

## Proverbs and Idioms in Modern Shakespearean Adaptations: Multicultural Aspects

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### ABSTRACT

*This is an essay that discusses traditional to modern allusions to multicultural Shakespeare. Major emphasis is placed on discussing proverbs and idiomatic expressions that help us understand the meanings of Shakespeare's plays, though they can be deeply hidden and difficult to catch for people from a completely different cultural context. Shakespeare transcends time and space to reach a place as diverse and sometimes as distant as the Indian subcontinent, where multiple versions and adaptations in and out of 12–13 languages are in vogue. Today, Shakespeare has transcended time and geography and is the subject of universal appeal. Appropriation opens doors to a novel method of interpretation; it allows us to revisit Shakespeare through the lens of another culture, which helps us place his universal themes within their specialized and narrow cultural and societal spheres. Idioms and proverbs, these customs, on the one hand, raise the play's setting and particularly display the customs of the characters working with the crowd. It has taken a moderate amount of work from these idiomatic expressions and proverbs in newer, creatively crafted versions of Shakespeare, and in this study, we have examined the role of these practices in adaptations of contemporary Shakespeare across geographic and encyclopedic borders.*

**KEYWORDS:** adaptation, localization, multiculturalism, nationalism, Shakespeare

### 1. Introduction

Shakespeare's language, despite being the foundation of contemporary world theatre, economic benefits, and language and culture studies, evidently loses ground in practical life. While some quotation phrases have become almost dead memes, used by people with a narrowed understanding of the context where they sprang up and for which they were coined, classical proverbs and idioms are known and memorized mainly by Western educated people. In the multicultural world of today, Shakespeare's quotations have rather aesthetic value, cosmetizing various contexts with wisdom on love, jealousy, revenge, war, life and death, and their intrinsic nature is often lost in translation. The phenomenon of multinational sharing of the realia of language and culture is a breathtaking event in itself in today's world of colloquial English, with some pragmatic equivalent of "to be" or "to have," which is lost in proverbs as such. (Gutas, 2023)

Therefore, it would be more practical to regard the limitations of coining new proverbs, idioms, and quotations as a narrowed worldview of the “classicists.” We explore signs of traditions in English proverbs and idioms through Shakespearean citations in modern film adaptations. As the world has become increasingly globalized, people from different parts of the world with different cultural, linguistic, social, and religious backgrounds share their lives with people who are different from them. This new intercultural reality is increasingly reflected in the domain of literary and film studies, and there is a growing body of academic interest in exploring the collision of cultures. At its essence, the use of Shakespeare can work as an inroad to current English and American cultural matters, refashioning the cultural variety that Shakespeare brought to life centuries ago in England. Moreover, it can serve as a means of re-examining current events. By using the language of a distant time to present work familiar to the global audience, one stands to place the problems we face in a new light. Based mainly on the proverbs and idioms repeated from their legacies in the Shakespearean canons, this paper seeks to examine from a multicultural standpoint. In particular, it will assess and analyze the role of the language of mainstream-quality Shakespearean adaptation in a contemporary context alongside William Shakespeare’s original work. (Loftis et al.2023)

### **1.1. Background and Significance**

Most of us perceive Shakespeare as just a playwright, the great genius of the Elizabethan-Jacobean era, whose life and work are heavily analyzed and studied. He embodies not just an author who lived in the early 17th century and understood the real preoccupations of his time, but through his texts, he represents a system: linguistics, languages, cultures,

rituals, religions, mythical structures, philosophical systems, and human waywardness. His language and way of writing have brought together people of different cultural backgrounds, religions, and ways of understanding life in a common hermeneutic culture and common aesthetic culture. Thus, his language in general and his proverbs and idioms in particular, in a larger context of writing, aim to convey to the audience visions about wisdom and life lessons. Although the use of proverbs in literary works is conditioned by the cultural, psychological, linguistic, racial, and social heritage of the author, every human being can learn more from this treasury of wisdom. It is precisely the function and the destination of the proverbs that have remained about the same in the Shakespearean literary panoply, and what is known as auxiliary language enables universal communication and access to the transcendence of borders. (Clifford & Marcus, 2023)

Shakespeare, as a lifetime playwright, has had a hyper-resonance at different stages of history, being officially published in large numbers in almost all languages of the world. All these highlights have induced a rereading, a return of multilingual multiculturalism to Shakespeare, a return that also reveals filters through which each generation and each nation has processed Shakespeare. Translations, regardless of the cultural horizon in which we evolved, have not yet lost a wonder struck with the vitality of Shakespeare's works, which constantly revitalizes itself and now lives in the present, not in the past, in whose mighty flair the characters' humanity and profound themes remain an inexhaustible current. If a good piece of literature survives the test of time, we could say a similar good reception for a text reveals the same cultural wisdom; this is also the case with Shakespeare, who has not only continued to assimilate and generate throughout centuries but still gives birth to "gorgeous accidents" even now in the 21st century. The

anticipation of identifying this universal cultural potential in a dramatic piece of writing presupposes understanding not only the original text but also the reception that has taken place in various cultures and periods. Shakespeare's characters, outer manifestations of the poor ignorant, have become material individuals or archetypal national power figures in national cultures. One of the main trends in presenting Shakespeare in the twentieth century was the new themes permanently emphasized by the unsuspecting beneficiaries of theatrical adaptations, for example, the adaptive narrative of the dramatis. Thus, today, the adaptation of pieces of Shakespeare has transformed the literary system, as well as the dramatic genre. Given the countless performances of Shakespeare's plays in theaters around the world, the cinematographic adaptations, in series or cartoons, opera, the Shakespeare narrative of the world is on TV. We consider that the analysis of proverbs and idioms in modern pieces is just as short as it is efficient. (Tatipang2022)

## **1.2. Purpose and Scope**

The purpose of this essay is to investigate proverbs and idiomatic expressions in modern Shakespearean adaptations from different countries, both non-English-speaking and English-speaking ones, from the point of view of world Englishes. Proverbs and idioms have always been one of the most important stylistic tools for Shakespeare, and it is their modern equivalents and translated versions in various languages that are to become a subject of this study. Employing the tools of micro and macro sociolinguistics as well as comparative linguistics, one can trace a close relationship between the use of ethno-cultural semes in these language units in different countries and the varying degrees of national or global familiarity with those adaptations. In this essay, a new model is being

proposed – one that deals with the modern adaptations of Shakespeare which are discussed in terms of 'borrowing' and 'importing.' As a result, a two-dimensional, multidimensional proverbs and idiomatic expressions scale of analysis is presented, i.e., a scale that takes into account the target texts and the 'audience,' or the directors and viewers who know the mechanisms of the local blending of these proverbs and idiomatic expressions with Shakespeare quotations. Within the domain of contrastive studies, and especially those related to the subarea of 'Cultural senses in translations,' a new and original examination is conducted, encompassing the issue of various ways and means of enriching translations with proverbs and idiomatic speech from the world literary heritage. Its explorations cover not only those phenomena that stupefy the non-English-speaking recipients of works by the author commonly known as Shakespeare, but in fact extended research, thus including the adopters in the English-speaking audiences from different countries of the target adaptations. Such notable criteria indicate the strengths of the 'intercultural borrowings' - 'imports' scale of analysis. The study may equally be of interest to film scholars, scholars of English and related areas, and Shakespeare and contrastive studies researchers alike. (Bajouda, 2020)

## **2. Shakespearean Proverbs and Idioms**

Shakespearean English, being a language full of rhythm and musicality, stands out among the texts we read in class. It is made musical and rich thanks to numerous proverbs and idioms that help to bring plenty of hidden meanings into the lines, making the texts humorous, ironical, effective, and memorable. Therefore, proverbs and idioms play a special role in enriching the text and opening ample opportunities for readers to understand their minor gig, create ambivalence of meaning, and thus require a certain

level of intelligence for profound comprehension. This ability of proverbs and idioms to obtain ambivalence has always interested us in applying them when composing a piece of work to amuse the readers or to emphasize the emotional state of a speaker. Therefore, an attempt to explore this issue may be successful. (Babazade, 2024). An idiom, a sample of the world's linguistic accomplishment, is a proverb but a distinguished and independent kind of proverb. Each of his plays and sonnets is grown by immeasurable tender endearments of phrases and figures of speech. Proverbs and idioms are at the center of events, the main events, written in verse or in proverbs sometimes. Each of these structures of language is significant proverbs and idioms. Proverbs and idioms are reflections of social culture. They mention their races' way of living and thinking, extremely acceptable for the linguistic creations of creative persons. Therefore, a change of these structures of language to adapt to another language community and another context is fairly permitted. (Lomotey & Chachu, 2020)

## **2.1. Definition and Characteristics**

Proverbs and idioms, also referred to as sayings, have a specific nature and peculiarities. Such expressions reflect socially based values and refer to certain periods. Many linguists explore proverbs as a form of habitually used language, but more recent work in sociolinguistics uses the term proverbs to describe a structurally distinct type of slogan that is distinctive, compact, in most cases metaphorical, and which impart words of wisdom vital to social and linguistic development. A general and widely accepted definition for this type of speech reflects a certain social aspect of language, given the time period for which they remain relevant. (Usman, 2021)

Hand in hand with the acquisition of knowledge about the characteristics of the proverb, experts emphasize that idiomatic language, particularly idioms, are expressions whose structure and literal meanings have a low correlation with the concepts they convey.

Phrasal expressions with idiomatic meanings contain certain fixed relationships between their constituencies. This fact has led many linguists to the conclusion that phraseology must be considered part of grammar. The meaning of idioms is conventional, i.e., it is arbitrary and agreed upon. Idioms are frequently used and lend style to language. They reflect the values of a particular sociolinguistic group and, like proverbs, are part of the collective wisdom of the people. Proverbs and idioms are typically regarded as cultural elements that are specific to a particular community, and as such, they are known as parts of the linguistic identity of a people. (Lomotey & Chachu, 2020)

## **2.2. Examples in Shakespeare's Works**

This part of the paper contains examples of different proverbs and idioms from Shakespeare's plays. The phrases are organized thematically. Taken out of context, these expressions remind one of aphorisms and have meanings that are clear for modern people. (Ismail Omar, 2020)

Time and Age - "I am too high-born to be propertied, to be a secondary at control, or useful serving man, and which is worse, all you shall know." - "I'll give him some relief, if it be but for that. If I can recover, sir, I will repay you." (Cressler, 2020)

Reputation and Stereotypes - "And now are bent to deal with shadows, and you are too stubborn for the bettering of the time." - "Then thou livest about her waist, or in the

middle of her favors?", "O me, you juggler, you canker-blossom, you thief of love. What, have you come by night and stolen my love's heart from him?" (Karamat & Khalis)

Justice - "O, reason not to need! Our basest beggars are in the poorest thing superfluous: allow not nature more than nature needs, man's life is as cheap as beast's." - "You have among you many purchased slaves, which, like your asses and your dogs and mules, you use in abject and slavish parts because you bought them. Shall our coffers, then, be emptied to redeem a traitor home?" - "Fie, fie, how wayward is this foolish love that, like a testy babe, will scratch the nurse and presently, all humbled, kiss the rod!" (Nussbaum, 2023)

### **3. Modern Adaptations of Shakespeare**

In 1973, an Elizabethan dramatist tried to snatch a scrap of bread from the life-giving table of our mother tongue. Nowadays, nobody seems to mind when Shakespeare is refitted in order to make him more digestible to modern audiences. The Finnish critic talks about "Shakespirability," which does not mean only the enormous popularity of Shakespeare as a dramatist: "What I propose here is nothing new: modern Shakespeare translations have a long tradition, while directors have been adapting Shakespeare's plays for new audiences all through the centuries. What is new about the recent developments is that Shakespeare's name is more and more often replaced by the titles or by 'inspired by.' Adapting Shakespeare has become a separate phenomenon, part of regular local and international repertoire rather than extraordinary festival projects." (Lanier2022)



It is highly likely that the reason for the ongoing popularity of Shakespearean adaptations in general lies in the universality or adaptability of Shakespearean dramas. The main themes of Shakespeare's works are timeless, and people all over the world are able to identify with them, no matter where or when they were born. All human emotions – love, hate, anger, sorrow – cannot change in their essence, so that is why we can adapt Shakespeare to any background. “The reason broad themes such as conflicts within families, cults, the military, and more are continually being explored is because ‘they will always matter to people. It doesn’t matter if the play was written 400 years ago; every kind of audience can follow this play,’ as the themes remain the same.” The universality of themes is quite appealing, so people are increasingly grabbing onto Shakespeare and are likely to continue generating interest in the future. It is important to note that terminology, types of speech, or gestures are not the only things that Shakespeare adopted into his dramas. Proverbs and idioms from Elizabethan England can be found, mostly in *Othello* and *The Winter's Tale*. Their parallel topoi are involved in network adaptations, too - from a “comedy” *Coriolanus*, set in an Indian district in London, to a recent production of *Midsummer Night's Dream*, adapted by a local artist. The network of counter-rational proverbs is multifocal. It is interesting that these proverbs are created by non-native speakers of English, often by re-translation from the standard Slovak phrase “it doesn’t grow on trees” to the English idioms in modern adaptational discourse. This “false adaption” now reads “money doesn’t grow on flower beds.” The creativity deployed in networks like this dramatizes translations as cultural work and carries the potential for equipotentiality in the translation world. That is, plays adapt every time. (Tuan2023)

### **3.1. Rationale for Adaptations**

In the era of global cultural transformation, the adaptation of Shakespeare's texts, which are widely regarded as universal and timeless, is seen as a necessity by authors and filmmakers. They like to give Shakespeare's eternal stories new contexts and productions in which modern adaptors illuminate Shakespeare's texts by contemporary, but more or less familiar, surroundings. The plot and setting of Shakespeare's texts are combined with new visual and linguistic media. That is why the updating of Shakespeare's plays is done in a variety of contexts and refers to themes significant at the time of creation. The audience can see creations that help understand the complexity of the narratives enriched by a long tradition of discourse. (Fortier, 2023)(Carney, 2021)

Nevertheless, the authors of modern adaptations also take up many innovative ways to revive the text of William Shakespeare while keeping the title and content of his works. They often combine drama and screen media, update the narrative of the plays, relate to Shakespeare's phrases and words, as well as explicitly refer to the plays performed by the screen characters. The fact that modern theories of utopias and dystopias often refer to previous texts allows adaptations to be placed within the tradition of literary criticism and to be read with allusion to the famous works. Conveying meanings encoded within texts allows filmmakers to creatively play with adaptational strategies, and ultimately helps to capture the viewer's attention. Accompanying their work suggests this act enhances the relevance of Shakespeare's literature and film as they reflect on contemporary social issues and customs. (Massai et al., 2021)

### **3.2. Multicultural Elements in Adaptations**

The multicultural elements treat the lives of the people of a particular dramatic culture, showing the interaction between the main characters' lives and those of the smaller parts. Adaptations are 'transpositional and translational', serving not only as revisioning but also as completions. Emphasizing the fact that the original contours are only visible in a variety of cultural mirrors, it is denied that there is a pure text. It is stated that in each adaptation there is also a meta-adaptor - another playwright who interprets the main character's dreams or deeds. The 'heroes of all cultures and ages ... are akin to us, ... and that is why everything concerning them is of interest to us today'. The modern adaptations illustrate this point of view. (Chan, 2020). Furthermore, multicultural adaptations can have universal themes such as love, jealousy, revenge, hatred, kindness, etc., because they raise the question of identity. The aim of the intercultural exchange is to create new representations of the multicultural elements that will contribute to the understanding as well as the effectiveness of the narrative. The choice of multicultural themes in these works 'suggests a reflection on the human as a carrier of various layers of cultural identity'. The 'multicultural emphasis is achieved by embedding narratives in cross-cultural frameworks, hence being involved in the process of reflecting on the human experience'. Successful transpositions of the plays into the contemporary context outline not only the mentioned themes but also communication strategies. (Sen, 2020)

### **4. Integration of Proverbs and Idioms in Adaptations**

Proverbs and idioms in literary texts are one of the main elements that can help to involve an audience, even a modern audience, in a story. They are absolutely untranslatable, as they reflect customs or attitudes inherent to a specific culture at a specific period of time.

Nevertheless, many proverbs can also express universally accepted wisdom, so they are also subject to change from one period or one culture to another. On this basis, we will try to focus on the way contemporary adaptations created from the works of Shakespeare can integrate proverbs or idioms, which appear in the original text on many occasions. In the 21st century, one of the most urgent challenges for us is to create versions or adaptations from Shakespeare's plays that can introduce to modern audiences both his concerns and his narrative plausibility, while making it clear that his essence can also be found in stories that are set in our periods with a cast of characters that reflect modern diversities. As a result, from this perspective, the final artistic task is the continuous height with cognitive justice of that central dialectic between a 'fidelity approach,' where the past is to be preserved for future generations, and a 'historicizing license,' which introduces any temporal gap between present audiences and the past the source text itself claims as contextual. Due to the enormous accumulation of Shakespeare adaptations, we can argue that the continuous success of the re-readings is due to their capability of interpreting the source text to different periods. (Orlova2021)

#### **4.1. Challenges and Opportunities**

Adapting proverbs and idioms in the twenty-first century is a challenging task. Many proverbs and idioms are well known to English-speaking people around the world, so when they are transformed in an adaptation, they have to sound familiar to English-speaking audiences. At the same time, viewers must perceive them as new in order to produce comical effects and surprises. Utilizing proverbs and idioms seems to be a good tactic for those who want to diversify the plot more subtly and create connections with

the narrative without too obvious references. Still, exploring the potential to adapt these formulas from other cultures will enrich the narrative a lot, or it might fail to engage the viewers due to using linguistic references that are culturally too distant. (Afrouz, 2022)

On the one hand, keeping the original style of idioms and proverbs in the translation is a big temptation leading to the animalification of the characters' language. On the other hand, using modern idioms can risk cheapening the language of the original multidimensional play. Ulysses is paradoxical because the animalification of the language of Thracian women may become attractive for mass audiences; however, it breaks away from the original intentions of the translators and adapters who want to make the tragedy absurdly comical in the twenty-first century and criticize a world where, at the center of power, we have a topos of a crying president. Adapters are a kind of catalysts who catalyze cross-cultural references appearing on different fronts of cultural life. Additionally, linguistic manipulations open up space for many other types, like pure intertextual references and the plain and easy-to-understand adaptational strategy. (Wang et al.2023)

## **5. Conclusion**

In conclusion, the present study indicates the importance of proverbs, idioms, and metaphorical expressions in Shakespeare's plays and in modern cultural contexts. These expressions should be considered as part of Shakespeare's heritage, connecting different generations and cultures. As the findings of the case studies suggest, proverbs and idioms can be successfully integrated in modern Shakespearean film adaptations to give them different senses and cultural backgrounds. They are also universalized and made generally understandable. Indeed, sayings associated with Shakespeare's plays and person

should contribute to a better understanding of and greater interest in Shakespeare and his work. Summing up, the research may be summarized in the following findings: 1. Proverbs and idioms in Shakespearean adaptations are related to the heritage of Shakespeare; 2. Sentence forms may be in the form of proverbs, idioms, catch-phrases or quotation; 3. Sentence forms in Shakespearean adaptations carry a portmanteau function. On the one hand, they refer to Shakespeare's plays and times through the meanings they denote, e.g. betrayal; on the other hand, they embrace contemporary concepts and issues, e.g. betrayal in love, revenge or sport; 4. Variations in sentence forms contribute to a multiplicity of contexts and self-reflexivity possibilities; 5. Concretely, the form of sentence (proverb, amended proverb or idiom, quotation, changed quotation, recontextualisation and repetition) and the wittiness of the coinage contribute to multiplicity of sense and cultural intercultural understanding. The results of the present paper suggest a number of fields for further study. First of all, it would appear extremely interesting to concentrate on intercultural studies. As we have noticed in our research, the sentence forms used in Shakespearean adaptations connect Shakespeare's times, cultures and plays with modern times, cultures and films. In this respect, there should be a systematic comparison between adaptations and original Shakespeare's texts. Another, possibly related, field of research may be the examination of translation strategies. In fact, it should be interesting to carry out a research on translated texts, in which peculiar quoted expressions are literally translated in the target language, and see if and how they genuinely quote and give voice to particularized quoting voices. Moreover, the study of idiomatic and proverbial forms used in translated screenplays may be compared to those present in the source texts. Finally, an in-depth analysis between literal original proverbs,

idioms and quotation and their restructured and changed forms may be proposed in other works. To conclude, it is worth noting that the changes and alterations in proverbial and idiomatic expressions described in the present study fit an open and flexible approach to verbal art, which does not dismiss the importance of linguistic richness, but, in fully contemporary fashion, holds firmly to the highest and most valuable ideas and values.

(Dent, 2023)

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