

## A corpus-based empirical analysis of pragmatics of English proverbs with graduonymy

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### Abstract

Nowadays, pragmatic features of proverbs are of great interest to linguists as proverbs are often used in conversations to polish speech stylistically, semantically and, at the same time, pragmatically. Paradigms such as synonymy, antonymy and polysemy were investigated as lexical-semantic relations in proverbial content in recent works. This research is devoted to analysing another lexical-semantic relation in proverbial content: graduonymic relations and their types, which are frequently seen in proverbial content, and their role in the pragmatic peculiarities of proverbs in particular contexts. The empiric corpus-based analysis of proverbs containing graduonyms in the chosen text fragments that were created by native speakers of the English language served to disclose the pragmatics of proverbs such as graduonyms function as various types of deixis, emphasise the speech act steps of the proverb and increase the pragmatic potential of the proverb. The results of the paper are discussed in the context of theoretical and pragmatic perspectives.

Keywords: Deixis, graduonymy, pragmatics, proverb, speech act;

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## 1. Introduction

Modern linguistics focuses not only on structural or semantic (Allan, 2006; Arhin, 2019; Cruse, 1986; Lyons, 1977; Uzunboylu & Altay, 2021) peculiarities of a language but also on pragmatic features of a language that enliven when a language is used either in oral or written speech. Therefore, pragmatics has been investigated as one of the main branches of linguistics since the 20th century. The dichotomy of language and speech, which was studied by Saussure, Chomsky (2006) and several other linguists, is the theoretical basis for the formation of this discipline. Several functions of a language in Halliday's (1976, p. 101) classification show that a language serves to express a speaker's thoughts and ideas about the situation and his inner feelings; a language complies with the function to form relations between itself and situational elements used in a conversation. Following his approach, it should be mentioned that a language cannot live if it is not used in speech. Morris (1938, p. 6) cited one of the dimensions of semiotic studies in pragmatics, which is concerned with the relation between sign and sign users. Moreover, Bach and Harnish (2000), Mey (2001), Kim and Hall (2002) and Levinson (2008) disclosed the theoretical sense of pragmatics and pragmatic approach thoroughly.

Paremiology, the study of proverbs, sayings and aphorisms, was separated from phraseology as an independent discipline of both linguistics and folklore. Proverbs, being the main object of the discipline as they are frequently seen in everyday speech and fiction, have been investigated from different linguistic points of view: structural (Coynigh, 2014), semiotic and semantic (Grzybek, 2014), pragmatic and stylistic (Jesenšek, 2014), cognitive (Lewandowska & Antos, 2014), etymological and semantic (Mieder, 2012, 2014) etc. The usage of proverbs in literature (Mieder, 1993), folklore (Taylor, 1950, 1962), teaching (Fiedler, 2014) and various kinds of speech (Mitchel, 2001; Obeng, 1996) was analysed so far. Kuusi (1972), Permyakov (1979) and Lauhakangas (2014) classified proverbs belonging to different nations and compiled outstanding international paremiological collections and dictionaries.

This paper provides a thorough investigation of the pragmatic peculiarities of proverbs containing graduonymic relations using corpus-based analysis of English proverbs in contexts. More specifically, the impact of graduonymy, existing in proverbial structures, on the pragmatic potential of the proverbs in different contexts is the focus of this research. The notion of graduonymy is different from the stylistic phenomenon 'gradation' (Galperin, 1971) and grammatical degree (Bierwisch, 1989; Bolinger, 1972) as it is a paradigm expressing one type of lexical-semantic relations among words. Uzbek linguist Vokhidova (2007a, 2007b) had researched the linguistic issue of graduonymy in the German language at the beginning of this century. This is the paradigm denoting lexical-gradual relations of word meanings, such as *to whisper – to speak – to shout*.

### 1.1. Purpose of the study

If there are only synonymic relations among the members of a graduonymic row, this type is called micrograduonymy. If there are both synonymic and antonymic relations among the members of a graduonymic row, this type is called macrograduonymy. If there are realias in a graduonymic row, this type is called unique graduonymy. If there are words denoting quantity in a graduonymic row, this type is quantitative graduonymy. This study aims to study the pragmatic role of these types of graduonyms in the content of proverbs in language-in-use relatively.

## 2. Materials and methods

### 2.1. Corpus-based analysis

Using corpora for investigating pragmatic features of proverbs is one of the sufficient methods as there are various types of authentic texts that were created by native speakers and writers. This is a very helpful electronic base for not only linguists but also any language learners as it is the time-economising and reliable site of material collected in a language. Linguists Richards and Schmidt (2010, p. 137) cited that:

*'Corpus (n) – a collection of naturally occurring samples of language which have been collected and collated for easy access by researchers and materials developers who want to know how words and other linguistic items are actually used. A corpus may vary from a few sentences to a set of written texts or recordings. In language analysis corpora usually consist of a relatively large, planned collection of texts or parts of texts, stored and accessed by a computer. A corpus is designed to represent different types of language use, e.g., casual conversation, business letters, ESP texts....'*

It is the programmed searchable set of language materials that is a helpful tool for linguistic research as it is a reliable source, while there are many unreliable sources on the Internet.

## 2.2. Data collection

Finding a proverb in a corpus demands searching for it with several keywords of the proverb's content because it is impossible to search for a proverb with its whole content. Entering several keywords of a proverb gives results of not only contexts including the proverb but also other contexts containing these words or word combinations as well. Therefore, it is a linguist's or paremiologist's task to choose the contexts in which the searched proverb exists.

For the current research, proverbs were searched and taken from the texts that were found in well-known corpora of the English language: British National Corpus (BNC) and Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) as both of them own a large number of different texts – authentic materials (Corpora: BNC. English, n.d.).

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Macrograduonymy

When the word combination of *little pitchers* was searched in BNC, two texts were founded. This word combination is used as a free word group (... *little pitchers that had to be filled...*) in the first result, and it is found as a part of a proverb in the next result:

- (1) ... Allusion to the saying 'Little pitchers have big ears', meaning that children have very sharp hearing.

This is the fragment of 'The Dickens Index' written by Burgis, Slater and Nicolas, which is non-fiction (Slater, 1983). The context says that Dickens used this proverb to express the children's abilities. The proverb in (1) possesses graduonyms *little* and *big* of the extended increasing macrograduonymic row *miniature* → *tiny/petty* → *little/small* → *normal* → *large/big* → *great/mickle* → *huge* → *gigantic*. Moreover, there are other variants of this proverb, such as *little pitchers have large ears* and *little pitchers have long ears*. Although these proverbs also have members of certain increasing graduonymic rows, the used variant of the proverb owning *little* and *big* has much more pragmatic potential than the others for the given context. It has the following implicature: there are children in the situation, and the speaker has to be careful while speaking, because children usually have very good listening ability; therefore, the speaker should think about what to say or not say the word. The graduonyms in the content of the proverbs also provide the pragmatic potential of the proverb in the context.

The phrase *but few* was searched in BNC to find the proverb *Many are called but few are chosen*, including the members of the non-extended decreasing macrograduonymic row *much/many* → *average* → *little/few*. Although nearly 300 results were found, only one of them includes the proverb:

- (2) ... in Matthew, chapter 22 and verse 14, listen again to what it says there (pause) Jesus is speaking he says (reading) for many are called, but few are chosen (pause) (SP: KN7PSUNK) (unclear) (SP: PS1RG) but when we've read those, we've got to look up what else Jesus said, ... (Gunter, 1989)

This is context (2) taken from the recorded part of religious speech, the proverb is used in its literal meaning. Its implicature is 'many people can be called, but few of them are chosen for their good deeds by God'. Furthermore, using this proverb in religious speech provides a high perlocution impact on the listeners of this speech as many people want to gain good things and this proverb leads them not to do evilness in their lives. Moreover, graduonyms *many* and *few* in the content of the proverb function as personal deixis in the given context.

### 3.2. Micrograduonymy

Investigating proverbs in BNC shows that the proverb *like father, like son*, is frequently used in various types of texts. This proverb includes graduonyms of *grandparents/grandfather/grandmother* → *parents/father/mother* → *child/son/daughter* → *grandchild/grandson/granddaughter* – decreasing micrograduonymic row. Eight results – texts owning this proverb – have been found in BNC so far: two of them are written fiction prose – W\_fict\_prose, one of them is written national newspaper broadsheet text on different themes – W\_newsp\_brdsh\_t\_nat\_misc, one of them is written newspaper text on commercial issues – W\_newsp\_other\_commerce, three of them are written texts about thoughts and knowledge on life matters – W\_pop\_lore, one of them is written text on scientific humanitarian topic – W\_ac\_humanities\_arts and one of them is written text devoted to social science – W\_non\_ac\_soc\_science. One example from each type of text was analysed below.

- (3) When Boyd was a child of eight, he and his father had to sit out a tornado while visiting a German friend who had settled in Kansas. Boyd was reminded of the howling noise of that fearful storm by his wife's tantrum. He and Hank were upbraided, reviled and screamed at, until, without uttering ... followed by a shriek from his mother that he was as disgusting as his father; like father, like son (Andrews, 1986, pp. 8–134).

This part of the fiction prose (3) describes the metaphorical similarity between the main character's wife and tornado, then his mother's words including '*like father, like son*', where the *son* expresses the main character and the *father* is his father. Moreover, the implicature of the proverb in the context says that this man is not as good as his father was.

- (4) But television fails to deal with some of the things that matter in sport: all-seat football stadiums, Manchester's application for the Olympic Games in the year 2000, and payment in Rugby Union. These are issues from which the sporting public is exploded other than in a weekly letter column. People rightly sound off about politics on television and the last 2 weeks have shown how sharp and articulate they are. It's time for sports followers to be given their say. # Golf: Like father, like son as Palmer is left behind # By IAN RIDLEY # All seems right with the world ... (Daily Telegraph)

These sentences (4) are taken from the text about sports issues in a national miscellaneous newspaper, and they inform about the preparation for the planned sports competitions. The context conveys that it is high time to disclose the sports fans' thoughts on the competitions, for instance, one of them – Ian Ridley said that golf player Palmer was left behind. He used the proverb including the graduonym *son* reflects Palmer, the graduonym *father* – the golf player's father, comparing his sports attendance with his father's. Here, if one knows who Palmer's father is, he can have the proper presupposition and comprehend the text implicature that his father was also a slow golf player and he is playing like his father through the usage of the proverb in the given context.

- (5) The business has begun preparations for the Christmas season – with a festive show planned for this week. # It's a family business. # LIKE father, like son – 3-year-old Darren Robinson takes a building lesson from his dad David. As well as being director of the Ideal Home Exhibition Mr Robinson has created this year's showhouse on the theme 'Next Generation – Building for the Future' (McDowell, 1994).

The text fragment (5), which is a piece of a newspaper article about commercial issues, gives information that Darren Robinson is very good at a business like his father. Although the usage of the proverb including the members of decreasing micrograduonymic row in examples (3) and (4) provides a negative sense, the proverb in the text (5) expresses positive pragmatic value in the situation of the context.

- (6) Like father, like son. Toby the Welsh Terrier is undeterred by any challenge. With family honour at stake, his inquisitive nature just gets the better of him... My famous dog Oggie, who has alternatively made me hate and love him for 12 years, has passed his tendency for being naughty on to his children. Genetics is a big mystery to me. I have discovered that not only do they pass their shape and colour, but behavioural patterns as well (Dogs Today, Windsor: Burlington Pub. Ltd, 1992).

Text (6) is one of the texts in which knowledge and thoughts on life matters are explained. It conveys that a dog looks like his father not only in his shape and colour but also in his behaviour. Here, a *son* is a dog – Toby, *father* refers to his father. The proverb owning these graduonyms defines two pragmatic meanings: both positive (the dog takes good habits from his father) and negative (the dog takes bad habits from his father) simultaneously.

- (7) In 1818, William Wordsworth was helping the new Lord Lonsdale, Sir William Lowther, in the Westmorland elections. It would be a good idea, he pointed out to the noble lord, ... he hastened to add that he would personally make sure that only suitable Tory adherents were thus enfranchised. A superficial observer of this piece of jobbery might well be forgiven for commenting: 'like father, like son' (Purkis, 2014).

English writer and poet William Wordsworth's political works are defined in the fragment that is taken from the text on the topic of scientific humanitarian issues. The proverb summarises the idea that he often changed his profession (writer, politician and sociologist) as his father did. Furthermore, the proverb in context (7) says that there is no point to be surprised by his change because his father also had the same habit. Here the proverb containing decreasing graduonymy reflects a neutral pragmatic sense in the context.

- (8) 'No Ordinary Journey: John Rae, Arctic Explorer 1813–1893', by (---) price 9.95 (paperback) or 15.95 (hardback) is on sale at The Museum Shop and bookshops throughout Scotland. Like father, like son. Following in his father's footsteps was a former NMS warder (---), who retired last year after 15 years of service. (---)'s father (---) was a warder in the old Royal Scottish Museum from 1932 to 1952 and as a boy (---) remembers being a frequent visitor to Chambers Street.

This fragment (8) is taken from a non-scientific social text and narrates about the writer's (whose name is hidden) book and its prices for paperback and hardback, then he was described as a frequent visitor of the museum in his childhood and followed his father's footsteps to become the warder of the museum. The proverb provides the implicature that his book was created on the knowledge that had been gained during his work at the museum as his father also worked there in the same position.

The proverb *Like father, like a son* does not convey figurative meaning, but its literal meaning in all above-analysed text fragments. It expresses positive meaning in some cases, negative meaning in several contexts, and neutral one in a few situations while it reflects both positive and negative senses at the same time in some fragments. There are graduonyms *father* and *son*, which function as personal deixis because they refer to characters of the contexts, in the content of the proverb. Furthermore, graduonymic relation in a proverbial structure increases the pragmatic potential of the proverb in a context. Although the proverb *Like parents, like children* may be used in the above-mentioned fragments as it is the synonym of the proverb *Like father, like son*, it cannot express the contextual situations as concrete as the used proverb because these contexts do not inform about

the similarities between parents and their children, but especially the similarities between a father and his son.

### 3.3. Unique graduonymy

One of the large and developing corpora of the English language is COCA. The proverb *If you watch the pennies, the pounds will take care of themselves* was searched through the keywords *the pounds* in this corpus. As a result, only this text was found including the proverbial structure:

(9) 'I want to take you to lunch at Windows', Jenny said a week or so later.

'I happened to pass by there when I was taking a walk this morning', I said. 'The menu looked expensive. Uncle Rakesh always said to me, if you watch the pennies, the pounds will take care of themselves. And remember, we'll still have the hotel to take care of'.

'Don't worry about the expense. I'm taking you to lunch'.

I flinched. 'It is not in my cultural pattern for a woman to pay for me. We Rajputs are very proud people and we hold our heads very high'.

'You said some priceless things, Arjun', she said, ... (Mehta, 2011).

The pragmatic analysis of fragment (9) taken from the fictional text is as follows:

1. This context is neither the beginning nor the ending of the text, the conversation between the participants has not been finished in the taken fragment;
2. The participants are young or middle-aged men and women that got acquainted with each other recently;
3. The woman is English – Jenny, who lives in her motherland;
4. The man is Indian – Arjun, who moved from India to England;
5. The woman's social degree/role is not obvious in the context;
6. The man is one of the Rajputs, who have a higher social degree in his motherland;
7. Jenny has got the intention to take Arjun to a café even though it is expensive;
8. Arjun has got the intention not to go the expensive café in order not to waste money;
9. Uncle Rakesh is Arjun's relative, who is older than Arjun (it is characteristic of Indian mentality to call an elder person 'uncle');
10. The inference of the context is literal, but not figurative or ironic: it is great disgrace for a man to make a woman pay for the man in Arjun's mentality;
11. Jenny's respect for Arjun increased after his utterance, and she was delighted with him.

The proverb *If you watch the pennies, the pounds will take care of themselves* in fragment (9) owns the members of increasing unique graduonymic row *penny* → *shilling* → *crown* → *pound* (*sterling*) as its components. There is the invariant of this proverb in the imperative mood: *Take care of the pence and the pounds will take care of themselves*. The addresser of the fragment – Arjun used the proverb in the subjunctive mood (not in the imperative mood) as the addressee is a woman – Jenny; hence, he used this proverb to make his conversation reasonably.

Moreover, graduonyms of the proverb – *pennies* and *pounds* are currencies of the English people expressing the addresser's money and Arjun's speech owns the following implicature: if he keeps his little money, he may have much money and can afford other expenditures, such as hotel fee. Therefore, the perlocution act (impact on the addressee) of this speech has happened quickly with a positive influence. There are several reasons for that:

- firstly, non-native speaker, Arjun used this English proverb in his speech and as the result, his speech attracted the listener's attention;
- secondly, unique graduonyms in the content of this proverb are linguo-cultures denoting English currencies;
- thirdly, Arjun used the affirmative variant of the proverb instead of the imperative one considering his addressee is of feminine gender;
- fourthly, the proverb assists to provide the addresser's intention in his speech reflecting his gentleness.

Furthermore, the proverb including graduonymic relations in its content functions as a discourse deixis in fragment (9) refers to the whole situation in the context of expressing taking care of the money that the addresser had.

### 3.4. Quantitative graduonymy

As Levinson (2008) cited about the metaphoric function of a proverb in a context, he gave the following text fragment as an example:

(10)Your defence is an impregnable castle. A stitch in time saves nine.

The usage of the proverb including graduonymic relation is also seen in the fragment (10). This graduonymic relation is called 'quantitative graduonymy' as its graduonyms are numbers *a (one)* and *nine*. The pragmatic implicature of the proverb is as follows: 'your one in-time-help – your defence saved me from several discontents that may come in the future, too'. The word combination *a stitch* refers to one's defence, while *nine* expresses preventing several discontents that may come in the future. In other words, the graduonyms of the increasing quantitative graduonymic row in the proverbial structure refers to the situation of the contexts; hence, they function as discourse deixis here.

The usage of not another number, but only 'nine' in the proverbial content is based on the fact that it is characteristic of the English nation to use this number to express an average or satisfactory quantity of events, people or things in their speech. The following proverbs also prove the fact:

*Nine tailors make a man.*

*A cat has nine lives.*

*A wonder lasts but nine days.*

Moreover, the proverb owning graduonymic relation, which is used in the context (10), serves to emphasise the addresser's gratitude to the addressee in a wide and strong sense, and here, the main role was done by the quantitative graduonyms *a (one)* and *nine* in the proverbial structure relatively.

To summarise, a proverb is used by the participants of a conversation to intensify semantic, expressive, emotional and sociologic features and, at the same time, the pragmatic potential of a speech (Celik & Yavuz, 2018; Chitez & Bercuci, 2020; Ozbal, 2020; Rahimi & Karimi, 2021). Especially, the usage of a proverb containing graduonymic relations provides to convey the above-mentioned features and pragmatic potential of the speech much more obviously than the usage of a proverb without graduonymy in the same context (Cavus & Sekyere-Asiedu, 2021; Issayev et al., 2022; Mguwata, 2020; Sahin & Hotun Sahin, 2018).

Besides, the graduonymic relation in a proverbial content is the reason that the proverb conveys positive, negative or neutral or even simultaneous both positive and negative attitudes of the participants in a situation as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Types of proverbial graduonymic relations and their pragmatic variability

Types of graduonymy in a proverb		Types of pragmatics meaning that a proverb conveys in a certain situation			
		Positive	Negative	Neutral	Both positive and negative
Macrograduonymy	Increasing	+++	+	+	++
	Decreasing	+	+++	+	+
Micrograduonymy	Increasing	+++	+	++	+
	Decreasing	+	+++	+	+
Unique graduonymy	Increasing	+++	+	+	+
	Decreasing	+	+++	+	+
Quantitative graduonymy	Increasing	+++	+	++	+
	Decreasing	+	+++	++	+

+++ means 'frequently used', ++ means 'sometimes', + means 'seldom used'.

#### 4. Conclusion

Macrograduonymy in proverbial content provides efficient pragmatic potential based on oppositional relations of graduonyms in a context. Micrograduonymy assists to emphasise a notion, thing, person or event by comparing them with another one in a context, which includes the proverb possessing micrograduonyms.

Proverbs owning graduonymy in their contents has the specific verbalisation of the sense of the situation as the graduonyms are culture-specific words, which usually take the reader's or listener's attention quickly. Quantitative graduonymy in proverbs refers to the quantitative features of a notion, thing, person or event in the wide sense; hence, it increases the pragmatic potential of the proverb, when it is used in a context.

Moreover, graduonyms in a proverbial structure function as personal, time, place, discursive or other types of deixis; provide a touchable effect on the addressee – quick perlocution speech act; disclose the implicature of the context in a short form expressing wide meaning; and strengthen the pragmatic potential of the proverbs in a context. Each of the functions can be the object of further research that can assist to investigate the role of graduonymy in the actual usage of a language in various types of speech.

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