

# IS PROVIDING PROVERBS A TOUGH JOB?

## References to Proverbs in Newspaper Texts\*

*Risto Järv*

### 1. POLITICIANS AS USERS OF PROVERBS

The novel by the Czech author Milan Kundera, *Immortality* contains the following passage: Johann Wolfgang Goethe is invited to an audience with Napoleon Bonaparte. At the beginning of the audience Napoleon, glancing at Goethe, utters a short remark, “*Voilà un homme! Hle, muž!*” [Behold, man]; towards its end he says “*divadlo – škola lidu*” [Theatre – school for the people] (Kundera 1990: 58, 60). As an experienced ruler, Napoleon knows that the greater part of what he is going to say will presently be forgotten. Making the speech memorable requires application of an **attention-grabber**. It takes but a brief impressive phrase – *une petite phrase*, as the French say – to be noticed by the listeners. If there were journalists present, these phrases would be repeated in the newspapers of the following day and the statesman could achieve his aim – to make a memorable presence.

Phrases of the kind constitute the sc. “borrowed sayings” columns in today’s Estonian newspapers. These include quotations by politicians or other influential persons, usually one per day. Sometimes these columns draw attention to the politicians’ infelicitous remarks, sometimes, however, they include such vividly expressive sayings as described above.<sup>1</sup>

The two phrases attributed to Napoleon represent two different methods of catching public attention. In the latter case, the utterer is as if presenting own ideas, which should attract the listeners’ attention in their figurativeness.<sup>2</sup> In the former case the French phrase “*Voilà un homme!*” can be compared with the corresponding Biblical quotation, *Et Pilate leur dit: Voici l’homme*” (John, 19:5).

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Using a phrase that is familiar to the audience makes the situation in which it is uttered more memorable. The moment of encountering something familiar – flavoured by the individual adaptations made by the speaker – takes the listeners back to a text familiar to them and, through that, to a familiar situation.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, the memorability essential for succeeding in politics can be guaranteed by using well-known quotations (or paraphrases of these) as well as dropping witty comments of one's own. One of the most influential categories of such quotations is made up by **proverbs**, that can be regarded as anonymous quotations, but – in contrast to anonymous letters – nevertheless exercise authoritative sources. The responsibility for their contents is projected on to the *anonymous past, anonymous folk* – as Alan Dundes and Erastus Ojo Arewa have formulated it their well-known essay titled “Proverbs and the Ethnography of Speaking Folklore” (1979: 35) which is among the first to draw attention not to proverbs as **texts**, but rather to the **context** in which they are used in oral speech.

## 2. THE AUTHORITY OF PROVERBS

That a proverb implies authority is reflected in many languages by the meaning of the corresponding natural term for it (i.e. the popular one, not introduced by researchers). In his work *Sananlaskut ja puheenparret* [Proverbs and proverbial phrases] (1954), Matti Kuusi has given a concise etymology of the word “proverb” in different languages. In addition to the expressions “**word uttered**” or “**word said**”, it may also have the meaning of “a statement in support of something” (Welsh or Cymric), a “**wise word**” (Komi or Zyryan) or an “**influential word**” (Japanese) (cf. Kuusi 1954: 5–6).

In Estonian (“*vanasõna*”) and Irish (“*sean fhocal*”) the underlying meaning is “an **old word**”. While, in the case of “a wise word”, reference is made to the significant quantity of wisdom contained in the saying, this case represents another obviously positive concept. The compound “old+word” is valued for its being “old”, i.e. belonging to the past – as has been the case with folklore ever since Herder's romantic conception of it.

As a side remark, a line of thought that is based on the author's impressions only and is not supported by any substantial proof could be mentioned at this point. At least in Estonian usage the word "*vanasõna*" has an important shade of meaning to it, as the general attitude towards proverbs that represent shorter forms of folklore, differs significantly from the attitude of an average uninformed person towards folklore as a whole, or "folk poetry" ("*rahvaluule*"), as the Estonians call it. For the man in the street anything that is included under the term "proverb" tends to have considerable truth value, whereas what is labelled as "folk poetry" is not infrequently viewed as fabrication, idle talk, as I have experienced during my field expeditions of collecting folklore.

In addition to mediating old wisdom, the user of proverbs – e.g. a politician – acquires an aura of being one of the people. Although borrowings by nature, proverbs seem to belong to the domain of **our own people**; thus, the statesman attempts to leave an impression that he is voicing the people's opinion. Abundant examples of proverbs used by politicians can be found on the highest levels of social hierarchy. Having chosen the Estonian words "*vanasõna*" ('proverb') and "*Meri*" as my search words in the Internet, using Altavista search engine offered four proverbs from the speeches given by Lennart Meri, President of Estonia, as well as several proverbs from his interviews. It seems that the reason for using proverbs in the speeches was not mere political eloquence, but also the wish to be remembered by the use of proverbs. Meri has included proverbs in his speeches held during his visit to Japan<sup>4</sup> and on the occasion of the first visit of the Turkish head of state to Estonia,<sup>5</sup> in his speech commemorating the perished MS Estonia,<sup>6</sup> as well as in the introduction to the Estonian Human Development Report in 1996 presented to the UN.<sup>7</sup> The President of a country enthusiastic over the Internet concludes the latter speech with the following words:

*/--- / There is an Estonian proverb we would like the Internet to propagate over the world: "Kus viga näed laita, seal tule ja aita!" ("Where you find fault with something, come and give a hand.") Proverbs never grow old, for they harbour the collective wisdom of the people – just the kind that people use as they talk among themselves or to their State.*

### 3. "IS PROVIDING PROVERBS A TOUGH JOB"?

In the survey article on proverbs included in the new encyclopaedia of American folklore the influential proverb researcher Wolfgang Mieder, who has conducted similar research himself (Mieder 1997b) argues that the ways in which world leaders of the democratic or dictatorial persuasion have used proverbs as an effective political tool can be of similar interest to researchers as the use and functions of proverbs among the sc. *primitive peoples* (Mieder 1997a: 665).

The contents of the Estonian proverb about proverbs ("*Vanasõna ei ole varrest võtta*", EV 13584),<sup>8</sup> could be conveyed into English approximately as, "providing proverbs is a tough job". The proverb was sent to the Estonian Folklore Archives by the correspondent Marta Mäesalu, whose explanation to the meaning of the text says that a proverb "is not for changing, distorting as one pleases" (*Eesti vanasõnad* III: 637). Also, the saying may mean that proverbs when used properly come to the user "on their own accord", not when desperately looked for. According to the academic index of Estonian proverbs, this unit has been recorded only once. Nevertheless, considering the general reliability of the correspondent who has sent it to the archive, it has been identified as an authentic proverb.

The distribution of proverbs contained in the Estonian Folklore Archives is governed by the so-called Zipf's Law (cf. Krikmann 1997: 188) – a relatively small number of proverbs are represented by numerous recordings, whereas a major number of proverbs have only a small number of recording instances. More than a half of the proverbs have been recorded only once. Nevertheless, the uniqueness of the metaproverbial proverb may raise the question if using proverbs in vain could have been considered too insignificant for the people for other proverbs to be coined about it. According to the electronic collection of proverbs "*Eesti vanasõnad*" [Estonian Proverbs], there are 13 metaproverbial Estonian proverbs, the number of recordings in each case is one or two only,<sup>9</sup> except for two types boasting significantly greater numbers of recordings – "*Vanasõna ei valeta*" [A proverb does not tell lies] (EV 13585, 25 authentic texts), and "*Vanasõna – vana hõbe*" [Proverb is old silver] (EV 13592, 15 authentic texts).

Thus we are faced with the question if proverbs are used in the function of a purposeful embellishment, a rhetorical cliché or spontaneously.

#### 4. SEARCH

In my research I have attempted to observe proverb usage in contemporary Estonian society. As the Herculean task of identifying all occasions of the use of proverbs by politicians appeared insurmountable, I decided to observe the context of proverb usage not by state authorities but by the so-called “fourth power” or the press.

The search for proverbs in today’s newspaper texts has been restricted to those original articles, published in *Postimees* and *Eesti Päevaleht*, the two major daily papers in Estonia, that have appeared in the Internet during the past two years.<sup>10</sup> In my search I have followed my earlier practice and confined myself to a relatively simple method of search (cf. Järv 1997: 31–34) – **only these proverbs have been taken into consideration, in case of which the user has marked the different level of text.** In Estonian this is done by using traditional phrases, approximately such as: “as the saying goes...” (Est. “*vanasõna ütleb, et*”), “as folk wisdom has it...” (Est. “*rahvatarkuse järgi...*”), etc. Also, it appeared that in some cases the users tended to call proverbs proverbial phrases; therefore, I have included also those “proverbial phrases” as they were labelled, that obviously turned to be proverbs.<sup>11</sup> The search was limited to four keywords only – *vanasõna* (**‘proverb’**), *rahvatarkus* (**‘folk wisdom’**), *kõnekäänd* (**‘proverbial phrase’**), *vanarahvas* (**‘old folk’**). Thus we might say that the search has ‘noticed’ only the proverbs in case of which any of these terms is applied as an ‘indicator’ of a proverb.

the use of proverbs, indicated by the author as	Päevaleht	Postimees	Total
‘proverb’	56	98	154
‘old folk’	7	20	27
‘proverbial phrase’	17	9	26
‘folk wisdom’	12	12	24
Total	92	139	231

Table 1. General results: the marking of proverb usage with different terms.

The use of such simplified search system could be justified by the fact that in the cases mentioned the authors of articles draw the readers' attention to the "proverbiality" of the utterances. So, in the case of the above markers, not knowing the proverb cannot create a situation where the proverb is not recognised as one. This aspect has been brought forward by e.g. Shirley Arora who, having studied the perception of Spanish proverbs, polemizes with Dundes' and Arewa's above-mentioned essay. In the collection *Wise Words*, compiled by Wolfgang Mieder, she stresses that proverb performance is successful when the other party is **clearly aware** that what is used is a proverb, or "collective wisdom" (cf. Arora 1994: 6).

It is obvious that such search method is not exhaustive. A comparison of the newspaper material with each of the 15.000 types of proverbs identified in the volume *Eesti vanasõnad* would be more resultative; however, it would involve too massive amount of work to be employed. Moreover, the folkloric variation of proverbs as well as their conscious variations (e.g. paraphrases) would complicate a search according to the types' title texts or core terms.

The number of proverbs that remain undiscovered by this method cannot be estimated, as we lack statistics on how often the "proverbiality" of a proverb is emphasised and how often its usage is marked. A brief survey of the articles found by the above-mentioned search method proved that proverbs not modified by the search keywords can be used even in the same articles. For example, in addition to the concluding sentence of article by the prolific proverb user Rando Soome, *I am reminded of the proverb about shoemakers who never have decent shoes to put on*,<sup>12</sup> there is a reference to a proverb in the headline of the same article "**Silence is Really Gold**" (recalls the proverb "Talking is silver, silence is gold" EV 9956).<sup>13</sup>

## 5. "PROVERBS ARE NOT POPULAR THESE DAYS..."

"/--/ and too often they just do not apply any more", one of the considered articles stated.<sup>14</sup> And yet, both daily newspapers would call for proverbs almost every other day; all in all, nearly 300 texts using proverbs could be detected for further discussion. In addition to these, there were about 50 of those articles that dealt with

proverbs on another level, containing references to researchers, collections of proverbs etc.<sup>15</sup> These were excluded from my calculations; also, several texts were ignored that were **referred** to as ‘proverbs’ by the users, but which did not in fact belong to our proverb body, representing e. g. so-called short proverbial phrases.<sup>16</sup> As an exception, a popular saying remaining on the borderline between the proverb and the proverbial phrase “*Hundid söönud, lambad terved*” [Wolves fed, sheep whole] was included. It is not recorded as a proverb in EV but still was as a rule regarded as one by most of its users.

I have also included familiar quotations, which to a certain extent meet the criteria set for proverbs. In such cases the author’s name has been forgotten in the course of time or has never been known. The concluding sentence of an article on politics could serve as an example:

*/---/ And, as the proverb goes: He who does not know his past may have to relive it. This is a tragedy I would not wish to befall even Russians.* <sup>17</sup>

seems to be a free rendition of the aphorism by the Estonian author Juhan Liiv. “He who doesn’t know his past lives with no future”.

Of course, we can never be certain whether such subjective sifting of including and excluding has an effect on the statistics below. The following is to exemplify some points of hesitation. One article begins with the sentence:

*/---/ According to folk wisdom a warm summer is usually followed by a warm winter; a hot summer, on the other hand, followed by an extremely cold winter /---/*<sup>18</sup>

This does indeed remind of a recorded text noted as proverb “*Sui käib talve järele*” [Like summer, like winter], (EV 10983, 5 authentic recordings). Still, as the text is not an aphorism presented as a proverb, but rather an example of the so-called *common wisdom*, it was discarded.

From the point of view of folklore research, also the next extract contains neither a proverb nor actual beliefs of people; rather, it could be classified as an everyday credo:

*!--/ A German proverb about catching the cold says that it takes three days to come, three days to be there, three days to disappear. There is another proverb about the running nose as well. This states that if you treat it, it will be cured in a week, and if you don't, it will be gone in seven days !--<sup>19</sup>*

With some hesitation I included an extract from a literary review which attempted to characterise the book's protagonist with the help of the proverb "*Kudas küla mulle, nõnda mina külale*" [As the village treats me, I shall treat the village] (EV 5030, 115 authentic texts). To support her choice, the author made a reference to the 2nd volume of "*Eesti vanasõnad*", including the page number as well as the large number of variants offered, obviously with the aim of proving the proverb's reliability.<sup>20</sup>

A fairly interesting letter by a reader was left out, that was titled "**Let's Remember Folk Wisdom**". In this an annoyed parent pointed out nine proverbs from M. J. Eisen's book "Estonian Proverbs", standing up for her child's school (e.g. *Mis sa teed, teed enesele* [Whatever you do, you do unto yourself], *Seda, mis tahad teisele öelda, ütle enne enesele* [Whatever you wish to say to another, first say to yourself], *Mida vihaga tehakse, läheb viltu* [What is done in anger will fail], *On sul häda, kaeba enesele* [If you have a trouble, complain to yourself]).<sup>21</sup>

## 6. OWN AND FOREIGN, OLD AND NEW

The occasional interpretation of the Estonian term "vanasõna" which allows proverbs to be regarded only as **old** wise sayings, as if will not allow for any more recent sayings reminiscent of proverbs, that have become firmly established in popular usage, to be classified under this name. Nonetheless, sayings such as "*Enne, kui lähed Pariisi, käi ära Nuustakul*" [Before going to Paris, go and visit Nuustaku], "*Üks pilt räägib enam kui tuhat sõna*" [One picture says more than a thousand words], "*Kes maksab arved, tellib hiljem muusika*" [He who pays the bill can order the music] have



become firmly established in modern usage and are perceived as proverbs by the people.

It is hardly surprising that such new sayings have an international spread. A number of such “new” proverbs was discovered by the Finnish as the result of the 1985 contest in proverb collecting. The bulky volume of this material contains the proverbs and proverbial phrases that had not been included among the archival records up to 1950 and nor appeared in publications about proverbs before 1965 (Kuusi 1988: 14). The material includes equivalents to such sayings labelled as proverbs in our newspaper texts as “*Üks pilt räägib rohkem kui tuhat sõna*”<sup>22</sup> [One picture says more than a thousand words] (Cf. *ibid.*: 253), “*Poolel teel hobuseid ei vahetata*”<sup>23</sup> [Horses are not to be changed on half-way] (Cf. *ibid.*: 215; Archer Taylor (1931: 37) attributes it to Abraham Lincoln).

Not infrequently proverbs of other nations have been made conscious use of. As stated by the authors of the articles, there were all in all 29 occasions of proverbs from 15 different countries (in fact, foreign proverbs were even more numerous). Russian (8), English and Chinese (both 3) were the ones used most frequently. A minor part of them was used in direct dependence on the context, i.e. the article was concerned with the relevant country. For example, an article about the Russian Orthodox religion began with the words:

*/--/ “A priest’s beard is always soaked in butter” goes a Russian proverb /--/*<sup>24</sup>

An article that was inspired by the building of an oil terminal in Lithuania described the passionate debates around it:

*/--/ Social democrats call the terminal a strategic issue, but president Brazauskas and prime minister Gediminas Vagnorius regard it as a commercial matter. There is a Lithuanian proverb: a name does not ruin the thing itself. /--/*<sup>25</sup>

Generally, however, there was no obvious reference to the contents of the article and the proverbs were well-known maxims of ancient “classical” cultures (Latin, Arab, Hindu), or expressed the wisdom of indigenous peoples (Rundi, Mari). In a single case a proverb was attributed to another culture to achieve a comic effect.

Texts regarded as foreign proverbs were in some cases known also in the Estonian tradition, – for example, “*Peale kaklust rusikatega ei vehelda!*” [Do not fling your fists after the fight] that occurred three times (and was twice identified as a Russian proverb), is included in EV with one authentic version, “*Pärast riidu ei ole tarvis rusikad näidata*” [There is no need to show your fists after the quarrel], (EV 9622, a record from Vaivara parish where the Russian influence has been strong).

It can be assumed that a proverb of a foreign “high” culture may at times seem more effective to the user than a local one, e.g. the proverb quoted in the extract:

*/---/A popular Chinese proverb says that if everyone swept the pavement in front of his house, the whole street would be clean. /---/*<sup>26</sup>

has an Estonian variant as well (EV 9372, “*Igäüks pühkigu oma ukseesist*” [Everyone should sweep their own threshold]).

All in all, the total of 182 proverbs could be provided with EV register numbers<sup>27</sup> for, while the remaining twenty percent consisted of foreign loans, familiar quotations, etc. with no Estonian counterparts. Thus, we can admit that the fact of the proverbs’ absence from the EV register did not discourage the authors from classifying them as “proverbs” [“folk wisdom” etc] – “new” proverbs and those from other cultures were used without their origin or novelty proving a problem.

## 7. PARAPHRASES AND PARODIES

Naturally, the proverb texts were liable to variation; memory will play its tricks even when the texts have reached the user via a secondary tradition. Also, there were more complicated variations – for example, merging of two proverb texts:

*/---/ Generally, the saying “kava tehtud, hästi tehtud” [Slowly done, well done] does not apply to the production of Russian car industry. /---/*<sup>28</sup>

Apparently, this is a combination of the proverbs “*Kava tehtud, kaunikene...*” [That which is slowly done, is nice] and “*Ise tehtud, hästi tehtud*” [Done by oneself, well done], (EV 8487+EV 7982).

In a few dozen cases the proverbs were paraphrased intentionally for the purpose of parody. Considering their proportionate role, however, shows that the “growth in intensity of the production of proverbial parodies”, noticed by Arvo Krikmann a decade ago (Krikmann 1985: 474), seems hardly to have become prevalent, at least not in the tradition of the press.

In some cases, however, the paraphrasing of proverbs was probably not intended to result in a humorous effect. The following text might serve as an example,

*/---/ I can't help recalling the old folk wisdom that an ox is to be feared from the front, a horse from the back and a career-climber from all four sides simultaneously /---/*<sup>29</sup>

listed as a proverb it ends with the words, “and an evil person from all sides” (EV 3270); it is not certain whether the press version is the author’s creation or a paraphrase heard from elsewhere. That the evaluative force of a proverb (even if made humorous use of) may be retained in newspaper articles has been observed, among others by Neal N. Norrick (1985: 24).

In an interview the sports physician Peeter Mardna argues that it is not sports medicine only that can guarantee Estonian skiers

*“/---/ high results at title competitions. Or, to paraphrase a proverb: Trust in medicine, but do some work yourself as well!” Mardna adds.*<sup>30</sup>

Apparently, this is a paraphrase of the internationally known proverb “Trust in God, but don’t be reckless yourself” (There are no authentic records of the proverb among the Estonian archival texts).

In case of some paraphrases the comical purpose was secondary, e.g., in the sentence “...*vanarahvas teadis öelda, ega tuumaõnnetus ei hüüa tülles...*” [... a nuclear accident brings no warning, as folk wisdom has it...], which refers to the proverb “*Õnnetus ei hüüa tülles*” [Misfortune brings no warning], (EV 14714).

The most numerous category of paraphrases discovered seems to have been aimed at creating a comical effect; the paraphrase acquired an additional element of parody. For example, introducing the picture “The First Wives’ Club”, a film critic wrote,

*“Fool a woman once, and she will fool you nine times,” may be a topical interpretation of a well-known proverb /---/.<sup>31</sup>*

A special mention should be made of the journalist Tambet Kaugema, who has used modified paraphrasing on several occasions; he is the author of modifications such as “*Aga kus suitsu, seal välgumihklit, on vanarahvas ikka öelnud.*” [The old folk has always said that where there’s smoke, there’s a lighter]<sup>32</sup> and “*Parem papagoi peos, kui kondor katusel*” [A parrot in the hand is better than a condor on the rooftop],<sup>33</sup> also a statement of uncertain authenticity: “*Samojeedi rahvatarkus ütleb, et kahte asja ei tohi pilgata: mehe naist ja mehe palka*” [A Samoyed saying goes that you must not make fun of two things: the man’s wife and the man’s salary].<sup>34</sup>

## 8. DISTRIBUTION OF PROVERBS IN DIFFERENT COLUMNS

Taking into account the differences between the divisions into sections of the two daily newspapers, the columns had to be unified. Thus, token ‘conventional columns’ were formed, mainly on the basis of the more general columns of *Eesti Päevaleht* and by reorganizing the more detailed division of *Postimees*. Also a new separate section titled **Readers’ Letters** was introduced. Originally, it did not exist in either of the papers. On the side of *Postimees* the **Opinion** column (“*Arvamus*”) was divided in two, separating **readers’ letters** (even if these were concerned with politics) on the one hand, and **political** articles on the other. I also regarded the **People** section of the weekend supplement *Extra* of *Postimees* and the column **Life** as equivalent with the **People** column of *Eesti Päevaleht*; these were united as the section **Life, people**. As could be expected, some columns in either newspaper had no equivalent in the other, the rest of the articles were classified as **Other**.

Measuring the “proneness to proverbs” in different columns of different newspapers need not necessarily provide the most reliable of results. Due to the paucity of the material observed, the conclusions reached might be arbitrary. The number of proverb occurrences in different token columns (see Table 2) is nearly equal as regards **Politics** and **Readers’ Letters**, followed by **Culture**,

column/newspaper	Eesti Päevaleht %		Postimees %		Total %	
Politics	21	22.8	23	16.5	44	19.0
Readers' letters	10	10.8	33	23.7	43	18.6
Culture	16	17.4	23	16.6	39	16.9
Sports	10	10.9	21	15.1	31	13.4
Life, people	12	13.0	14	10.1	26	11.3
Foreign News	4	4.4	8	5.8	12	5.2
Environment	11	12.0	1	0.7	12	5.2
Economy	7	7.6	2	1.4	9	3.9
News	0	0.0	5	3.6	5	2.2
Media Review	-	--	4	3.6	4	1.7
Other	1	1.1	5	2.9	6	2.6
Total	92	100.0	139	100.0	231	100.0

Table 2. The total of proverbs and percentage of articles containing proverbs.

**Sports** and **Life, people**. However, the separate ‘top lists’ of the two papers are somewhat different from each other – e. g. in *Postimees* **Readers’ Letters** are definitely at the top.

It must not be forgotten that the proportions of columns vary as well according to the newspaper. That the number of proverbs in readers’ letters of *Eesti Päevaleht* is smaller than in *Postimees* comes as no surprise, being obviously caused by the smaller amount of readers’ letters printed. Also, there is no such column as **Media Review** in *Eesti Päevaleht*. The column **Environment**, however, appears almost every day in *Eesti Päevaleht*, but quite rarely in *Postimees* (under the name of Nature), which is the reason why this column was on quite a high position in the ‘top list’ of the former newspaper.

As mentioned already, the frequent use of proverbs in the **Politics** column is hardly surprising, as politicians want to be remembered and wish to imply reliance on people. The high position of **Readers’ Letters** in the list is fairly predictable – letters sent to editors are often intended as a protest or to teach others. The authors have probably assumed that the most efficient way of educating a collective is by using arguments ostensibly created by the same collective. While similar psychological motivation can partly be pre-

sumed in the case of politicians as well, readers' letters there may also contain the fear that the writer, the man on the street would not get a hearing, and thus they had better use "generally accepted truth".

The frequent use of proverbs in the **Culture** column can be explained by the fact that proverbs belong rather to the cultural sphere than to the topics covered by other columns. Still, I would once again remind the possible "flaws" in the mechanism of choice. About a quarter of the proverbs (4) from the Culture column in *Eesti Päevaleht* derive from Mati Unt's essayistic articles in the series "Everyday Mythology" where he often gives examples of different nations' wisdom. Often, however, it can be assumed that these are artificial and do not express a spontaneous reaction, but rather the firm intention to demonstrate the author's erudition (this is further indicated by the wide range of the proverbs and familiar quotations of different origin that he uses). E.g. in the article "**Red Light**" Unt writes: "There is an English proverb saying that the red evening sky is the shepherd's joy, and the red morning sky is a warning for bad weather".<sup>35</sup> In his article "**Field**" he recalls the well-known proverb "*Narrid põldu üks kord, narrib põld sind üheksa korda vastu*" [Cheat the field once and the field will cheat you nine times], (EV 7398) arguing that it is a case of personifying the field.<sup>36</sup>

What appears as a surprise is the sum total of the proverbs in the **Sports** column of *Postimees*. Almost all of these (18 out of 21) occur in Rando Soome's articles, presented either directly ("*Kus häda kõige suurem, seal abi kõige lähem*" [Where the need is the greatest, help is nearest], (EV 1787),<sup>37</sup> or "*Töö kiidab tegijat*" [Work praises the one who has done it], (EV 12515)),<sup>38</sup> or as paraphrases:

*!--/ I cannot help being reminded of the proverb about shoemakers who never have decent shoes to put on.*<sup>39</sup>

*!--/ Knight's words implied that at least in his opinion, business is thicker than blood, to paraphrase a popular saying.!--/*<sup>40</sup>

Thus, this is the case of an author's uncommonly prolific use of proverbs that is not equalled by anyone else.<sup>41</sup>

Quite a number of proverbs could be found in the **Life, people** column. In the interviews included here, in some cases the proverbs have been uttered by the person interviewed and the reporter has just recorded them. But still, proverbs have also been used in asking questions: a reporter, for instance, asked the director general of the State Revenue Office whether the proverb “*Suured vargad sõidavad tõllas, väiksed ripuvad võllas*” [Big thieves drive in coaches, smaller ones are hanging from the gallows] still applies. The answer was the following

*/---/ All thieves should be hanged, the bigger ones higher and smaller ones lower. (Laughs.) Actually, there should be no difference in how they are treated. /---/*<sup>42</sup>

Among the most important columns it is predictably the **Economy** column that contains relatively few proverbs. This is illustrated by *Postimees*, where the classification of the two articles involving proverbs under “Economy” is ambiguous – although classified as such by the newspaper, both are connected with family planning rather than represent orthodox articles on economic issues.<sup>43</sup> Proverbs occurring in the **Economy** column of *Eesti Päevaleht* were comparatively more abundant, including a striking example of manipulation with a proverb that was included in an insurance agent’s call for buying insurance: “As the saying goes, “Stinging is no economy”, and so is not being insured.”<sup>44</sup>

It seems interesting that while *Postimees* has peppered its **News** column with five different proverbs (it must be admitted, though, that two of them appear in interviews on topical matters), there is not a single occurrence of proverbs in the corresponding column of *Eesti Päevaleht*.

All these differences have influenced the general statistics, during the period of two years (see table 1) the references to proverbs in *Eesti Päevaleht* are less numerous by one-third than those in *Postimees*. The uneven need for proverbs could be caused by the different size, or else by the different target groups of the two papers. *Eesti Päevaleht* has characterised its reader as an “ambitious Estonian”,<sup>45</sup> while *Postimees*, which is released in a bigger circulation, has aspired to be a paper for “readers of all age groups”.<sup>46</sup>

## 9. DISTRIBUTION OF PROVERBS ACCORDING TO AUTHORS

As mentioned, the articles containing the largest number of proverbs were written by Rando Soome – all in all he used proverbs in 17 different articles. References to proverbs in more than three articles occurred in the texts of authors such as Vahur Kalmre, Tambet Kaugema, Andrus Laansalu, Mati Unt, (4), Vahur Kalmre (4), Česlovas Iškauskas, Ülo Tonts, Deivil Tserp, and Andres Varik (3). Among consistent proverb users there are not as many politicians as might have been predicted. Nevertheless, more than one proverb was used by Andres Varik, minister of agriculture (3), Robert Lepikson, in his roles as the minister of internal affairs and the mayor of Tallinn (1 + 1), and the young politician Meelis Kitsing (2).

The principal users of proverbs in newspaper texts are men – they have contributed 72% of the proverbs under observation, whereas women were responsible for 17% (the rest of the articles were written by persons whose gender remained unspecified, the articles were anonymous or signed with initials only). Yet I believe that the proportion in covering the total newspaper space is not quite three quarters in favour of men, with women being responsible for one fifth of the newspaper only. So, to provide a cautious formulation, **men seem to use more proverbs in newspapers than women.**

It is interesting to observe how the use of a proverb by one author can bring along the reflection of the same proverb (at times even in a similar context) by another. Also, this might confirm the fact that a proverb sharpens the audience's attention. For example, an author made a critical comment, relying on the proverb "*Kelle leiba sööd, selle laulu ka laulad*" [You sing the song of the person whose bread you eat], (Cf. EV 5657).<sup>47</sup> In an answer published three days later the proverb was "returned", i.e. was directed against its original employer.<sup>48</sup> Thus, criticism with the help of a proverb must have been effective and conditioned its re-use.

Several examples of the kind could be detected. On April 16, 1996 the Sports column of *Eesti Päevaleht* includes the following sentence:



*/---/ The winners are not judged – this saying would also justify [basketball coach Allan] Dorbek’s behaviour /---/.<sup>49</sup>*

Two days later the same phrase is repeated by another author, an editor of the sports column:

*/---/ After the match this situation was not mentioned, he was simply glorified. Even the saying goes: the winners are not judged /---/<sup>50</sup>*

Also, we can observe how the same proverb is repeatedly inspired by the same situation. Presuming that the following two texts are not influenced by each other, we have another – in this case Island-related – piece of evidence of how witty expressions absorb in people’s minds and are quoted in their travel journals with nearly a year between them.

*/---/ But yesterday’s weather refuted the Icelandic saying that if you don’t like the weather, wait for half an hour /---/<sup>51</sup>*

*/---/ Icelanders have a proverb of the Murphy kind: if you do not happen to like the Icelandic weather, just wait for five minutes and it gets worse /---/<sup>52</sup>*

## 10. THE POWER OF PROVERBS

Due to its intertextuality a proverb exercises a distinct influence by being merged in the text. The proverb is a complete text in its own right, constituting **a text within the text**. A proverb is even more powerful when in a stressed position, at the beginning or end of the text. In his survey of the use of proverbs in some newspapers Max Lüthi has mentioned the not infrequent use of proverbs “*an ausgezeichnete Stelle*,” as titles or concluding sentences (Lüthi 1970: 495).

It is a known fact that what is said at the beginning or end of a story is remembered best, psychologists have called such an experiment (conducted with sequences of unrelated words) *recency effect* and *primacy effect* (see e.g. Gleitman 1991: 249). Thus, such positioning of proverbs will show the author’s (perhaps even unconscious) wish to be remembered by the reader, reveal the gen-

eral tonality of the story or provide it with an imposing final chord. Traditionally, proverbs have been used at the end of folk tales to make a rhetorical conclusion of what has preceded; however, unlike folk tales, newspaper texts are fairly utilitarian. It seems that the use of a proverb positioned at the texts' beginning, especially functioning as the title, can be regarded as relatively "non-folkloric"; such application of proverbs is rather a calculated action than a spontaneous reaction to the situation.<sup>53</sup>

In the following I shall observe proverbs in titles, at the beginning and end of texts. Also proverbs situated not at the absolute beginning or end of the article, but remaining near the corresponding "border" of the text, are included. These additional proverbs were all situated in the first or the last paragraphs, and the "topic" of the proverb was not deviated from – the whole of the text between the proverb and the text border constituted a preparatory statement for the proverb or its conclusion. Examples from the beginnings of sentences:

*Chairman of the Coalition Party Mr Tiit Vähi and Chairman of the Centre Party Mr Edgar Savisaar have busily been digging pits for each other for two weeks running. Supposing the well-known proverb be true, the digger should fall into the pit himself* /---/<sup>54</sup>

*In today's technological world talking is an old-fashioned form of communication. Even a proverb has said that talking is silver, silence is gold* /---/<sup>55</sup>

On one occasion a set of two proverbs was used to summarise the article:

*/---/ There are two good proverbs applicable in such a situation: "The pot derides the kettle" and "It is wiser to give in". Your preference will depend on your kindness.*<sup>56</sup>

We should make a note here that some of the examples involving two proverbs in a row in one and the same article have become 'devaluated' for our statistics, e.g. the following concluding sentences

*/---/ Just be consistent and keep on looking. He who seeks shall find – as the proverb goes. And a mouse will not run into the mouth of a sleeping cat!*<sup>57</sup>

In distributions all such cases (7) were considered to be a single reference to a proverb.

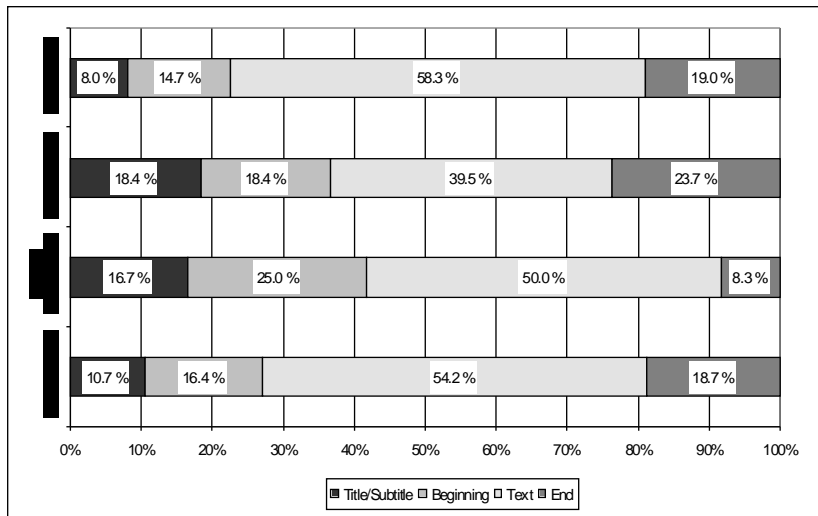


Chart 1. The use of proverbs at the beginning/end of the article according to the user's gender. Percentage among the particular distributions.

Chart 1 shows the tendencies in positioning the proverbs. As it appears, men have placed proverbs into beginning or end of the article in more than 40 percent of the cases. Women have proved to be even more conscious employers of proverbs – three out of every five proverbs used by women (nearly 60%) are placed at the very end or beginning of the article. In other words, as such sentences constitute but a minor part of the bulk of the article, the function of the proverb as a rhetorical weapon is quite apparent.<sup>58</sup>

The authors' awareness of the power of proverbs is convincingly proved by including them in editorials. Half of the eight proverbs used in the editorials of *Postimees* were placed at the end of the text.

*/---/ If he [the current prime minister of Estonia Mart Siimann] has really no skeletons in his closet as he himself claims, there is no need to be worried. Nobody can lay hold of the skirt of a righteous man, as the proverb goes.<sup>59</sup>*

*/---/ And so the personnel policy of Siimann so far recalls the proverb: row slow and you shall reach far. And if there are no extraordinary elections, he may indeed get far.<sup>60</sup>*

*/---/ Better half an egg than an empty shell – “Postimees” would like to hope that the proverb does not apply here. All compensations that high state officials receive should be honest and made public. Only then could we decide whether Tüit Vähi’s [the then prime minister of Estonia] future salary of 16.560 kroons a month is appropriate for a politician.<sup>61</sup>*

*/---/ Thus, at the visa negotiations with Finland Estonia does not have to play the role of the humble brother any more. “He, who has thirst, has legs,” says an Estonian proverb.<sup>62</sup>*

We cannot overlook the fact that in three cases proverbs are meant to reproach the Prime Minister in office. Obviously, proverbs are used as *vox populi* not only by the statesmen, but also against them.

In both newspapers proverbs (or paraphrases of them) were used as headlines:

**Before Going to Paris, Go and Visit Nuustaku!  
First Negligence, then Disaster.  
Taking One’s Time Brings Good Results  
Never Look a Gift Horse in the Mouth  
Repetition is the Mother of Wisdom  
He Who Asks is not Slapped on the Mouth  
You Shall Reap What You Sow  
A Name Does not Ruin the Man  
If a Cow Had a Grandmother It Would Keep an Eye on  
the Calf! (Estonian proverb)**

**The Mote that is in Thy Brother’s Eye...** [+ in the article the text was continued as: “...and the beam in your own”]

The first example is not one of the ‘authentic’ proverbs, but it is often used these days. In this regard, nearly all proverbs used as

headlines belong to the ones used frequently, which confirms that popularity in traditional usage has indeed served as a precondition for them to be included in headlines. An exception here is “If the cow...” – a proverb with a single authentic variant obviously derived from the collection *Vanasōnaraamat*.<sup>63</sup>

Headline proverbs are often extended: “**Stinging on Insurance is no Economy**”,<sup>64</sup> and modified: “**The Big Cheats are Still Driving in Coaches**”,<sup>65</sup> “**Half an Egg Does Not Replace a Whole**”,<sup>66</sup> “**The Cranes Have Left, but Nasty Weather Has Not Come**”.<sup>67</sup> An interesting example of proverb usage was an article where the headline “**Negligence Causes Increasingly More Fire Accidents**” was extended by the first sentence of the article “*First negligence, then disaster*”.<sup>68</sup> Sometimes headlines question the validity of proverbs: “**Is Silence Consent?**”,<sup>69</sup> or reverse folk wisdom, “**Wolves not Fed, Sheep Gone**”.<sup>70</sup>

Mihkel Mutt’s lengthy essay titled “**Tying up the Ox’s Mouth**”, an extensive speculation on the meaning of proverbs, used, as its starting point, a proverb derived from the Biblical quotation about not tying up the ox’s mouth while he is threshing grain. The article was placed in the context of the then topical “housing scandal” (municipal government illegally selling apartments to statesmen and businessmen).<sup>71</sup>

There is little that is new under the Sun. The present article was already nearly completed when I discovered a similar research conducted by Wolfgang Mieder in 1971 that was based on the weekly *Die Zeit* (Mieder 1983). The frequency of proverb occurrence in Mieder’s survey provided a ‘top list’ nearly similar to the one introduced above. (The division of Mieder’s survey was indeed more specific, and the columns with no equivalents in my survey could change the results to a certain extent): Modern Life – Politics – *Feuilleton* – Readers’ Letters – Mirror of Country – Economy – Literature – Science – Sports – Topical (Mieder 1983: 12).

Wolfgang Mieder also studied the position of proverbs in articles. 36 (11.7%) out of the total of 306 proverbs were used as headlines, 64 (20.9%) at the beginning of paragraphs, 56 (18.3%) at the end of paragraphs. (Mieder 1983: 12). It deserves attention that only 65

(21.2%) of the proverbs detected by Mieder are marked, whereas the terms used as keywords in the present paper form but a minor part of Miedler's survey (Mieder 1983: 12). This confirms that the actual number of proverbs in newspaper texts might be considerably higher than the one presented in our survey.

## 11. TOP LIST OF THE MOST POPULAR PROVERBS

According to the result of the survey, the most popular marked proverbs were the following:

*Üheksa korda mõõda, üks kord lõika* [Measure nine times, cut once], (EV 14841, authentic archival texts 40) – 7 occurrences

*Väiksed vargad ripuvad võllas, suured sõidavad tõllas* [Smaller thieves are hanging from the gallows, bigger ones are driving in coaches], (EV 14474, authentic texts 35) – 5

*Parem hilja kui mitte kunagi* [Better late than never], (EV 1262, auth. 40) – 4

*Pada sõimab katelt, ühed mustad mõlemad* [The pot derides the kettle, both are equally black], (EV 8196, auth. 220) – 3

*Parem pool muna kui tühi koor* [Better half an egg than an empty shell], (EV 8970, auth. 270) – 3

*Ära enne vana kaevu täis aja, kui uus valmis ei ole* [Don't fill up the old well before you have dug a new one], (EV 13525, auth. 195) – 3, occurred only as 'Don't spit into...'

*Pea tehtud pilla-palla, kaus tehtud kaunikene* [What is done quickly is a muddle, what is done slowly is nice], (EV 8487, auth. 165) – 3

*Teise silmas näed pindu, enda silmas ei näe palki* [The mote that is in thy brother's eye and the beam in thine own eye], (EV 11889, auth. 50) – 3

*Tasa sõidad, kaugemale jõuad* [The slower you drive, the further you get], (EV 11698, auth. 35) – 3

*Pärast riidu ei ole tarvis rusikad näidata* [There is no need to show your fists after the quarrel], (EV 9622, auth. 1) – 3

It is possible that ‘proverbiality’ is stressed first of all in case of less known proverbs, therefore, we might assume that more popular proverbs were all in all more poorly represented in our search. As a second phase of the study a renewed search for proverb texts that were already detected by the present search might have been conducted.

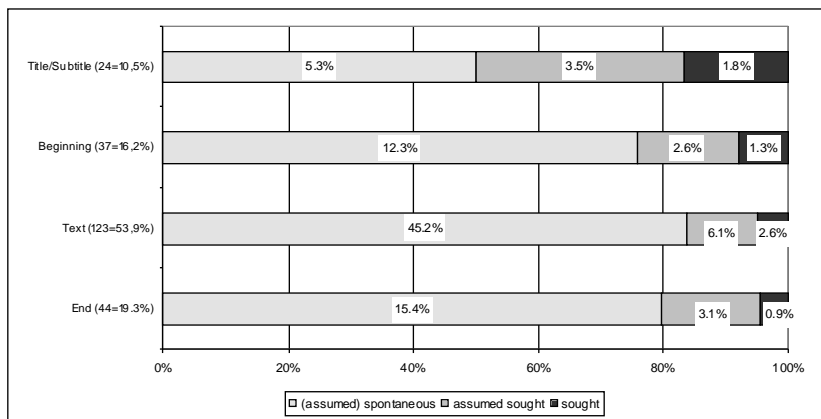
Nearly a half (103) of those detected proverbs that were recorded as types in EV was registered just once. Part of them had obviously been used with certainty just because of their occurrence in the well-known “*Vanasõnaraamat*” or some other source. The position of the proverb was also important; cases in which the first proverb listed in a certain topical category or printed at the top of a page in “*Vanasõnaraamat*” are by no means rare.<sup>72</sup> For instance, the proverb “*Üks põle ühtigi*” [One is nothing]<sup>73</sup> that is supposed to come from Paldiski is most likely taken from the introduction to the respective subsection in “*Vanasõnaraamat*”, that mentions Paldiski as the site of recording.

An interesting proverb found at the end of an article is “*Koduvärvat ei panda kinni, ütleb Võrumaa vanarahvas*” [One’s home gate will never be closed, says folk wisdom from Võrumaa].<sup>74</sup> “*Eesti vanasõnad*” contains three authentic records of the saying (EV 4003), all being dialectal and originating from the Setu region. We might assume that the author of the article has borrowed it from the earlier, 1955 edition of the proverb collection, which indeed names Võrumaa as the place of recording (*Valimik eesti vanasõnu*: 196).

This kind of proverb use cannot be labelled as spontaneous, but may rather be described as a purposeful search in a “catalogue of goods”. An attempt to differentiate between the two situations resulted in a distribution of proverb use presented in Chart 2. (In some cases identification of loans proved difficult and remained necessarily subjective.)

Although the role of sought and assumedly sought proverbs is by no means overwhelming, it becomes clear that these appear to be

Chart 2. Use of 'sought' proverbs in the text titles & subtitles/ beginnings/ closures. Percentage among the total number of occurrences.



more numerous in the titles and at the beginnings of the texts (The 'planned' proverbs' distribution was similar also within smaller text units – **paragraphs**). It seems that in case of natural and oral use of proverbs the proverbs are mostly situated so as to conclude the text unit, to characterise what has been said earlier. The tendency, apparent in newspaper articles, to use proverbs at the beginnings of text units is a result of the (presumably) more calculated composition<sup>75</sup>. It is not surprising that publications facilitating proverb search have been used for this purpose. Nevertheless, most of the proverbs we observed in newspapers have been referred to because of an "inner compulsion", thus in the spontaneous way.

Translated by Ene-Reet Soovik, Kai Vassiljeva and Kait Realo

## Comments

<sup>1</sup> A 1997 overview of this column is accessible on the web-site <http://www.postimees.ee/leht/97/12/31/uudis.htm#viieteistkymnes>

<sup>2</sup> Cf. e.g. the article in the Estonian daily newspaper *Postimees* (Dec. 16, 1997), saying,

*President Jacques Chirac of France has quoted Premier Mart Siimann's promise, given at a common meal of the European*



heads of states, that although on Saturday champagne was consumed both in Luxembourg and in Tallinn, next week Estonia will plunge into serious work of preparation for the negotiations.  
<http://www.postimees.ee/leht/97/12/16/uudis.htm#kaheksas>

<sup>3</sup> Cf. the news agency report in daily paper *Eesti Päevaleht* (Oct. 28, 1996):

[The Russian prime minister] *Chernomyrdin* also assured that the formation of the four [the union of leading countries] does not necessarily bring along a vagueness of responsibilities or the destruction of the vertical of executive power: “Every one of them proceeds to carry out the responsibilities, and our meetings are held according to the folk wisdom – one head is good, two or four – even better.”

<http://www.zzz.ee/epl/961028/art44.html>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.president.ee/est/statemen/210397e.htm>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.president.ee/est/statemen/030697e.htm>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.ilmamaa.ee/raamatud/meri/60meri.html>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.ciesin.ee/UNDP/nhdr96/eng/Foreword.html>

<sup>8</sup> Abbreviation EV stands for the register number of proverbs in the scientific edition of “*Eesti vanasõnad*” [Estonian Proverbs] vol. I–III, published 1980 – 1985.

<sup>9</sup> <http://haldjas.folklore.ee/~kriku/VSR/TH.HTM#NHO>

<sup>10</sup> The electronic version of *Eesti Päevaleht* has come out since Oct. 4, 1995, the electronic version of *Postimees* has been published since Nov. 24, 1995. I included the articles published before Nov. 13, 1997.

<sup>11</sup> I tried to go by the degree of **generalisation** of the utterance, which in case of proverbial phrases is absent. The interrelationships of the two genres in the Estonian material are dealt with e.g. in Krikmann 1997: 52ff.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.postimees.ee/leht/97/02/26/sport.htm#1>

<sup>13</sup> Other articles by this author contain combined proverbs, but not all of them refer to the ‘proverbiality’ of the text: e. g. <http://>

*www.postimees.ee/leht/96/11/13/sport.htm#kolmas* and *http://www.postimees.ee/leht/96/11/21/sport.htm#kolmas*. Certainly also other such prolific proverb users can be found.

<sup>14</sup> *http://www.postimees.ee/leht/97/06/14/kultuur.htm#esimene*.

<sup>15</sup> References to hypertexts of all included articles with proverb are at the web-site *http://haldjas.folklore.ee/tagused/nr10/vsviited.htm*

<sup>16</sup> In reviewing and extending the typology of proverbs, as well as searching for background information I received invaluable help from Arvo Krikmann to whom I am most grateful.

<sup>17</sup> *http://www.zzz.ee/epl/970801/art13.html*.

<sup>18</sup> *http://www.zzz.ee/epl/951021/art42.html*.

<sup>19</sup> *http://www.zzz.ee/epl/960223/art51.html*.

<sup>20</sup> *http://www.zzz.ee/epl/951222/art40.html*

<sup>21</sup> *http://www.postimees.ee/leht/97/05/14/tartu/kirjad.htm#esimene*

<sup>22</sup> *http://www.postimees.ee/leht/96/10/11/valis.htm#neljas* and *http://www.postimees.ee/leht/97/05/07/tana.htm#teine* (the author of both articles is Kaido Floren).

<sup>23</sup> *http://www.zzz.ee/epl/970523/art38.html*

<sup>24</sup> *http://www.zzz.ee/epl/970412/art38.html*

<sup>25</sup> *http://www.postimees.ee/leht/97/03/06/valis.htm#kolmas*

<sup>26</sup> *http://www.zzz.ee/epl/960122/art12.html*

<sup>27</sup> The more recent additions to the “*Eesti vanasõnad*” are available in Internet search: *http://haldjas.folklore.ee/rl/date/robotid/leht1.html*.

<sup>28</sup> *http://www.zzz.ee/epl/960508/art15.html*

<sup>29</sup> *http://www.zzz.ee/epl/960701/art28.html*

<sup>30</sup> *http://www.postimees.ee/leht/97/10/28/olympia.htm#kolmas*

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.postimees.ee/leht/97/05/24e/film.htm#teine>; refers to the proverb “*Narri põldu üks kord, põld narrib sind üheksa korda*” [‘Cheat the field once and the field will cheat you nine times’], EV 7398)

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.postimees.ee/leht/96/10/21/kultuur.htm#neljas>; refers to the proverb “*Kus suitsu, seal tuld*” [‘Where there’s smoke there’s fire’]; (EV 10650)

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.postimees.ee/leht/96/07/27/kultuur.htm#neljas>; reference to the proverb “*Parem varblane peos, kui tuvi katusel*” [‘Better a sparrow in the hand than two on the branch’], (EV 13795)

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.postimees.ee/leht/97/02/12/kultuur.htm#teine>

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.zzz.ee/epl/960511/art55.html>, the thought has parallels in Estonia as well: “*Eha punab, hea ilm; koit punab, kuri ilm*” [‘Sunset is red – nice weather, sunrise is red – bad weather’] (EV 514)

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.zzz.ee/epl/960831/art79.html>

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.postimees.ee/leht/97/09/03/sport.htm#kaheksas>

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.postimees.ee/leht/97/09/17/sport.htm#viies>

<sup>39</sup> <http://www.postimees.ee/leht/97/02/26/sport.htm#1>, cf. EV 3188 “*Rätsepal pole riiet ega kingsepal kinga*” [‘The tailor has no clothes, the shoemaker no shoes’].

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.postimees.ee/leht/96/08/21/sport.htm#kuues>, cf. EV 13944, “*Veri on paksem kui vesi*” [‘Blood is thicker than water’].

<sup>41</sup> When, in order to reduce the possible influence of such prolific user of proverbs as Rando Soome, I excluded him from the calculations. As a result, the percentage of proverbs published in the **Sports** column dropped to 6,9%, placing it in the same group with the columns **Environment**, **Foreign News** and **Economy**.

<sup>42</sup> <http://www.postimees.ee/leht/97/03/22e/index.htm>

<sup>43</sup> <http://www.postimees.ee/leht/96/11/14/majandus.htm#kolmeistkymnes> and <http://www.postimees.ee/leht/96/05/11/majandus.htm#kuues>

<sup>44</sup> <http://www.zzz.ee/epl/970208/art21.html>, cf. EV 15209, “Koonerdamine pole kokkuhoid” [Stinging is no economy].

<sup>45</sup> <http://www.zzz.ee/epl/951218/art32.html>

<sup>46</sup> <http://www.postimees.ee/leht/95/12/30/arvamus.htm#esimene>

<sup>47</sup> <http://www.zzz.ee/epl/961123/art61.html>

<sup>48</sup> <http://www.zzz.ee/epl/961126/art21.html>

<sup>49</sup> <http://www.zzz.ee/epl/960416/art27.html>

<sup>50</sup> <http://www.zzz.ee/epl/960418/art33.html>

<sup>51</sup> <http://www.postimees.ee/leht/97/07/24/uudis.htm#seitsmes>

<sup>52</sup> <http://www.postimees.ee/leht/96/09/21e/reis.htm>

<sup>53</sup> The Estonian weekly *Maaleht* deserves special attention as a conscious user of proverbs. On the front page of every issue we can find a topical picture with a matching proverb (most likely selected by the editors).

<sup>54</sup> <http://www.zzz.ee/epl/970822/art63.html>, the article, in fact, is entitled “**Tiit Vähi in His Own Pit**”.

<sup>55</sup> <http://www.postimees.ee/leht/97/01/04e/jess.htm#esimene>

<sup>56</sup> <http://www.postimees.ee/leht/97/07/19e/elu.htm#esimene>

<sup>57</sup> <http://www.postimees.ee/leht/96/01/10/tartu/kirjad.htm#kolmas>

<sup>58</sup> Another calculation also considered proverbs placed at the end or beginning of paragraphs – it appeared that most of the proverbs would be positioned as the title (11%), at the beginning (32%) or the end (34%). Only less than a quarter of the proverbs would be placed in the middle of a paragraph...

<sup>59</sup> <http://www.postimees.ee/leht/97/04/30/index.htm#esimene>

<sup>60</sup> <http://www.postimees.ee/leht/97/03/17/index.htm#esimene>

<sup>61</sup> <http://www.postimees.ee/leht/96/05/18/index.htm#esimene>

<sup>62</sup> <http://www.postimees.ee/leht/96/01/20/index.htm#esimene>

<sup>63</sup> Presumably it is the first text under the sub-topic “**Oleks**” [If there were...] (Vanasõnaraamat: 557), containing a single record.

<sup>64</sup> See note 44.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. the proverb “*Väiksed vargad ripuvad võllas, suured sõidavad tõllas*” [Small thieves are hanging from the gallows, big thieves are driving in coaches], (EV 14474).

<sup>66</sup> Cf. the proverb “*Parem pool muna kui tühi koor*” [Better half an egg than an empty shell], (EV 8970).

<sup>67</sup> A polemization with the proverb “*Kured lähvad — kurjad ilmad /---/*” [When the cranes leave there’ll be nasty weather /---/], (EV 4574)

<sup>68</sup> EV 1496

<sup>69</sup> Cf. “*Vaikimine on nõusolek*” [Silence is consent], (EV 3225)

<sup>70</sup> Cf. “*Hundid söönud, lambad terved*” [Wolves fed, sheep whole].

<sup>71</sup> <http://www.zzz.ee/epl/970127/art33.html>

<sup>72</sup> Here, I present a list of five references to the articles where this was the case: <http://www.zzz.ee/epl/961123/art61.html>, <http://www.zzz.ee/epl/961203/art48.html>, <http://www.zzz.ee/epl/951216/art36.html>, <http://www.postimees.ee/leht/96/04/13/arvamus.htm#teine>, <http://www.postimees.ee/leht/96/05/11/index.htm#esimene>

<sup>73</sup> <http://www.zzz.ee/epl/960402/art25.html>

<sup>74</sup> <http://www.postimees.ee/leht/96/08/14/kultuur.htm#esimene>

<sup>75</sup> Also Charles L. Briggs (1994: 336) who has studied the proverb use by the inhabitants of the state of New Mexico has observed that proverbs used for didactic purposes nearly always constitute the final word on the subject.

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