

Review

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Language in Society

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respect, Wierzbicka's claim that she has tried to bridge the gap between lexicography and semantics, which "usually . . . proceeded largely in an empirical vacuum" (5), is rather ironical: Judging from my own lexicographical experience, I doubt very much whether introspection can fill the vacuum. This is not to say that prototypical conceptions of semantic structure cannot provide a firm theoretical basis for lexicography (see Geeraerts 1985), but I do not think they do so in the way Wierzbicka describes.

As such, her book remains first and foremost a contribution to theoretical semantics rather than to practical lexicography. Pointing out pitfalls and opening up new perspectives in the study of commonsense categorization, *Lexicography and conceptual analysis* is a major contribution to lexical semantics.

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NEAL NORRICK, *How proverbs mean: Semantic studies in English proverbs*. Berlin: Mouton, 1985. Pp. 213.

How proverbs mean presents a thorough and thoroughly fascinating overview of proverbs. As Norrick points out, his discussion of proverbs sheds light on linguistic pre patterning and on figurative processes found more generally in language – both areas that are receiving increasing attention (examples of such attention include Becker 1987; Bolinger 1976; Fillmore 1982; Friedrich 1986; Hopper 1987; Lambrecht 1984; Pawley 1986; Tannen 1987a, forthcoming). As Norrick observes, proverbs merit attention because (i) they are there: a significant part of language; (ii) they have a special status as "both form-meaning units and analyzable complexes of independently occurring units"; and (iii) they "unite properties of the sentence and the text."

Norrick is primarily interested in the semantics of proverbs as discrete texts. The main body of his analysis is focused on the first 200 proverbs listed under *F*

in the *Oxford dictionary of English proverbs*. He briefly mentions analysis of the Svartvik and Quirk (1980) corpus; Hain's (1951) apparently not tape-recorded but observed conversational data; proverbs in several Shakesperian plays; and several issues of *The International Herald Tribune* and *Time* magazine. His mentions of proverbs in these sources are brief because the sources include few instances of proverbs; Norrick draws interesting conclusions based on them nonetheless.

How proverbs mean is unusually clear and readable. Norrick makes excellent use of section and chapter summaries and prefigurings. Chapter 1 gives a crystal-clear introduction and overview. Chapter 2, the only one about proverbs in text and interaction, considers the few proverbs that are found in the sources named above and then discusses two crucial aspects of proverbs: First, "proverbs as inventorized [i.e., prepatterned] units" are (i) readily available, (ii) used in signaling group membership, and (iii) "doubly indirect," as acts of quoting and as idiomatic, implicating utterances. Second, "proverbs as traditional items of folklore" "carry the force of time-tested wisdom" and therefore (i) are used more by older speakers, (ii) sound authoritative, and (iii) tend to be heard as didactic, so that they "tend to place the speaker in a one-up relation to the hearer" (29). This last observation seems to me the most significant and will be discussed below.

Chapter 3, "Defining the Proverb," provides an illuminating survey of the prior literature on proverbs, including a survey of characteristics of proverbs that have been previously observed. Proverbs have been described as (i) self-contained, (ii) pithy, (iii) traditional, (iv) didactic, (v) fixed in form, and (vi) poetic in both prosody and figuration. Norrick also discusses various schemas by which proverbs have been characterized: (i) structural definitions, (ii) as supercultural versus ethnographic genres, and (iii) via a feature matrix. He integrates all these schemas in proposing "a linguistically founded proverb definition."

Chapter 4, "Literal Proverb Meanings," is offered as a foundation for figurative meanings discussed in Chapter 5. A figurative proverb is simply one whose standard proverbial interpretation (SPI) differs from a literal reading. Norrick treats, in turn, synecdoche, metaphor, metonymy, hyperbole, and paradox. He presents his classification of the 200 proverbs in his corpus according to these categories. Particularly intriguing is the suggestion that the scenic proverb is the most common and archetypal. This supports those who believe that cognition is primarily imagistic and takes place in scenes (e.g., Chafe 1974; Fillmore 1975; Friedrich 1986; Sacks 1986; Tannen 1987b). The scene referenced by the proverb is "generalized to yield an abstract truth."

Chapter 7 provides a brief and clear recap of the book's arguments and discusses its significance.

Although I understand Norrick's reasons for choosing the corpus he did, I was disappointed that of the 200 proverbs in the corpus (which are happily included

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in an Appendix) only five were familiar to me; of these, one was discarded for being a "proverbial phrase" ("to face the music"), and I was uncertain of the meaning of another ("The fat is in the fire"). The others were, to me, unfamiliar, archaic, literary, and foreign. This does not, however, undercut any of Norrick's insightful observations and discussion.

His discussion of the apparent contradiction between the function of proverbs in bonding and in establishing an authoritative stance would be enlightened by consideration of the paradox of power and solidarity: The same linguistic devices are frequently used for both, as with use of first names. Often the valence is tilted toward one or the other by reference to whether or not its use is reciprocal.

Norrick's emphasis of the didactic nature of proverbs seems to privilege the power dimension, at the expense of solidarity. I found myself wondering whether the conclusion that all proverbs are inherently didactic may be overstated, though certainly many are. For example, "When it rains it pours" seems to me primarily descriptive. I envision someone uttering this following his or her own account of multiple troubles or following such an account by another, as an expression of sympathy. I suspect that if one taped real conversations, one would find that more of them are descriptive in this way, expressions of understanding based on shared experience rather than advice based on superior experience. The question, however, is one of proportion. Doubtless they are always potentially both, the ambiguity of power and solidarity inherent in interaction.

Clearly, the study of actual use of proverbs is needed, as in the work of Arewa and Dundes, and P. Seitel. *How proverbs mean* provides a valuable tool.

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