



---

# Critical Stylistic Analysis of Gender Naturalization in American Men-and Women-Related Proverbs

**Ibrahim Adil Qadir**, Mustansiriyah University, College of Arts, Iraq, [ibrahimadil900@gmail.com](mailto:ibrahimadil900@gmail.com)

**Abbas Lutfi Hussein**, (PhD), Mustansiriyah University, College of Arts, Iraq, [drabslutfi@yahoo.com](mailto:drabslutfi@yahoo.com)

---

**Abstract-** Proverbs have intrigued many scholars around the world as they reflect how cultures view people's social life. North American proverbs related to men and women, among them, are often employed to uncover how the culture of North America views men and women. By employing four analytical tools from critical stylistics, ten American proverbs will be analyzed in terms of their stylistic characteristics and gender-related ideologies. This paper ventures into how not only women but also men are stereotyped in proverbs. Through exploiting the critical stylistic tools, it concludes that the proverbs implicitly express how men and women are different in terms of their inherited traits and the daily tasks.

**Keywords:** women and men proverbs, gender, naturalization, critical stylistics, tools

## I. INTRODUCTION

Proverbs have been an engrossing area in which many scholars have invested their time and effort in. One reason, it is said that proverbs can reveal how a specific culture views life. For this reason, this paper is targeted at analyzing a group of proverbs in order to learn more about how the culture of North America looked/looks at men and women in terms of gender roles — which they are expected to adhere to throughout their lives.

The present paper also aims at analyzing the proverbs by employing critical stylistics (CS). Doing so will ensure that the paper at hand puts an emphasis on the language used in these proverbs — and since CS is a text-based framework to ideology in language, it will make the analysis objective and rigorous.

As far as the data is concerned, ten American proverbs will be analyzed. Those proverbs are centered on men and women at the same time, especially their social as well as familial roles. Moreover, they are taken from books which are primarily concerned with how proverbs depict women and men — while putting great emphasis on women.

One may wonder why this paper is being written whilst there are already multiple books and papers written on the same topic. The answer to this lies in exploiting CS in order to uncover some stereotypical ideologies in (American) proverbs. In other words, most of the books and the research done regarding this matter are interested in the cultural value of proverbs while neglecting their linguistic characteristics — which make proverbs have their propositions. Yet, the proverbs analyzed here are taken from those resources, which do not cast light on the linguistic characteristics of proverbs. Thus, the present paper will shed light on the linguistic properties as well as social/cultural significance of the proverbs in order to unearth any ideologies that they may bear. Below are the books from which the data is taken:

- “American Proverbs about Women” by Lois Kerschen.
- “Women through Anti-Proverbs” by Anna T. Litovkina.

With regard to the model (CS), it should be noted that its toolkit consists of ten analytical tools — each of which concentrates on a specific stylistic aspect of texts. Nevertheless, only four of them are employed here since there is not enough room to use every single one of them. What is more, these four tools can be effective when it comes to proverb analysis (a point to be explained further soon). But, before indulging into the data analysis, it is necessary to account for the main concepts concerning women and men proverbs as found in the literature available.

## Proverbs: Terminology and Questions

Almost everyone likes proverbs and uses them from time to time. However, laypeople would usually define proverbs differently based on what they know about proverbs. Perhaps even dictionaries do not give sufficient information about proverbs — since their definitions are often targeted at laypeople. For example, in Oxford dictionary (2010), the term *proverb* is defined as: “A short well-known sentence or phrase that gives advice or general truth about life.” Neglecting many linguistic and social details, this definition provides its readers with short and rather basic information about proverbs.

Even resorting to dictionaries which specialize in linguistics may end up reading unsatisfactory definitions of the term *proverb*. For instance, in his “An Encyclopedic Dictionary of Language and Languages” (1992, p. 319), David Crystal defines the term *proverb* as a saying which is *pithy* and *rhythmical*. He also casts a little light on the syntactic and phonological features which are characteristic of most proverbs.

One might think that reading books which mainly revolves around proverbs could be helpful. Nevertheless, even those books seem to agree on specific points but not a comprehensive definition. For example, some books which are concerned with *paremiology*<sup>1</sup> state that *proverbs* are concise sayings that reflect people’s daily observations and experiences figuratively (Hrisztova-Gotthardt and Varga, 2014, p. 7). Proverbs are also said to be statements which are fixed and constructed with simple and popular wording to demonstrate “the profound truth”, states Zheng (2018 as mentioned in Trank, 1983).

The question is: *Why are these definitions unsatisfactory?* In order to answer this question, two questions should be asked: *Is there a comprehensive definition? Do proverbs bear objective truth?* The former has already been answered above, but the latter needs to be discussed. To begin with, many scholars, who are interested in proverbs, say that *proverbs* are part of the folklore of a group of people. And through them, those people express a general truth (see Kerschen, 1998). However, these proverbs may attack other communities or individuals who belong to a different gender/sex category. By attacking them, proverbs are likely to be subjective since they view the world from one perspective. For this reason, it would be more accurate to say that proverbs are indeed figurative and pithy statements, yet they express the views of their producers/users rather than general truths.

## What Is Gender?

One of the central parts of this paper is *gender*. This is because *gender* is usually confused with the term *sex*. In sociolinguistics, these two terms are distinguished. That is, it is claimed that there is a difference between what a person *does* and what they *are*. In other words, when it comes to the biological features — or the sex — of a person, they might be called male or female. On the other, the *gender* of the same person is another story; their gender is determined by their behavior within their society. Put differently, there is a masculine-feminine continuum on which different cultures evaluate their individuals. For instance, in some cultures, masculinity and femininity can be expressed through linguistic means; a good example can be when men address each other using swear words — which is considered masculine — whereas women tend to give compliments to each other (Wardhaugh and Fuller, 2015, p. 313).

Another reason why differentiating between gender and sex is important is that society tends to reject those who manifest qualities that do not match their sex. That is to say, if someone is male, he would be expected to work so hard and provide his family with whatever they need in order to be called a real man. Otherwise, he is likely to be picked on by his community or even his family members.

If the argument above is true, this means the environment where people live is what shapes their sociolinguistic behavior. This notion is supported by Tannen (2003). However, she also states that the dichotomy between men and women’s sociolinguistic behavior can be noticed from an early age. Differently put, girls tend to share secrets and listen to each other whereas boys are usually after competing against and bullying their male peers (ibid). Therefore, the sex-gender paradox seems to be created by not only society but also some other genetic reasons.

---

<sup>1</sup> Paremiology is the study of proverbs.

After establishing how the terms sex and gender are different, now, it is time to ask the question: *how is all of this relevant to the paper?* The answer to this question lies within the fact that this paper is interested in *gender naturalization* in American proverbs. In other words, how American proverbs look on men and women in terms of gender roles. Thus, by probing into American proverbs about men and women, the expectations of gender roles which women and men are expected to meet will be unearthed. Alongside the concept of gender, *naturalization* is a focal notion in this work. To explain the reason behind its importance, the section below is dedicated to it.

## Naturalization

Language users often create an ideology and then use it over and over, via language, to the extent that they ingrain this very ideology in society. This process is called *naturalization* (Norgaard, Montoro and Busse, 2010, p. 12). To clarify this notion further, the concept of *ideology* will be explained since it is a central concept when it comes to naturalization and an example will be provided as well.

The term *ideology* is usually used to refer to a set of ideas shared by a group of people, or held by an individual. This means this term can refer to not only political matters, but also the beliefs and traditions a culture has (Jeffries, 2010, p. 8). For example, nowadays, children are not required to work day and night in order to feed their families and themselves. At present, this ideology sounds self-evident to most people; however, to some poor families who live in a developing country, this ideology may be outrageous (ibid, p. 9).

## Proverbs, Gender and Naturalization

Explaining the correlation between these three concepts could be difficult here. For one thing, they are vast areas which have many details, and thus, there is no space for the three of them here to be scrutinized. Nevertheless, a concise account will be provided underneath in order to justify why the three of them are crucial to when it comes to proverbs.

To start with, proverbs, as it has been said early, reflect how a specific culture perceives life in general. In the case of this paper, what is relevant is how North American proverbs represent men and women. Therefore, the way men and women are portrayed in them will uncover some of the gender roles — which were / have been *naturalized* in the American culture. For example, the proverbs below have different wording, but they almost contain the same proposition (Kerschen, 1998, pp. 19-20).

Woman-related proverbs	Man-related proverbs
“A good wife is the workmanship of a good husband.”	“When a man takes a wife, he ceases to dread hell.”
“A good wife makes a good husband.”	“Two good days for a man in his life: when he weds, and when he buries his wife.”
“The happiest wife is not she that gets the husband but she that makes the best of that which she gets.”	“It’s a sweet sorrow to bury a nagging wife.”

**Table No. 1. Proverbs with different dictions but the same propositions**

The proverbs above seem to have two basic messages: 1. If a wife is not good, she will not be able to make her husband a better man. 2. Men look at women as if they are a burden. It is obvious that these two notions are very common to the extent that they have been produced and reproduced via proverbs. They are also good evidence that *naturalization* exists. That is, there are chains of similar proverbs which are centered on the same notions that they become normal in the discourse.

## Critical Stylistics

Above, the process in which language users naturalize an ideology is tackled. In this part the way they use (the English) language to achieve this will be discussed. Thus, this part is dedicated to *critical stylistics*. CS is usually compared with other critical approaches to ideology in text (e.g. critical discourse analysis, abbreviated as CDA). This is because it is after political ideologies in texts; however, it can also be used to uncover (sexist) ideologies in any text. In other words, whether a text is political, literary or non-literary, CS can be employed to unearth the ideological intentions in it (Burke, 2014, p. 408).

What makes CS different from CDA, and other frameworks, is that the former is mainly concerned with texts whereas the latter is centered on other aspects such as the “sociopolitical” context of a text. For instance, Halliday, who is a proponent of CDA, concentrates on three so-called *metafunctions* of language: 1. “Ideational” (the way language portrays the world). 2. “Interpersonal” (the way language is used to mediate between its users). 3. “Textual” (how linguistic forms are constructed to create the discourse). In CS, the primary goal is to analyze how language represents the world, which is basically, in a Hallidayan sense, the first *metafunction* of language. Put differently, how texts (or their producers) depict the world or hypothesize about possible events is what interests CS (Jeffries, 2010, p. 6).

CS has fundamentally ten analytical tools. Nevertheless, not all of them will be exploited here. In fact, only four tools will be used during the process of data analysis. This is because there is not room for the whole toolkit to be used here; and perhaps the selected tools are more important than the others when it comes to analyzing language of proverbs — since these tools concentrate on linguistic features which are commonly found in (English) proverbs. Consider the selected tools below:

- Naming and Describing
- Representing Actions/Events/States
- Equating and Contrasting
- Implying

The tools above are almost half of the toolkit provided by Jeffries (2010). It is also important to be noted that what is about to be mentioned regarding these tools is taken from her book “Critical Stylistics: The Power of English” (2010). Yet, the way of explaining how they work will be as simple as possible, and some invented examples will be provided for the sake of clarity.

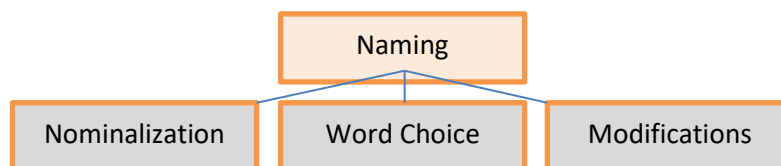
### **Naming and Describing**

Naming is an analytical tool used in CS to identify how texts (or their creators) ideologically represent the world. That is, the *word choice* is central to this tool. Also, it is because this tool is primarily concerned with the nominal elements of a text, great emphasis is placed on *noun phrases*, which are also known as *noun groups*.

Grammatically speaking, *noun phrases* are usually either the subject or the object of a *predicator* (i.e. verb). However, when it comes to the functions of these noun phrases, they would be called the *Actor* (i.e. the initiator of the action) and the *Goal* (i.e. the recipient of the action) — there are other labels, though. For example, in the sentence *The father beat his son*, the noun phrase *The father* is the Actor whereas *his son* is the Goal.

Naming does not stop at the where-is-the-Actor-and-Goal level. It is also interested in what linguistic *modifications* which can be added to the noun phrases in order to provide more information about the entities being discussed — this information usually bears biased ideologies. For instance, the example above can be modified as in “The hard-working father beat his troublesome son who ruined the kitchen table.” In this sentence, *hard-working* is the adjective which *pre-modifies* the head of noun phrase *father*. On the other hand, the Goal (his son) is *pre-modified* by another adjective (troublesome). Then, the sentence ends with a relative clause which *post-modifies* the same entity. All these *modifications* are not arbitrary — they are intended to represent the boy as being guilty so that the father’s action might be justified.

Another point to touch on here is the notion of *nominalization*. This notion is usually used as a *presupposing trigger*. This happens when a verb is changed to a noun. For instance, the verbal element in the sentence “She stole my wallet” can be changed into the nominal element *Her stealing* as in “Her stealing of the wallet will cause her loads of trouble.” This way, the action of stealing is not salient and thus less susceptible to doubt and debate. This is because it is no longer the main proposition of the clause. Put differently, changing the verb *stole* into a noun (Her stealing) *presupposes* that this action has actually been done by her, and now it is important to focus on the outcomes. As the notion of naming has been tackled briefly, below is a diagram which summarizes the main aspects to look for in a text while using this analytical tool.



**Diagram No. 1. Three stylistic practices of naming**

### Representing Actions/Events/States

Unlike *naming*, the tool at hand revolves around verbal elements. In other words, it is about how the *action* of a clause is represented. Also, it shows the way a verb connects the noun phrases of a clause. That is, how actions/processes are done so as to link entities.

According to Jeffries, Halliday's *transitivity* can be accurate and useful when it comes to tackling this linguistic area (i.e. representing processes). However, note that the concept of *transitivity* is not used in the sense of traditional grammar (i.e. whether a verb is transitive, intransitive, etc.). For one thing, Halliday's transitivity is centered on the functions of verbs in terms of the nature of their processes. To clarify this, below is a table which illustrates how verbs are categorized based on their functions.

Main Category	Subcategory	Example
<b>Material Action Process</b>	Material Action Intentional	He <i>broke</i> the window. (physical)
	Material Action Supervention	The teacher <i>postponed</i> the exam. (abstract) His wife <i>lost</i> her temper
	Material Action Event	The building <i>collapsed</i> .
<b>Verbalization</b>	Usually, there are only a <i>Sayer</i> and their <i>Verbiage</i>	Professor Dan <i>said</i> that we had to write a sixty-page project.
<b>Mental Processes</b>	Mental Cognition	He does <i>know</i> what his friend did.
	Mental Reaction	Her classmates <i>likes</i> her
	Mental Perception	Can you <i>hear</i> that?
<b>Relational Processes</b>	Intensive Relations	<i>Copula</i> as in "My friends <i>are</i> hospitable"
	Possessing Relations	He <i>has</i> dysfunctional friends.

**Table No. 2. Transitivity Processes**

The table above may seem kind of vague, especially to those who are unfamiliar with CS and transitivity. Therefore, further details will be provided in the *data analysis part* in order to clarify the form-function properties of these categories. For the meantime, no more information will be mentioned about them so as to save room for the rest of the tools.

### Equivalence and Contrasting

The present tools are crucial when it comes to speakers/writers' ability to express what is equal to what and what is opposed to what. This can be done by at the semantic level (e.g. using synonyms or antonyms), at the syntactic level (e.g. employing parallelism to create equivalence).

This, nevertheless, does not necessarily entail using only language to do so. In fact, some texts can set up equivalence or opposition between two concepts which are not related semantically. In order to achieve this, speakers/writers may resort to the context in which two unrelated linguistic items can create equivalence or opposed ideas. As a result, interpreting implied equivalence/opposition sometimes requires looking for what can be found beyond the text itself (e.g. probing into the context of a text or even creating a hypothetical situation which could trigger equivalence/opposition).

However, in many cases, it is possible to spot equivalence/opposition by looking at the lexical/syntactic properties of a text. For example, using a *copula* is usually intended to equate two entities. Another way is when figurative devices such as *metaphors* and *similes* are used. What is more, comparative forms like *as adjective as* is a possible technique to create equivalence, to name a few. On the other hand, employing lexical opposites is usually a straightforward technique to set up opposition (e.g. using complementary opposites like *right vs. wrong*).

## Implying

Implying — also known as *implicature* — is one of selected tools here since many ideologies are not explicitly structured into the focal proposition of a clause. Thus, unearthing implicatures might require drawing on some contextual or culture knowledge. For this reason, the notion of implicature is considered to be part of Pragmatics.

To identify implicatures, the reader/hearer of a text needs to be aware that the producer of the text has flouted something; that is, his/her utterance is not to be interpreted literally. This usually means that language users should recognize four maxims/principles; and keep in mind that if one of these maxims is broken, there may be an *implied message* to look for. These maxims are basically four despite the fact that there may be more than this number:

- Maxim of quality (be truthful).
- Maxim of quantity (be as informative as possible).
- Maxim of relevance (try not to drift off-topic).
- Maxim of clarity (be clear).

To exemplify what is said above, imagine person describes someone else as a *monkey*. The readers/listeners would be expected to notice that the speaker/writer has violated the maxim of *quality* since the person who is being described (as a monkey) is not an animal in the literal sense: he/she may be just troublesome. Thus, recognizing these maxims as well as when they are violated is key when it comes to spotting implicatures.

## II. METHODOLOGY

Before delving into the data, a brief account regarding the data, the nature of the analysis as well as the model will be provided. This will help clarify the process in which the proverbs are tackled.

To begin with, the data consists of ten North American proverbs taken from two books which are mainly concerned with gender-related topics in proverbs (see the introduction). Each one of these proverbs touches upon men and women simultaneously. Thus, they may be splendid examples which show how men and women are contrasted / compared, and what they are believed to be or expected to do.

With regard to the analysis process, it will be qualitative throughout the data analysis section as well as the conclusion. This will be achieved by exploiting four tools from CS. That is, the analysis revolves around spotting any stylistic choices by using CS. Moreover, the analysis process will be a chain of connected proverbs. In other words, each proverb will be tackled on the basis of CS and then will be connected to what comes after it. Below is a diagram demonstrates the tools used in this work.

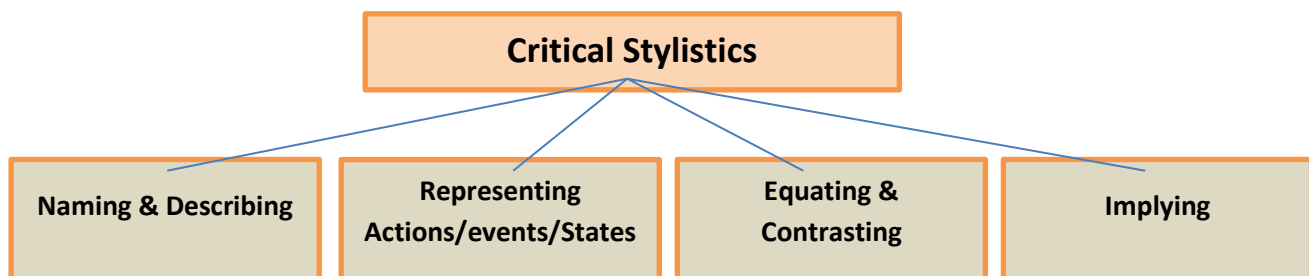


Diagram No. 2. Analytical Tools

## Data Analysis

In the previous part, the model adopted in this paper has been introduced. Here, this model will be applied to the data, which is fundamentally ten American proverbs related to men and women. All of the proverbs will follow one pattern throughout the analysis process. First a brief account on the proverb will be

provided. Then, the proverb will be right under the short account. Finally, a critical stylistic analysis will be carried out.

To start with, the first proverb to be analyzed here is taken from Kerschen's "American Proverbs about Women" (1998). This proverb discusses women's flightiness when it comes to men's unreliability.

"Women distrust men too much in general and not enough in particular." (p. 184)

In this proverb, the Actor of the verbal element (distrust) is *women* and the Goal is men. In the context of the proverb, *women* and *men* are talked about in general — through using plural nouns (women & men) without *modifying* them with any items like *married* or *young*, for example. This means that the proverb focuses on women and men's nature in general.

As far as the *predicator* is concerned, the process of this verb is *mental*. Within this *verb*, there are two processes: *mental cognition* and *mental perception*. This is because it is followed by two *opposed prepositional phrases* (a point to tackle soon). That is, it is employed in a way that demonstrates how well women *know* men and how they *behave* toward some of them.

In regard to the rest of the proverb, the predicator *distrust* is *modified* by two *adverbs* (too much and not enough) as well as two *propositional phrases* (in general and in particular). This *implies* that women perceive men as if they are unreliable and dishonest; nevertheless, when they see a man they like, they may change their opinion on men, and start trusting him. To sum up, the proverb tries to say that women are flighty whereas men are unreliable when it comes to relationships.

The proverb above illustrates how women think that men are unreliable, but they are still flighty with regard to this matter. In a similar fashion, the proverb below discusses to what extent women know what men are. It tells its recipients that even a simple-minded lady can deceive smart men:

"Any wise man can be fooled by a foolish woman." (Litovkina, 2019, p. 5)

Before delving into the individual elements of this proverb, it is worth mentioning that recognizing its structure plays an important role in interpreting its intended message. It starts with the Goal *Any wise man* and ends with the Actor *a foolish woman*. This makes the Goal the focal element of the sentence. In other words, the sentence is in the passive form, and this fact prioritizes the object (Any wise man) in order to say that men are the ones who are being discussed.

Apart from the syntactic structure, it is noticeable that the head of the first noun phrase is *man*, and it is preceded by *Any wise* — which is a *pre-modifier*. This modification rules out all types of men except those who can make good judgments and have a deep understanding of life.

As far as the verbal element is concerned, the *predicator fooled* is in the passive form since it is preceded by *can be* and followed by the preposition *by*. It is in the passive form because it is intended to be emphasized alongside the object (Any wise man). Although this verb may be abstract, it is still a *material action intention* for it is a process carried out by an Actor and performed on a Goal.

After the verb, the Actor *a foolish woman* appears. The word *woman*, which is the head of the noun phrase, is *pre-modified* by the adjective *foolish* which is the *opposite* of *wise*. As a result, this *opposition* (i.e. wise vs. foolish) seems to create an *implicature* which asserts that even simple-minded women can deceive wise men. In other words, shrewd men are can become unwise and blind when it comes to dealing with women — to the extent that their wisdom and deep understanding of life are considered nothing when they are around women.

The proverb tackled above begs many questions: *Who works for who? Is it women who work for men? Is it men who work so hard to cater to their wives and children?* These questions could be implicitly answered by the proverb underneath:

"Men make houses, women make homes." (ibid, p. 20)

The proverb at hand is a good example of *syntactic parallelism* — it contains two clauses, each of which has got a subject, a verb, and an object. This parallelism suggests that there is a connection between

the propositions on both sides. However, it does not necessarily mean that this relationship is of semantic *equivalence*: it could express *opposition*.

What determines the nature of this relationship is the *diction* used in the two clauses. This is because word choice can change the propositions of texts. To clarify this point, it should be noted that it is true that these two clauses have similar syntactic structure, yet they propose two different notions. Thus, it would be plausible to say that this proverb is an instance of *contrasting* even though it has syntactic equivalence.

With regard to the semantic choices found in the clauses, the first clause has the word *men* as its object/Actor followed by the *predicator make* — which is a *material action intention* — plus the object/Goal *houses*. On the other hand, the second one has *women* as its subject/Actor and then the same *predicator* (make) appears which is followed by the object/Goal *homes*. After having a look the proverb's word choice, one might ask: *Why is this proverb that important if it has similar wording?* Even though it is true that both clauses have practically the same structure and wording, they have different objects (houses and homes). This is what sets the two propositions apart. That is, a *house* is known to be just a building whereas a *home* is any place in which people live and feel warm and comfortable. These two words (i.e. houses and homes) even affect the processes of the *predicators*. In other words, making a *house* requires working, earning money and physical effort whereas making a *home* may require settling in, warmth and love. Therefore, men are expected to have jobs and provide materialistic needs. On the other hand, women are expected to stay inside buildings made by men in order to make them real *homes*.

The notion of men being outside working and women being at home doing what they are expected to do appears frequently in American proverbs. For instance, the proverb below asserts that there are inherited actions which men do while women do not:

*"The man earns and the woman spends."* (Kerschen, 1998, p. 96)

This proverb, which has quite a simple structure, consists of two clauses linked by the coordinating conjunction *and*. Like some of previously analyzed proverbs, it has syntactic parallelism in which semantic *opposition* appears.

The first clause, which is centered on men, has the phrase *The man* as its object/Actor and the word *earns* as its *predicator*. This verb is to be considered a *material action intention* as it expresses an action done by a human (The man).

On the other hand, the second clause consists of the Actor *the woman* followed by the *predicator spends*. It is obvious that the semantic choices found in this clause are what make it have a different proposition from the first one.

After analyzing the constituents of the proverb, it would be valid to say that this proverb *implies* that men and women are different in terms of what they tend to do when it comes to money — men are prudent whereas women are spendthrifts.

Apart from who should be the breadwinner in the family, underestimating men's intelligence compared to women's cunningness is not uncommon in American proverbs. To exemplify this, consider the following proverb:

*"Man has his will, but woman has her way."* (Litovkina, 2019, p. 5)

This proverb has got two syntactically equal clauses joined by the coordinating conjunction *but*. This creates syntactic *equivalence* which contains *contrasting* propositions. This type of *contrast* belongs to a category called *contrastives*. This type of contrasting is usually used when a text producer would like to contradict what they have said before.

As far as the verbal elements are concerned, both clauses have got the *predicator has*. This verb indicates a process called *relational possessive* since it represents a stable relationship which is based on possession between two entities. Thus, the use of this form (i.e. has) functions as an indicator of the notion that being a *man* equals possessing *will* and being a *woman* entails having a *way* to do anything she wants.



With regards to implying, men are represented as having a strong *will* and determination, as it is expressed in the phrase *his will* whereas women are depicted as too cunning to be controlled since a woman does what she wants — although men think they have the power to control their actions and thoughts. Perhaps this *implies* that men believe that they are in control, *but* it is women who actually have the power to direct men's thoughts and actions.

Like the proverb above, a lot of proverbs seem to be interested in warning men about women as they are said to be deceivers. Thus, men should avoid bad women since she might ruin their lives no matter how smart they are. Consider the following proverb below:

*"A bad woman will ruin any man."* (Kerschen, 1998, p. 75)

This proverb begins with the subject *A bad woman*, which is a noun phrase. This noun phrase consists of the head *woman* which is *pre-modified* by the adjective *bad*. Having this adjective limits the discussion to only *bad* women. It is not clear what *bad* exactly means here owing to the fact that the word *bad* can be defined in countless ways depending on where you are from.

In regard to the predicate, the verb *ruin* is a *material action intention* since it is done by an animate Actor. The action *ruin*, which is done by *A bad woman*, is performed on the Goal *any man*. Like the Actor, the object/Goal is *pre-modified*. However, it is not modified by an adjective — it is *modified* by the determiner *any* which is used in its strong form to refer to all types of men.

For the reason mentioned above, it is obvious that the proverb violates *the maxim of quality* since it exaggerates the sentiment that one type of women can influence all types of men. This creates an *implicature* regarding what is expected from women. It may *imply* that all women should be virtuous, and if men meet a bad one, they should avoid her for she will corrupt them.

Some proverbs do not only warn men, but also make them feel intimidated by women. They encourage men to control everything so as not to be considered foolish. This is best exemplified by the proverb below:

*"When a man's fool, his wife will rule."* (ibid, p. 29)

The proverb at hand has got two clauses: a subordinate clause plus a main clause. The subordinate clause sets the contexts in which a wife may become in control of everything. That is, the clause *When a man's fool* tells the readers/hearers the (hypothetical) situation that may give a wife the power to rule the household. Within this clause, the word *man* is *post-modified* by the adjective *fool*. Modifying the entity in the subordinate clause provides more details about the context in which wives are in charge. In other words, *naming* is employed twice in the proverb: the subordinate clause *defines* the main clause and the adjective *fool* in the subordinate clause *describes* the type of man. So, it is basically *naming* within *naming*.

The word choice and syntactic structure found in this proverb *implies* that men should never let their wives be more powerful than them. If they let them be, then this means they are fools and do not deserve respect. This kind of ideology is ingrained in different cultures around the globe. Perhaps this is why some men feel annoyed with a woman who tries to do better than them. That is, they do not like the idea of being inferior to women.

The notion of men being dominant is used frequently in American proverbs. Those proverbs try their utmost to convey this idea. Some of them resort to nature in order to communicate their ideologies with their recipient.

*"Nature framed women to be won, and men to win."* (ibid, p. 82)

The present proverb has one subject (Nature) and two objects (women and men). What should be noted about this is that the subject here is inanimate; thus, the action *framed* is a *material action event*. In other words, the person who has come up with this proverb wants to represent the proposition found in the proverb as an event which people have no power over.

Another point to mention here is that the phrases *women to be won* and *men to win* bear *opposition*. That is, although both of them have the same predicator (to win), they are structured differently. *Women* are

represented as things to be attained. This is done by using the passive form of verb (to be won). For this reason, *women* are the Goal of the action. On the other hand, *men* are portrayed as the Actors who do the action of winning. Thus, they would be the Goal of the Actor *Nature* plus the Actors who perform the action which they are expected do.

Based on the critical stylistic analysis above, the *implied* message is that *women* are expected *to be won* by men. This may also *imply* that *women* should not be bold and leave it for men to make the first move when it comes to relationships. Thus, *men* should always be the hunters who chase women, and not vice versa.

In a similar fashion, the proverb below stresses the different gender roles which men and women should adhere to:

*"Behind every great man there is a great woman."* (ibid, p. 83)

This proverb is controversial because it can be interpreted in multiple ways. The reason why it has different interpretations is the preposition *Behind*. However, before tackling this point, the proposition which is structured in the proverb should be looked at.

To begin with, the head of the first noun phrase, which it happens to be *man*, is *pre-modified* by the determiner *every* as well as the adjective *great*. This makes the scope of the proverb include all successful men.

After the first noun phrase, the complement appears. The complement includes (there) *is a great woman*. In this noun phrase, the head is also *pre-modified* by the adjective *great*. Thus, this woman's success and greatness is *equated* with her man's.

Note that what links the Theme (every great man) and its complement is the copula *is*. This verb is considered an *intensive verb* which is usually used to express a stable relation between the entities which are linked by it. Put differently, this proverb claims that its proposition is a fact.

Back to the proverb's controversy, the preposition *Behind* is the key component. This is because prepositions such as *beside* or *ahead* are not used — keep in mind that the notion of questioning word choice is important to critical stylistics. That is, even though one may say that women are praised here, being behind a man does not appeal to some people, especially women in the case of the proved. They claim that women are given a "supportive-only role" and they are expected to be unseen.

The last proverb to be analyzed here clearly illustrates how gender roles related to who is to stay at home and who is to be the breadwinner have been/were naturalized in the culture of North America:

*"Man works from sun to sun, but woman's work is never done."* (ibid, p. 84)

The proverb at hand sets up *opposition* between different gender roles which men and women are expected to do. To clarify this further, a critical stylistic analysis will be carried out below.

First, it is noticeable that the proverb consists of two clauses connected by the coordinating conjunction *but*. This tells the reader/hearer that there are two opposed propositions within the proverb.

In the first clause, the word *Man* is the subject/Actor. Then, it is followed by a *material action intention* (works) — which is *post-modified* by the propositional phrase *from sun to sun*. Simply put, this phrase *modifies* the predicator (works) in order to tell the recipient when men start and finish work — from sunrise to sunset. During this period of time, most people go to work; thus, this phrase tries to say that a man's job is supposed to be outside and ends once he is back home.

On the second side of the proverb, there is a coordinating conjunction which prepares the recipient for receiving a notion different from the first one. That is, after the conjunction, the clause has the phrase *woman's work* as its subject/Theme plus a copula which is followed by the adjective *done*. It is also worth mentioning that the copula (*is*) links the subject (*woman's work*) with its *modifier* (*done*). Also, the use of the adverb *never* is important in the proverb, too. This is because it shows how women are expected to work day and night (most likely at home) while men stop working once they get home.

### III. CONCLUSION

In the data analysis part, linguistic devices such as *equivalence* and *contrasting* have been found in most of the proverbs. By using these devices, proverbs express how men and women are different in terms of their inherited traits and the daily tasks, which they have to do. What is more, *equivalence* and *contrasting* have appeared at not only the syntactic level but also the semantic one. That is, men and women are discussed in two separate clauses — which are likely to be syntactically paralleled — and then different lexical items are given to men and women in order to set them apart. *Naming* is also a salient feature of the proverbs. It is used to modify men and women. In other words, the proverbs use adjectives, prepositional phrases, and adverbs in order to build clauses in order to pass the proverb's ideologies to readers/hearers.

The notion of *representing Actions/Events/States* is frequent as well. What is worth mentioning about it is that different types of processes are given to men and women equally. That is, both men and women seem to perform *material action intentions*, *mental processes* or even have intensive relations (e.g. *copula* and *have*). However, what is important is the linguistic frame in which the *predicators* occur since the co-text of the proverbs affect the intended ideologies of the verbs. Finally, it is noticeable that *implying* appears in almost all of the proverbs. This is because the syntactic and semantic properties of the proverbs analyzed call for *implicatures* to come to the surface. It is also worth mentioning that the proverbs usually have implicit messages. As far as the intended messages are concerned, with the list below the paper comes to its end and summarizes what the proverbs try to convey:

- Women are flighty.
- Women think men are dishonest.
- Men are weak when they are around women.
- Women are able to manipulate men easily.
- Women are expected to stay at home.
- Men are required to work and build things.
- Men are prudent.
- Women are spendthrifts.
- Men think they are in control, but they are not.
- Men must be careful while dealing with women because women can ruin them.
- Women should not be in control.
- Women should not be bold.
- Men are expected to chase women.
- Men should be breadwinners.

### REFERENCES

1. Burke, M. (Ed.). (2014) *The Routledge Handbook of Stylistics*. London: Routledge.
2. Crystal, D. (1992) *An Encyclopedic Dictionary of Language and Languages*. Oxford: Blackwell.
3. Hrisztova-Gotthardt, H. and Varga, Melita (eds.) (2014) *Introduction to Paremiology: A Comprehensive Guide to Proverb Studies*. Warsaw/Berlin: De Gruyter Open Ltd.
4. Jeffries, L. (2010) *Critical Stylistics: The Power of English*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
5. Kerschen, L. (1998). *American Proverbs about Women*. 88 Post Road West, Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc.
6. Litovkina, A. (2019). *Women through Anti-Proverbs*. Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland AG.
7. Nørgaard, N.; Busse, B. & Montoro, R. (2010). *Key Terms in Stylistics*. London: Continuum.
8. *Oxford Wordpower* (2015). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
9. Wardhaugh, R. and Fuller, J. (2015) *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. Oxford: Blackwell.
10. Tannen, D. (2003) *Communication Matters: He Said/She Said: Women, Men, and Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
11. Zheng, X. (2018). The Analysis of Sexism in English Proverbs. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 9(2), pp. 352-357.