or fear), projected from the second input space, and the exaggerated reaction projected from the first input space.

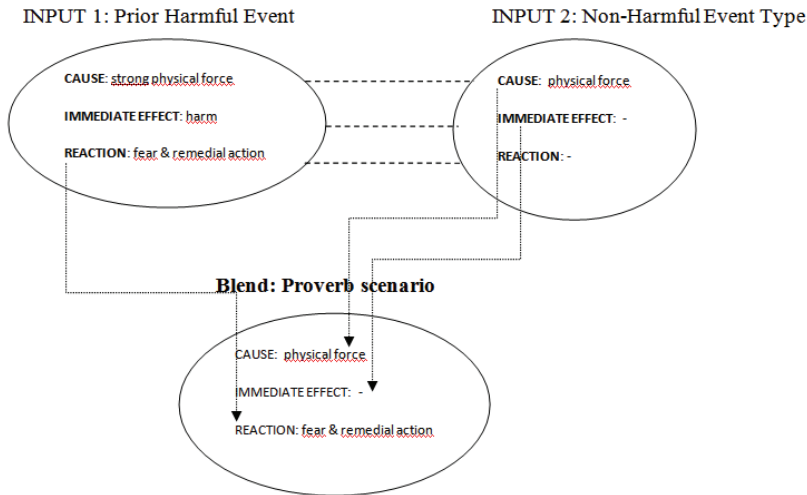


Figure 1. Schematic blend: OVERCAUTION AGAINST REPEATED PHYSICAL HARM motivating the proverbs in (1) to (9).

This schema is schematic enough to allow various elaborations of its roles in (1) to (9):

CAUSES:

- (7) the animal: snake; (8) natural force: last year's snow'
- (1), (2), (3), (4), (6): implicitly hot liquid, hot food, fire, animal, person
- (5), (9) unspecified

IMMEDIATE EFFECTS:

- (1), (2), (6) being burnt; (3) being beaten; (4), (7) bitten,
- (5), (9), (8) unspecified

REACTIONS:

- (1), (6) blowing; (5) quick ear; (9) big eyes; (2) (7) (8), fear; (3), (4) shy

In Figure 1 there are three schematic conceptual spaces, each representing different aspects of the complex conceptualization. But this schematic structure has its more specific elaborations, which are closer to the specific proverbs and are the locus of cross-linguistic variation. In the remainder of this section we present these more specific blends. Notice that this time the blended spaces will be referred to as

sanctioning units, to underscore their role as categorizers of our real world experiences of fear (novel usage events, see 2.3).

#### 4.1.1. Overcaution against repeated thermal injury

The following three proverbs can be considered more specific elaborations of the schematic blend above.

- (1) *He who has once burned his mouth always blows his soup*
- (2) *A burnt child dreads the fire*
- (6) *Tko se jednom opeče, i na hladno puše*  
(‘He who got burnt once, will blow even on things cold’)

Therefore, the schematic blend OVERCAUTION AGAINST REPEATED PHYSICAL HARM can be renamed as OVERCAUTION AGAINST REPEATED THERMAL INJURY, to take account of its more specific nature.

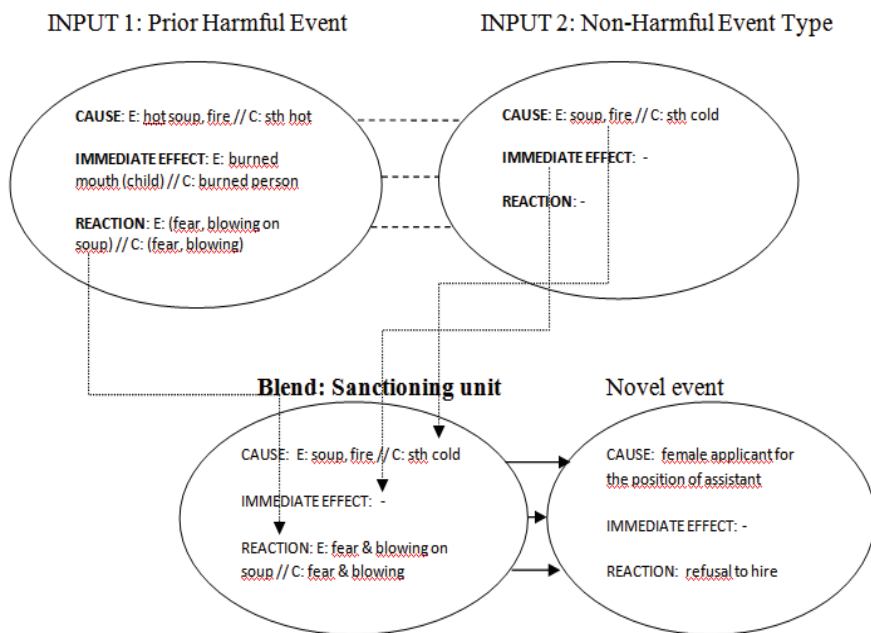


Figure 2. Specific blend: OVERCAUTION AGAINST REPEATED THERMAL INJURY motivating the proverbs in (1), (2), (6).

Proverbs (1), (2) and (6) express similar scenarios: a person displays an exaggerated reaction: *always blows his soup* (even when cold) and *blows even on things cold*, or *dreads the fire* even when the fire does not pose any real danger (e.g. fire in a fireplace). The reaction is undue given the circumstances at hand, but stems from

the subject's having been harmed before by the same kind of force, but possibly much stronger - an intense source of heat. In English it was probably hot soup (1) and fire (2), while the Croatian proverb remains vague here (6): something very hot. The central inference behind these proverbs is that the subject's present reaction is exaggerated, but that past experience causes overreaction. The cognitive work involved in using these proverbs can be observed at two levels: A) the proverb's conceptual architecture; B) its categorizing function (cf. 2.3.).

Input spaces 1 and 2, and ultimately the blend derived from them, represent the conceptual background of the three proverbial texts (A). This blend arises through building conceptual links between two similar events from the two input spaces. Input space 1 is the conceptual assembly accounting for a past experience in which the agent got burnt by a hot substance because he failed to exercise the necessary caution. The topology of this input space is filled out differently in English and Croatian, since the English proverb is more specific about the identity of the cause and reaction than the Croatian. The 2<sup>nd</sup> input space includes information about largely the same event type, but without a cause capable of harming the agent, which in turn produces no harmful effect and requires no remedial reaction whatsoever. However, the logic of the proverb is only established in the blend, where through selective projection of information from the two input spaces: the cause and the immediate effect from the 2<sup>nd</sup> input, but reaction from the 1<sup>st</sup> input, we get a new scenario in which an innocuous substance causes undue reaction. The juxtaposition of the 'non-cause' from the 2<sup>nd</sup> input space and the strong reaction from the 1<sup>st</sup> input space produces the central inference of the proverb, viz. that the agent's reaction is exaggerated.

With the blend thus established, we can now briefly turn to (B), the categorizing function of the proverbs. Namely, all three proverbs can be used to categorize target events such as e.g. a presidential candidate now refusing to hire any female assistant, because the former female assistant had filed a sexual harassment suit against him, causing him harm and necessitating remedial action to prevent more damage to his reputation, etc.

#### 4.1.2. *Overcaution against repeated mechanical injury*

The following three proverbs elaborate the schematic blend above in a slightly different direction.

(3) *Once beaten twice shy*

(4) *Once bitten twice shy*

(7) *Koga jednom zmija ugrize i guštera se boji*

('He who was once bitten by a snake fears the lizard')

We label this specific blend OVERCAUTION AGAINST REPEATED MECHANICAL INJURY since the harmful cause of Input 1 is not a source of intense heat, but an animal/person capable of inflicting mechanical injury (biting, beating). In all other respects, the composition of the blend is completely analogous to the patterns established in represented in Figures 1 and 2.

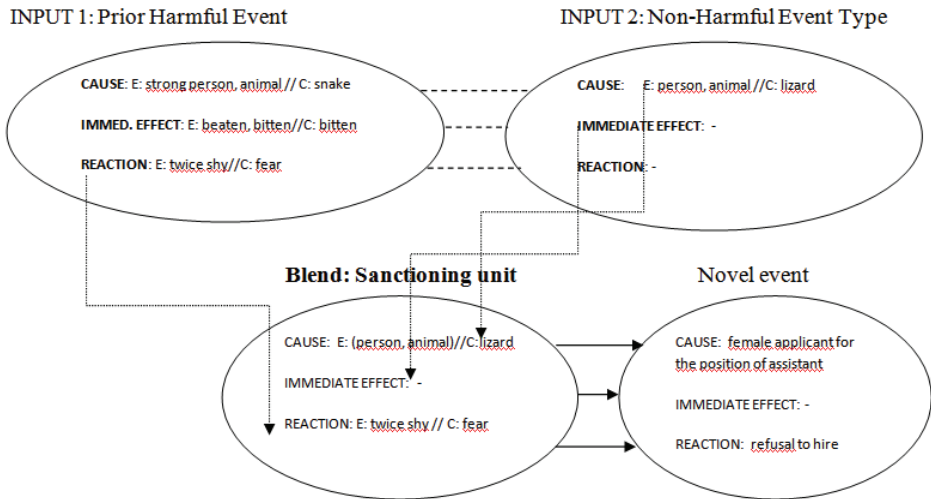


Figure 3. Specific blend: OVERCAUTION AGAINST REPEATED MECHANICAL INJURY motivating the proverbs in (3), (4), and (7).

#### 4.1.3. *Overcaution against repeated harm by a natural force*

The kind of cross-linguistic contrast we observe here is the simple absence of an English proverb under this elaboration of the schematic blend.

- (8) *Lanjskoga se snijega nije bojati*  
 ('Last year's snow needs not be feared')

The Croatian proverb has no English counterpart, but fits our schema just the same. We label this specific blend OVERCAUTION AGAINST REPEATED INJURY BY A NATURAL FORCE. In this case, there is an important difference in the projection of specific topology from the two inputs into the blend. Here, the cause of Input 1 (last year's snow) is projected into the blend, where it is matched with the lack of immediate effects and reactions projected from Input 2. Of course, this builds a scenario where by inference we conclude that, due to its perishability, last year's snow cannot be there to pose a threat and cause fear a year later. Moreover, the blend

itself is not about a person’s overcaution (which makes it somewhat different from the previous examples), but suggests that no such overcaution or fear is necessary over things long past.

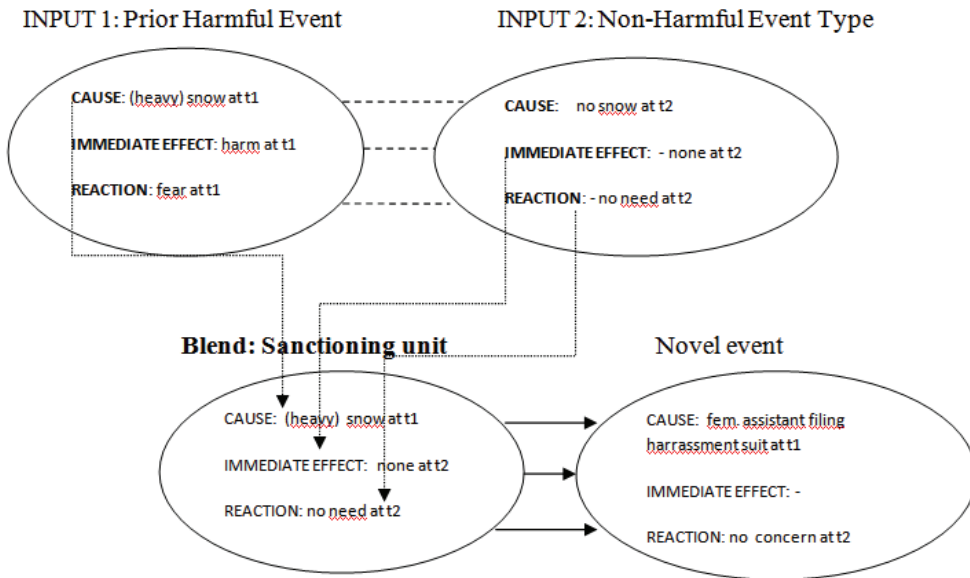


Figure 4. Specific blend: OVERCAUTION AGAINST REPEATED HARM BY A NATURAL FORCE motivating the Croatian proverb in (8).

#### 4.1.4. Overcaution manifested through enhanced senses

- (5) *Fear has a quick ear*
- (9) *U strahu su velike oči*  
('Eyes are big in fear')

Finally, our examples (5) and (9) elaborate the blend schema in somewhat different ways, but still in compliance with the blend’s overall logic. We label this sub-schema OVERCAUTION MANIFESTED THROUGH ENHANCED SENSES. These proverbs do not make explicit linguistic reference to any past harmful events, therefore the 1<sup>st</sup> input space is completely backgrounded (unspecified). But, an awareness of some immediate force (unspecified, but not necessarily strong), causes overreaction: BIG EYES (FOR FEAR metonymy in Croatian), and QUICK EARS (FOR FEAR metonymy in English).

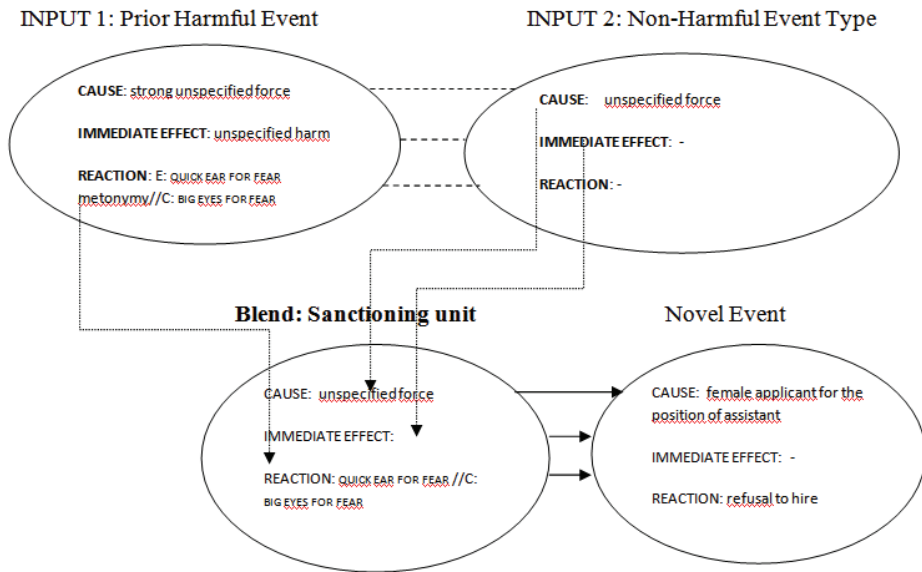


Figure 5. Specific blend: OVERCAUTION MANIFESTED THROUGH ENHANCED SENSES motivating the proverbs in (5) and (9).

We summarize our study of proverbs of fear by focusing on the most important sources/types of cross-linguistic (and intralinguistic) variation in examples (1) to (9):

- 1) English and Croatian differ in the NUMBER OF SPECIFIC BLENDS elaborating the schematic blend. The Croatian blend OVERCAUTION AGAINST REPEATED INJURY BY A NATURAL FORCE is absent in English.
- 2) The NUMBER OF PROVERBS instantiating a specific blend may be different; e.g. English has two, Croatian one proverb for OVERCAUTION AGAINST REPEATED THERMAL INJURY
- 3) Proverbs instantiating the same blend subschema may differ in the LEVEL OF SPECIFICITY in identifying the input/blended space roles; e.g. Croatian specifies the identity of cause in *Koga jednom zmija ugrize i guštera se boji* ('He who was once bitten by a snake fears the lizard'), English remains vague in *Once bitten/beaten, twice shy*. The situation is reversed in *He who has once burned his mouth always blows his soup* and *A burnt child dreads the fire* vs. *Tko se jednom opeče, i na hladno puše* ('He who got burnt once, will blow even on things cold')
- 4) Proverbs instantiating the same blend subschema may fill the roles at the same level of specificity, but with DIFFERENT IDENTITIES: *Fears have quick EARS* vs. *U strahu su velike OČI* ('Fear has big eyes')

- 5) Proverbs may linguistically code DIFFERENT CONCEPTUAL CORRESPONDENCES between input spaces; e.g. English and Croatian both code REMEDIAL ACTION and leave the EMOTION implicit in ... *always blows his soup*, ... *puše i na hladno* ('blows on things cold'); but only the emergent EMOTION is coded in *A burnt child dreads the fire*, *Koga jednom zmija ugrize i guštera se boji* ('He who was once bitten by a snake fears the lizard').

We are fully aware that these sources of contrast do not *explain* their causes, but our integration networks do provide a platform for accentuating them against the common conceptual background.

## 4.2. English and Croatian proverbs on LOVE

LOVE is a truly vast domain, and certainly an area that inspired a lot of proverbial wisdom. It is no wonder, then, that there are so many proverbs about LOVE in both languages under study. The many faces and facets of love would each fill pages of a paper like this one: e.g. LOVE AND MARRIAGE, LOVE AND FAULTS, LOVE AND YOUTH, LOVE AND RECIPROCITY, LOVE AND PERMANENCE, etc. but we need to limit ourselves to what is manageable given space constraints.

In this section we limit ourselves to a brief illustration of several cases where the English and Croatian proverbs share some aspects of conceptual motivation, while differing in others. This part of our analysis is indebted to Kövecses (2005) who worked out an elaborate system to capture the different dimensions of metaphorical similarity and variation.

Our first instance is two proverbs about LOVE AND PERMANENCE, which appear to share a generic-level metaphor, but elaborate it with different specific metaphors:

(10) *Old love does not rust* (OLD LOVE IS A PIECE OF METAL)

(11) *Stara ljubav ne blijedi* (OLD LOVE IS A PHOTOGRAPH)  
('Old love does not fade')

The generic level metaphor could be framed as LOVE IS A DETERIORATING OBJECT. This metaphor suggests that like any other perishable object, given time, love will deteriorate too. The more specific metaphors elaborate the schematic concept of DETERIORATING OBJECT with specific instances of this category, viz. METAL and PHOTOGRAPH, which deteriorate in their own specific ways: metal rusts, photographs fade.

Another source of diversity is cases where the same experiential correlation between perception and emotion underlies several proverbs, but additional cognitive tools elaborate these correlated domains in somewhat different directions. We do not aim at an exhaustive analysis of these examples, but would merely like to point to the more obvious sources of contrast:



- (12) *Out of sight, out of mind*  
(13) *Daleko od očiju, daleko od srca*  
(‘Far from eyes, far from heart’)  
(14) *Što oko ne vidi, srce ne žudi*  
(‘What the eye cannot see, the heart doesn’t long for’)  
(15) *Distance makes the heart grow fonder*

Proverbs in (12) to (14) are all rooted in the basic experiential correlation between EMOTIONAL UNENGAGEMENT and PERCEPTUAL INACCESSIBILITY. But notice that the English proverb in (12) fills this out with an image schema of a CONTAINER (*out*): objects lying outside of the boundaries of an enclosed space – which coincides with the scope of perception – cannot be perceived. By correlation, such objects are also outside the mind as a CONTAINER. The Croatian counterpart in (13) codes DISTANCE IN PHYSICAL SPACE (*daleko* ‘far’): objects that are distant in space cannot be perceived and cannot claim emotional attachment. Neither a CONTAINER nor PHYSICAL DISTANCE is implied in (14), where the simple fact of perceptual inaccessibility translates into the lack of emotional engagement.

Another difference between the English proverb and its two Croatian counterparts is the additional metonymies expressing the (lack of) emotions and absence. Notice that not one of the three proverbs states literally LOVE or ABSENCE. Rather, the emotion is metonymically accessed in Croatian via a body part associated with the emotion, HEART FOR LOVE, and in English via a cognitive faculty indirectly associated with the emotion, i.e. the MIND. ABSENCE is also metonymically expressed, in Croatian via the body part responsible for visual perception ORGAN (EYE) FOR PERCEPTION. The English proverb, in turn, makes no mention of the organ, but more directly of the faculty or power of seeing SIGHT.

The English proverb that sends a completely opposite message to that in (12) to (14) exploits the same imagery as the Croatian proverbs. In (15), there is a reference to PHYSICAL DISTANCE (cf. 13) to convey the idea of EMOTIONAL etc. ABSENCE, and the HEART FOR EMOTION metonymy (cf. 13 and 14) as a metonymic shortcut to the concept LOVE.

### 4.3. *English and Croatian proverbs on GREED*

In this section we will illustrate an image schema which can take us far in unifying the rich and diverging imagery behind a number of different proverbs. We will not analyze in detail all the proverbs below but will focus on the one conceptual element which they share, viz. the scalar nature of the behaviors and actions concerned. This image schema of a SCALE will provide a common platform for identifying GREED in (16) to (26) as “over-the-top” kind of behavior.

- (16) *He that will steal an egg will steal an ox.*
- (17) *Tko ukrade jaje, taj će i koku.*  
(‘He who steals an egg will steal a hen.’)
- (18) *The more you rub a cat on the rump, the higher she sets her tail.*
- (19) *Što više mačku mažeš, ona više rep nadiže.*  
(‘The more you pet a cat, the higher it lifts its tail.’)
- (20) *Pusti koku u jarak, ona će i na stog.*  
(‘Let the hen into a trench, it will climb on a haystack.’)
- (21) *Pusti macu pod policu, ona će i na policu*  
(‘Let the cat under a shelf, it will climb onto it.’)
- (22) *Pruži mu samo prst, a on grabi cijelu ruku.*  
(‘Give him a finger, he’ll grab the whole hand/arm.’)
- (23) *Give him an inch and he’ll take a yard.*
- (24) *Ako je med i sladak, ne valja i prste ugrizati.*  
(‘Honey may be sweet, but there’s no need to bite off your fingers.’)
- (25) *Your eyes are bigger than your stomach.*
- (26) *Greedy folks have long arms.*

All these proverbs convey a negative assessment of the behaviors which manifest greed, a major character flaw. Greed can be informally defined as desiring/taking more than is due or appropriate. This behavior is considered inappropriate because there is a sense of violation of some (unspecified) social norm.

Although representing more or less complex forms of social behavior, we argue that the different manifestations of greed in (16) to (26) have a common experiential underpinning, the image schema of a SCALE.<sup>8</sup> SCALE can be understood as a type of image schema that combines the notion of UP (VERTICALITY) and MORE (QUANTITY) since they are so often coactive in our experience (cf. whenever we see a pile going up as more things are added). Importantly, such scales not only underlie our basic correlational experience with the physical world (see above), but require a minor conceptual leap to allow the assessment of more abstract social behavior. The relatively abstract qualitative domain of GREED is thus construed relative to such an image schema, whereby the *more* we want, the *higher* up we stand on the GREED scale.

Notice that all of our examples make reference to the idea of scalarity in one of three ways. First, the performance of the same action (*stealing/rubbing/petting/roaming free/taking something* in (16) to (23)) may be construed on a scale from normal/moderate to excessive, where excess is defined in reference to a) the larger size of the object (*egg* vs. *hen/ox*; *finger* vs. *arm*; *inch* vs. *yard*) or b) exceeding the

<sup>8</sup> On different interpretations of scalarity, see Hampe and Grady (2005).

limits of socially sanctioned behavior (letting a cat go *under* a shelf, but not *on* the shelf; letting a hen *into* a trench, but not *on* a stack of hay<sup>9</sup>). Second, scalar inferences may derive from engaging in two different actions (though still within the same functional domain), of which one represents the standard of normal behavior; the other exceeds the contextually defined norm (*biting* honey-smearing fingers, instead of *licking* them clean in (24)). The scalar nature also manifests itself in appearance (25) and (26), i.e. bigger eyes than the stomach (the latter, but not the former, being the organ metonymically associated with food consumption and as such defining normal food intake), or longer arms than normal, allowing one to reach out of one's own personal sphere into the sphere of others/into their possessions (via metonymic association between BODY PART FOR ACTIVITY vs. LARGE BODY PART FOR EXCESSIVE ACTIVITY).

In short, all these examples imply the existence of a scale, of some socially acceptable norm on this scale, and deviation from this norm, in ways detailed above. Of course, the proverbs also exhibit very interesting variation, where e.g. in (16) and (17) unacceptable behavior means moving from petty theft (eggs) to stealing an ox and chicken in English and Croatian, respectively. Or, in examples (22) and (23), where giving inches but losing yards in English corresponds to giving a finger, but losing an arm in Croatian.

Interestingly, the GREED proverbs shown above have a few counterparts that send a slightly different message, although they play on the same schema of a SCALE:

(27) *A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.*

(28) *Bolje vrabac u ruci nego golub na grani.*

(‘Better a sparrow in hand than a pigeon on a branch’)

(29) *Stretch your arm no further than your sleeve reach.*

These are different from the proverbs in (16) to (26) in that they explicitly caution one to refrain from greed and excess (one bird is less than two birds; a sparrow is smaller than a pigeon, reaching out for things as far the sleeve goes guarantees less than you would get by extending your arm further; but this is framed as desirable). There is no idea of illicit or socially unsanctioned behavior, the moral of the proverb is to caution against wanting too much. A more detailed account of these proverbs and the interplay of different cognitive mechanisms behind their imagery would be a fascinating question to explore, however, this has to be left for future research.

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<sup>9</sup> Notice that here there is an explicit linguistic reference to verticality (*under* vs. *on*, *into* vs. *on*) where the socially sanctioned correlates with staying *below* a particular landmark, and the socially inappropriate (translating into one or another form of greed) correlates with climbing *on top* of it.

## 5. Conclusion

In this paper we have presented our cognitive-contrastive analysis of selected English and Croatian proverbs of human emotion and character traits. The goal was to recontextualize and reassess the universal-vs.-particular debate that still runs in contemporary paremiology. We have argued and hopefully managed to prove that there is no need for a strict dichotomy between the universalist (cognitive) and the particularist (folkloristic) concerns. A closer integration of the two agendas is possible under the roof of Cognitive Linguistics, which provides a set of tools, principles, and assumptions which make it possible to attend to both the universal and the culture-specific aspects of proverbs and their use. Moreover, by using several tools and theoretical models available in Cognitive Linguistics (conceptual metaphor, conceptual metonymy, image schemas and Blending Theory) we have shown that cross-linguistically, proverbs may share more than their universal categorizing function. Our examples have given evidence of similarities of a different order, i.e. partial and local similarities residing in the rich, culturally-specific imagery of specific proverbs, but also more schematic similarities arising from the experiential grounding of many, more or less abstract, concepts (i.e. image schemas). We did not go into explaining the *cultural sources* of proverb variation, for which we believe folkloristic paremiology is much better equipped. But we have hopefully shown that the various frameworks and tools already well-established within Cognitive Linguistics may successfully account for both the universal and language/culture-particular in proverbs at no extra cost. Finally, the benefits of this marriage between Cognitive Linguistics and paremiology are mutual, since Cognitive Linguistics can only grow if it allows its tools, models and explanatory principles to be constantly tested and re-evaluated against cross-linguistic and culture-specific data, especially data which are as deeply rooted in culture and tradition as proverbs.

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