

PROVERBS AS RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING RISK TAKING*

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ABSTRACT

This research focuses on how people evaluate proverbs as recommendations about risk taking. In Study 1 we found that each of the proverbs presented without a context activated its favorite context. In Study 2 we discovered that when a scenario involved risk, the advice given in proverbs was not rated very high. We also found that the acceptance of advice given in antonymous proverbs was inconsistent. In Study 3 it was found that the rating of a proverb without any context was typically better than the rating of the same proverb when a context was provided. It was also found that the advice given by a proverb was rated no higher than was a direct recommendation. The inconsistency of ratings was found to be higher for proverbs than for direct recommendations, and (2) for the proverbs in the context of concrete scenarios than for the same proverbs given without any scenario.

1. INTRODUCTION

In many real-life situations more than one person is involved in making a judgment or decision. The decision maker, for example, may be given advice by other people -- friends, family members, and often by various experts (doctors, lawyers etc.). How people evaluate and utilize different kinds of advice has recently attracted the attention of researchers in the field of judgments and decisions (e.g. Sniezek and Buckley, 1995; Yaniv and Kleinberg, 2000; Harvey and Fischer, 1997). For example, Harvey and Fischer (1997) found that as the decision to be made became more important, the more likely it was that external advice would be considered.

Advice may come from an expert, a friend, or it may be derived from general a rule. For example, Tyszka and Zaleskiewicz (2001) found that in natural scenarios that involved risk, people followed such rules of thumb as: *It is good to try new possibilities, especially if the status quo is not satisfactory*, or, *it is better not to pay the money in advance if the outcome of the business is uncertain*.

Historically, societies have developed culturally rooted rules – proverbs and sayings - that suggest appropriate actions in certain situations. For example, if one is faced with a choice between small benefits with certainty, or large benefits with little certainty, one might use the advice given in the proverb, *“a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.”* This proverb suggests choosing the “certain” option. Similarly, if faced with a decision between action now and wait for a better opportunity, the proverb, *“he who hesitates is lost”* might be appropriate. It is well known that for almost each situation a pair (or even more) of proverbs containing contradictory recommendations may be quoted. For example, for the situation “action now or wait for a better opportunity”, another proverb offers a contradictory piece of advice, *“look before you leap*. Probably, these proverbs are the conclusions of specific past situations in which people took action that led either to success, or to failure.

The main question of the present paper is, “how do people evaluate the accuracy of recommendation given in a proverb? We focus on two comparisons. In the first, we compare evaluations of proverbs presented without a context to the same proverbs presented in a specific context. The second comparison evaluates the form in which the advice is given -- either as a proverb, or as a direct recommendation.

Proverbs have recently gained some attention from psychologists. In a study to determine how people perceive the value of recommendations given in proverbs, Teigen (1986) asked people to evaluate the quality of proverbs with respect to their originality and truth-value. He found that people had a tendency to think that proverbial advice was valuable

regardless of the direction of the advice given. As a result, even two antonymous proverbs were perceived as valuable. Teigen suggests that this high evaluation of proverbial statements results from the perception that proverbs are the condensed wisdom of nations. As such, proverbs are generally accepted as providing truthful advice.

A characteristic of proverbs observed by both Teigen (1986) and Furnham (1987), was that people tended to evaluate the advice given in antonymous proverbs with equally high value. Furnham (1987) found that people evaluated some pairs of antonymous proverbs to be equally true, while for some other pairs the evaluations were negatively correlated, but even the negative correlations were not strong. Teigen interprets the acceptance of contradictory proverbs in terms of people seeking meaning in conversations. Thus, when a person hears two proverbs offering contradictory advice, he or she will choose the messages that are most meaningful and informative for them. Stated another way, people look for an interpretation that makes the initial contradiction less transparent.

A somewhat different explanation of the phenomenon of accepting the advice given in contradictory proverbs is that the contradiction arises from lack of context. According to the most influential approach in paremiology, the process of understanding a proverb consists of two phases. In the initial phase the literal meaning is decoded. This meaning is then rejected and a new metaphorical meaning is constructed. For example, one of the proverbs used in our studies in the Polish version is “*a sparrow in hand is better than a pigeon on the roof.*” This corresponds to the common English proverb, “*a bird in hand is worth two in the bush.*” In this proverb, the first step is to imagine a scenario where someone has caught a sparrow and is given the possibility of catching a pigeon that is very difficult to reach. Only a comparison of the size of birds and the distance between them allows the figurative understanding – in this case, praising the status quo (Kemper, 1981).

Gibbs and Beitel (1995) emphasize the metaphorical nature of proverbial sayings as a crucial factor in their understanding. According to them, the metaphorical nature of a proverb makes us automatically retrieve a context or domain for its application. This means that when we use a proverb in normal conversation, we do so in a context that is appropriate for the message in the proverb.

Thus, when someone hears two antonymous proverbs, one after another, he or she constructs an appropriate context for each proverb in which both of them give appropriate advice. If this reasoning is true, one can formulate the following hypothesis:

H1: The accuracy of the a proverb presented without a context will be rated higher than the accuracy of the same proverb when a context is provided.

This is an implication of the premise that when the proverb is presented without a context, the person will automatically construct the most appropriate contexts that fits this proverb. On the other hand, when we force a context of applicability of the proverb, this need not be the most appropriate context that fits the given proverb.

McGlone (2000) suggests that the form of a recommendation could influence its ratings. To test this possibility, McGlone (2000) asked subjects to rate a group of proverbs in describing human behavior. He used proverbs with and without rhymes. For each rhyming proverb a non-rhyming counterpart was prepared by replacing a rhyming word with its synonym. The experiment showed that people tended to assign a higher rating to rhyming proverbs than to their non-rhyming counterparts. Thus, another possible explanation of the high evaluation of proverbial statements is that people assess the quality of proverbs on the basis of their literary form. Following this finding we formulated the following hypothesis.

H2: A recommendation given in the form of proverb should be rated higher than a direct recommendation.

Moreover, in accordance with the paremiological process outlined earlier, we can assume that understanding a proverb is more complex than understanding a direct recommendation. While the interpretation of a proverb consists of the initial decoding of the literal meaning followed by the construction a metaphorical meaning, understanding a direct recommendation requires no intermediate interpretation. This led us to formulate the following hypothesis.

H3: Rating the accuracy of contradictory recommendations given in a form of proverbs should induce a higher level of inconsistency than rating the accuracy of contradictory direct recommendations.

A consequential characteristic of our research is its focus on the risk taking domain. According to standard decision theory, in risky situations people should use information about basic risk parameters - outcomes and probabilities - rather than to rely on general rules that encourage or discourage risk taking. Thus, one should not ascribe particularly high values to general recommendations such as proverbs. However, research on naturalistic risk taking suggests that people base many of their decisions on rules of thumb (cf. Tyszka and Zaleskiewicz, 2001) and thus their evaluations of general recommendations could be quite high. One could also argue that the acceptance of contradictory recommendations in a state of indecision is perfectly rational. Being undecided about what to do in a given situation, an individual may evaluate highly contradictory recommendations.

Thus, the question of the acceptance of contradictory proverbs in risky situations is of special interest. In particular, there is a question of whether the acceptance of the contradictory proverbs will be more prominent when the proverbs are presented without a context than when the same proverbs are presented in a concrete context. Two opposite predictions are possible. On the one hand, one can think that proverbs presented without a context will automatically activate different contexts (the most suitable for each proverb) and therefore even contradictory proverbs can be evaluated equally positively in suitable contexts. When, however, a concrete scenario enforces the context of the proverbs, one of two contradictory proverbs can be evaluated more positively than the other. Thus, one could expect that the acceptance of the contradictory proverbs will be more prominent when the proverbs are presented without a context than when the same proverbs are presented in a concrete context.

On the one hand, one can imagine that proverbs presented without a context will automatically activate the most suitable context for the proverb. Therefore, even contradictory proverbs can be evaluated positively. However, when the context in which the proverb is to be evaluated is given, one of the two contradictory proverbs will likely be evaluated more positively than the other. Thus, one could expect that the acceptance of contradictory proverbs will be higher when the proverbs are presented without, rather than with, a specific context.

In the research presented here, we selected a particular type of proverb -- those pertinent to the risk taking. The specific feature of the context provided is the uncertainty of outcomes in a situation involving risk. In situations involving personal risk, people are typically hesitant, or alternatively, deliberate, about which action they should take. Thus, they may be unsure if it is good to take the risk of driving very fast in order to be on time for an important business meeting; to sell stocks whose price has risen; etc. In agreement with a state of indecision, the proverbs pertaining to risk give contradictory advice. Some of them encourage risk taking while others discourage taking risk. The proverbs, "*better safe than sorry*" and "*he who hesitates is lost,*" illustrate this characteristic.

We thought that the uncertainty over what to do in a risky situation could make both kinds of recommendations acceptable or unacceptable at the same time. In other words, while uncertain about what to do people can tend to accept or to reject both contradictory recommendations simultaneously. In agreement with these considerations, one could expect that the acceptance of the contradictory proverbs will be more prominent when the proverbs are presented in a concrete context than when the same proverbs are presented without a

context. Moreover, in line with this premise, the level of inconsistency should vary across scenarios depending on the level of the feeling of uncertainty in various scenarios.

In Studies 2 & 3, the question we ask is, “how do people evaluate the advice given by proverbs when they are presented in a context that involves risk?” We focus on two comparisons:

In the first comparison (Study 2), we ask one group of subjects to evaluate the advice offered by a set of proverbs *without* a context while another group of subjects is asked to evaluate the advice offered by the same proverbs *in* a specific context.

The second comparison (Study 3) evaluates the form in which the advice is given. In this study, the subject is given a specific situation in which risk is involved and a decision must be made. One group of subjects is given advice in the form of a proverb, e.g., “*a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.*” Another group of subjects is given advice in the form of a declarative statement, e.g., “*it is better to take something smaller but certain than to count on something bigger but uncertain.*”

2. STUDY 1: CONTEXTS ACTIVATED BY THE PROVERBS ENCOURAGING TO AND DISCOURAGING FROM RISK TAKING.

Since proverbs do not come with a specific context, we were interested in finding out if proverbs activate a favorite context. Study 1 was conducted to see if certain common proverbs elicited similar contexts among different people.

Method

In this study, a group of business students (N=229) were asked to write a typical story brought to mind by the proverb he or she evaluated. Each subject was given only one proverb. Five different (Polish) proverbs concerning risk taking were used. Two of them discouraged risk taking, specifically, they were:

1. “*If the goat didn’t jump around she wouldn’t break her leg*” and
2. “*A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.*”

Three proverbs encouraged risk taking:

1. “*He who hesitates is lost,*
2. “*Fortune favors the brave,*” and
3. “*Nothing ventured, nothing gained.*”

Results

Stories written by participants were then coded by two independent competent judges on the basis of the general domain the stories were pertinent. Between judge agreement was almost 100 per cent.

As shown Table 1, each proverb seemed to have a favorite context. For example, the proverb, “*if the goat didn’t jump around she wouldn’t break her leg,*” elicited a health context. The proverbs, “*a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush,*” and “*fortune favors the brave,*” elicited a job-changing context. The proverb, “*nothing ventured, nothing gained,*” frequently elicited a health context. Finally, “*he who hesitates is lost,*” did not elicit a typical context.

Table 1. Frequencies (in percentages) of contexts chosen for different proverbs

PROVERB	CONTEXT							
	abstract	changing a job	changing school	investments	gambling	health	interpersonal relationship	other
If the goat did not jump around She wouldn’t break her leg	10.00	4.00	10.00	4.00	0.00	64.00	6.00	2.00
A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush	7.89	44.74	7.89	18.42	0.00	0.00	13.16	7.89
Fortune favors the brave	8.89	44.44	15.56	11.11	4.44	2.22	11.11	2.22
Nothing ventured nothing gained	0.00	19.23	19.23	42.31	9.62	0.00	9.62	0.00
He who hesitates is lost	20.45	13.64	4.55	20.45	0.00	25.00	11.36	4.55

3. STUDY 2: EVALUATION OF PROVERBS IN A CONTEXT OF RISK TAKING

The purpose of Study 2 was to explore evaluations of the proverbs encouraging and discouraging risk taking in the context of risk taking scenarios. We wanted to learn how positively these proverbs are evaluated in the context of different scenarios that require one to take a risk, and in particular, how antonymous proverbs are evaluated in these, i.e. those encouraging and discouraging risk taking.

In order to avoid culturally biased results arising from Polish autostereotype in which taking risk is perceived as something of positive value, the study was conducted simultaneously in two country groups – Polish and American.

Method

This study was conducted simultaneously in Poland and in the USA. Six proverbs concerning risk taking were evaluated in the context of naturalistic scenarios containing risky dilemmas. The proverbs were selected according to the principle of their presence in both the Polish and English language.

Three of the proverbs discouraged risk:

A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush; never quit certainty for hope; swift risks make precipitous falls.

Three other proverbs encouraged risk:

Fortune favors the brave; he who hesitates is lost; nothing ventured nothing gained.

While preparing the naturalistic risky scenarios we used modified versions of the stories written by the respondents in the previous part of the study. Ten scenarios were composed. Below there is one of these scenarios in full and a list of the titles of the other scenarios.

I. K. purchased a certain company's stock on the open market at \$35 per share. He had high hopes of making a big profit to take an exotic trip to a place he had always dreamed of visiting. To his delight, the stock doubled its value in one month's time. There was a chance that the stock's value could continue to rise and that the stocks might split, affording I. K. considerable earnings and the chance to take his trip. However, there was also a rumor that the value of the stock could drop precipitously at any time if certain factors in the global economy shifted. I. K. did not know whether to sell the stock or keep it.

Scenario 1. Fast driving: money or safety

Scenario 2. Decision about having a baby: career or family

Scenario 3. Starting one's own firm: stable job or challenge

Scenario 4. Revealing a past indiscretion: integrity vs. career

Scenario 5. Pollution of environment: admit fault or put the firm in jeopardy

Scenario 6. Money market: sell stock or keep it

Scenario 7. Health: vaccination

Scenario 8. Two job offers: not so good but stable vs. better but not stable

Scenario 9. Choosing a partner: unattractive but sure, or attractive but not sure

Scenario 10. Bank loan: to save or not to save invested money.

A group of 149 Polish business undergraduate students and 54 American post-graduate students were given a questionnaire composed of the 10 scenarios listed above and asked to evaluate “to what degree does the proverb give an appropriate recommendation about how to solve the dilemma” on a 7-point scale.

Results

Figures 1 and 2 show the mean ratings of proverbs encouraging and discouraging risk taking in various scenarios.

Figure 1. Mean ratings of proverbs encouraging risk taking in various scenarios.

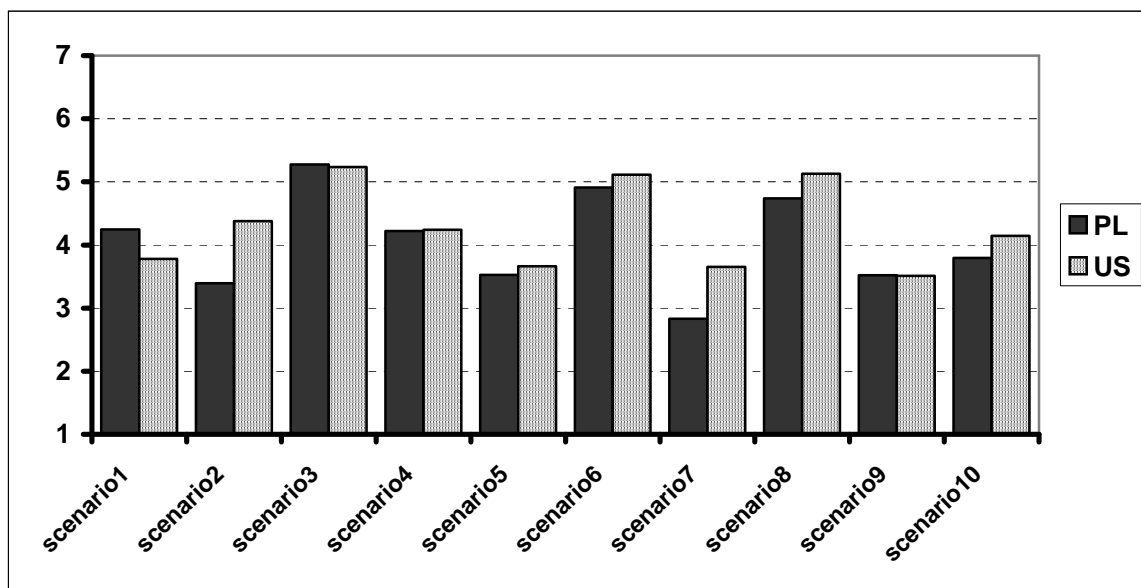
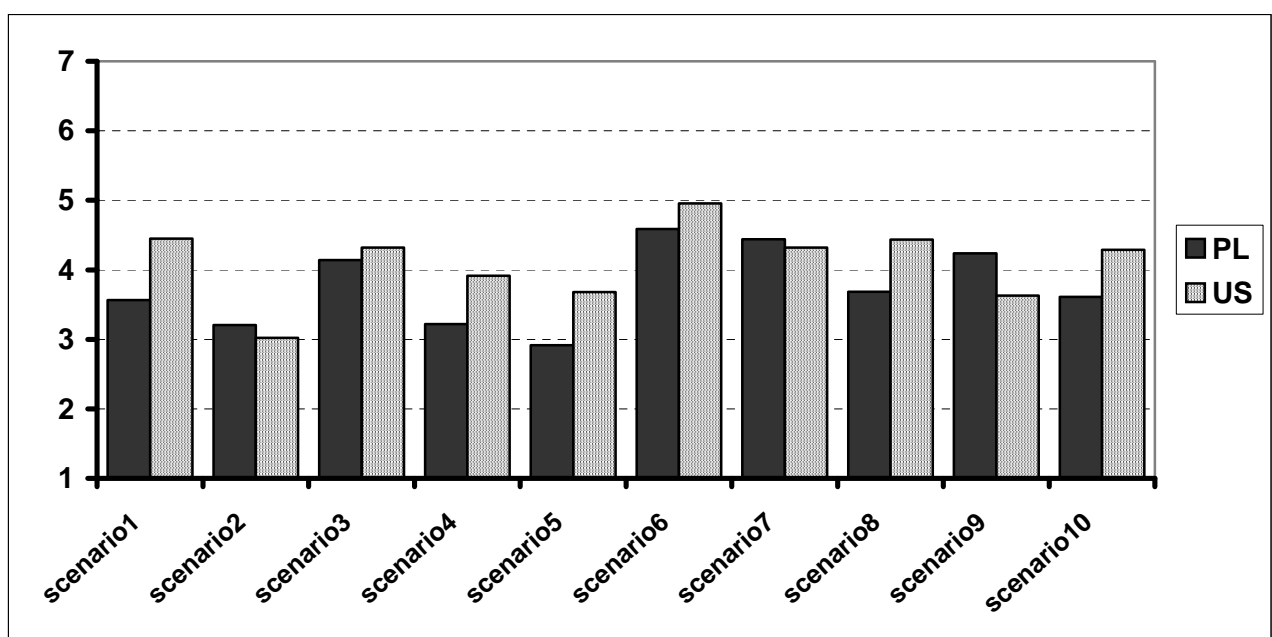


Figure 2. Mean ratings of proverbs discouraging for risk taking in various scenarios.



The ratings of proverbs encouraging risk taking differed for various scenarios. 10 (scenarios) x 2 (country groups) ANOVA revealed significant effects of scenarios ($F = 24.88$, $p < .001$), and country groups ($F = 7.59$, $p < .01$). T test showed, however, that the American sample rated proverbs encouraging risk significantly higher only in two scenarios: scenario 2 ($t = -3.68$, $p < .001$) and scenario 7 ($t = -3.06$, $p < .01$).

Similarly, the ratings of proverbs discouraging risk taking differed for various scenarios. 10 (scenarios) x 2 (country groups) ANOVA revealed significant effects of scenarios ($F = 12.18$, $p < .001$), and country groups ($F = 14.27$, $p < .001$). For most scenarios, the American sample rated proverbs discouraging risk higher than Polish sample.

We calculated correlation coefficients between the ratings of different proverbs within the same scenario. One could expect positive correlations within a group of proverbs encouraging risk taking and within a group of proverbs discouraging risk taking, and negative correlations among antonymous proverbs. As can be seen in Table 2, the correlations within a group of proverbs encouraging or discouraging risk taking are positive but moderately high, both for the Polish and American samples. However, contrary to our expectations, correlations close to zero were found between two groups of antonymous proverbs.

Table 2. Mean correlations between the ratings of proverbs encouraging to and discouraging from risk taking in the same scenario.

Proverbs Sample	encouraging / encouraging	discouraging / discouraging	encouraging / discouraging
USA	+0.37	+0.26	-0.03
PL	+0.50	+0.53	+0.02

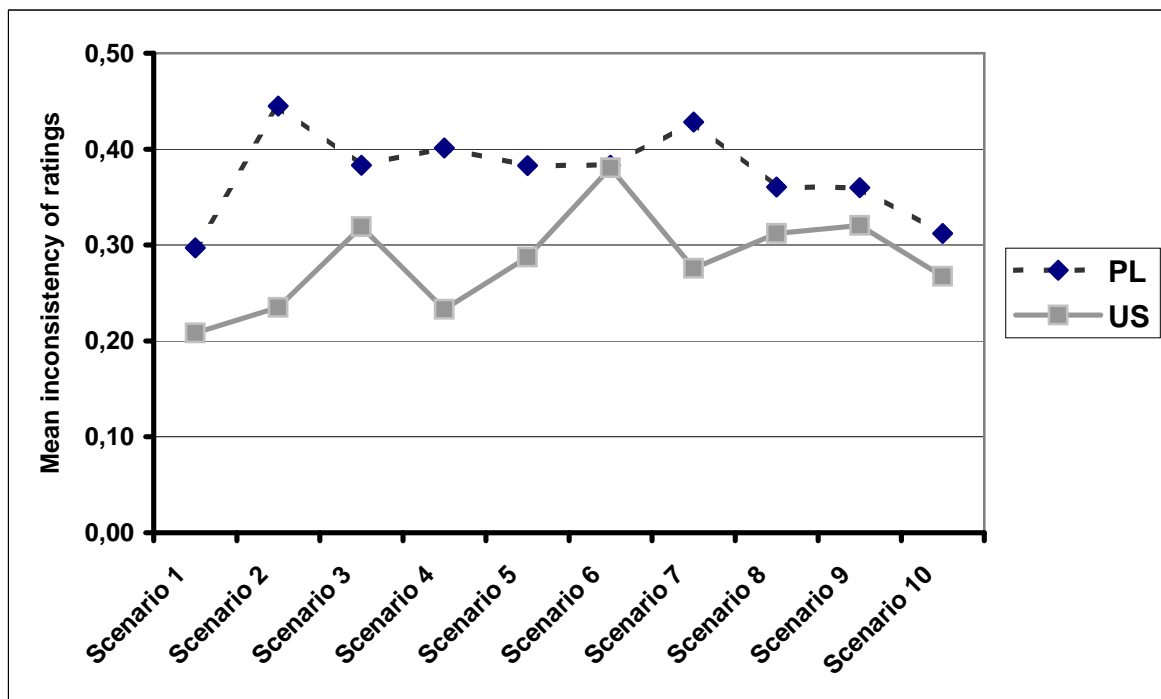
The lack of correlations between groups of antonymous proverbs suggests that the contradictory proverbs - those encouraging and discouraging risk taking – could be rated simultaneously as either good or bad recommendations for the same scenario. A special index of inconsistency in ratings of the same scenario was constructed. Since each recommendation was rated on a 7-point scale, we judged as extremely inconsistent the case of ascribing 7 to both contradictory groups of proverbs and judged as perfectly consistent the case of ascribing

7 to one category of proverbs and 1 to the other category of proverbs. To normalize the index of inconsistency on a scale from 0 (completely consistent ratings) to 1 (completely inconsistent ratings) we accepted the following formula:

$$x = \frac{|8 - \text{meanEncouraging} + \text{meanDiscouraging}|}{6}$$

As can be seen in Figure 3, in all of the scenarios the value of the inconsistency index is rather high, which indicates a tendency to accept inconsistent recommendations expressed in proverbs. At the same time, 10 (scenarios) x 2 (country groups) revealed significant effects for both variables. The inconsistency indices were different for different scenarios ($F= 2.37$, $p< .02$). They were higher for the Polish than for American sample ($F= 44.33$, $p< .001$).

Figure 3. Inconsistency indices in ten scenarios



4. STUDY 3: PROVERBS WITHOUT CONTEXT VS. PROVERBS IN A CONTEXT OF RISK TAKING

The purpose of Study 3 was to test the hypotheses discussed in the Introduction section. Hypothesis 1 concerned the role of the context for evaluation of the accuracy of recommendations given in proverbs pertinent to risk taking.

H1. Accuracy of the proverbs presented without a context will be rated higher than the accuracy of the same proverbs presented in a concrete context.

Another focus of this study was the meaning of the form of recommendation. The question was if its form influences the evaluation of recommendations, whether the recommendation is expressed in the form of a proverb or as a direct statement. Our hypotheses were that

H2: accuracy of recommendations given in the form of proverbs will be rated higher than the accuracy of the direct recommendations;

and H3: the rating of accuracy of contradictory recommendations given in the form of proverbs will induce a higher level of inconsistency than the rating of accuracy of contradictory direct recommendations.

As in Study 2, the same task was given to two samples – Polish and American.

Method

In the second study Polish and American respondents evaluated proverbs concerning risk taking in the context of naturalistic scenarios containing risky dilemmas. The same set of proverbs as in the first study was used. We also employed the same method as in Study 1, except that somewhat different scenarios were used, the titles of which are listed below:

- 1. Making an investment in stocks – selling stocks whose price has risen or waiting;*
- 2. Investment - launching one's own business*
- 3. Insurance – buying insurance against flooding*
- 4. Reaction to warnings about floods – whether or not to evacuate*
- 5. Health risk – driving too fast*
- 6. Social risk - admitting socially undesirable activities*
- 7. Illegal activities – tax evasion*
- 8. Social risk - disappointing other people.*

The participants were asked to fill in a questionnaire with the descriptions of risky dilemmas and a set of different recommendations – encouraging and discouraging risk taking.

They were asked to give their evaluations of the accuracy of each recommendation on a 7-point scale.

In the Polish sample (95 undergraduates) a 2 x 2 factorial design was used. Two manipulations used were the form of recommendation given to the respondents and the level of certainty in the description of the scenarios. The same recommendation was phrased in two different ways: (a) in the form of a proverb and (b) as a direct recommendation. The second form was obtained from the proverb phrased in a non-metaphorical way using everyday speech. For example, the proverb *a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush* was transformed into the following phrase: *it is better to take something smaller but certain than to count on something bigger but uncertain*. Each story was written in a version intended to contain a relatively high level of certainty about the outcomes and in a version intended to contain a relatively low level of certainty about the outcomes. Additionally, in the Polish sample there was a group (70 undergraduates) evaluating the accuracy of the proverbs given without any context.

In the American sample (N=27 day-traders) only one group was used with proverbial recommendations; half of the scenarios were in the more certain and the other half was in the less certain version.

Results

The first analysis consisted in comparisons of the ratings assigned by the respondents to the same recommendations in the two versions of each scenario: those in which the positive outcome was more certain and those in which the positive outcome was less certain. It turned out that the differences emerged sporadically and without any logical pattern. This means that the manipulation with certainty was either too weak or the respondents were insensitive to the level of uncertainty of the outcomes. As a result, we decided to conduct further analyses without distinguishing certain and uncertain scenarios.

Figure 4. Ratings of the six proverbs without and with the context of specific risky scenarios

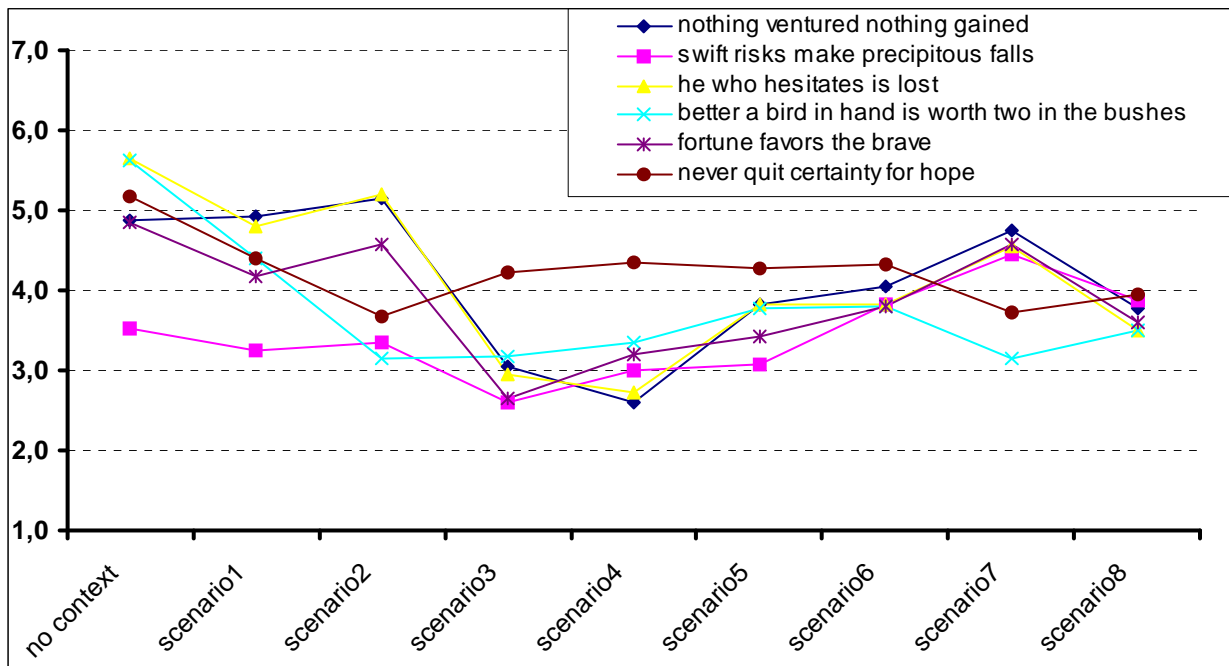


Figure 4 shows the ratings of accuracy of the six proverbs without a context and with the context of specific risky scenarios. As can be seen, the ratings of proverbs without context were in a few cases as high as the ratings of the same proverb with concrete scenarios, but for most cases the ratings of proverbs without context were higher. Most of these differences were statistically significant (t-test $p < .05$).

Figure 5. Ratings of recommendations encouraging risk taking in various scenarios.

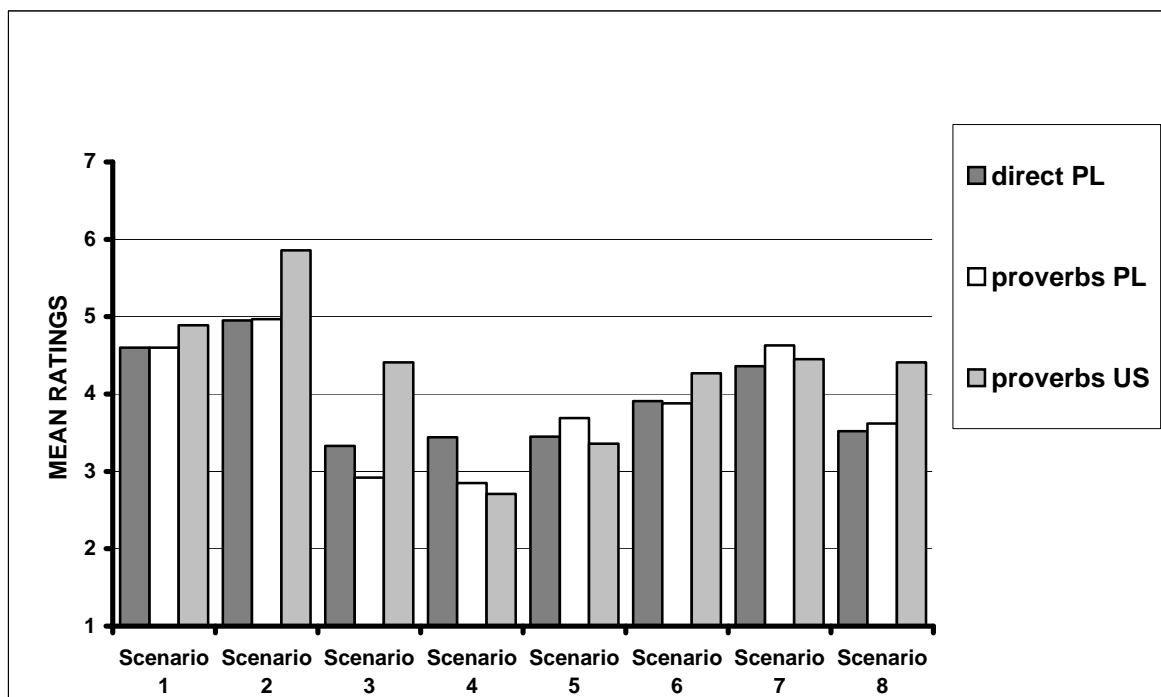
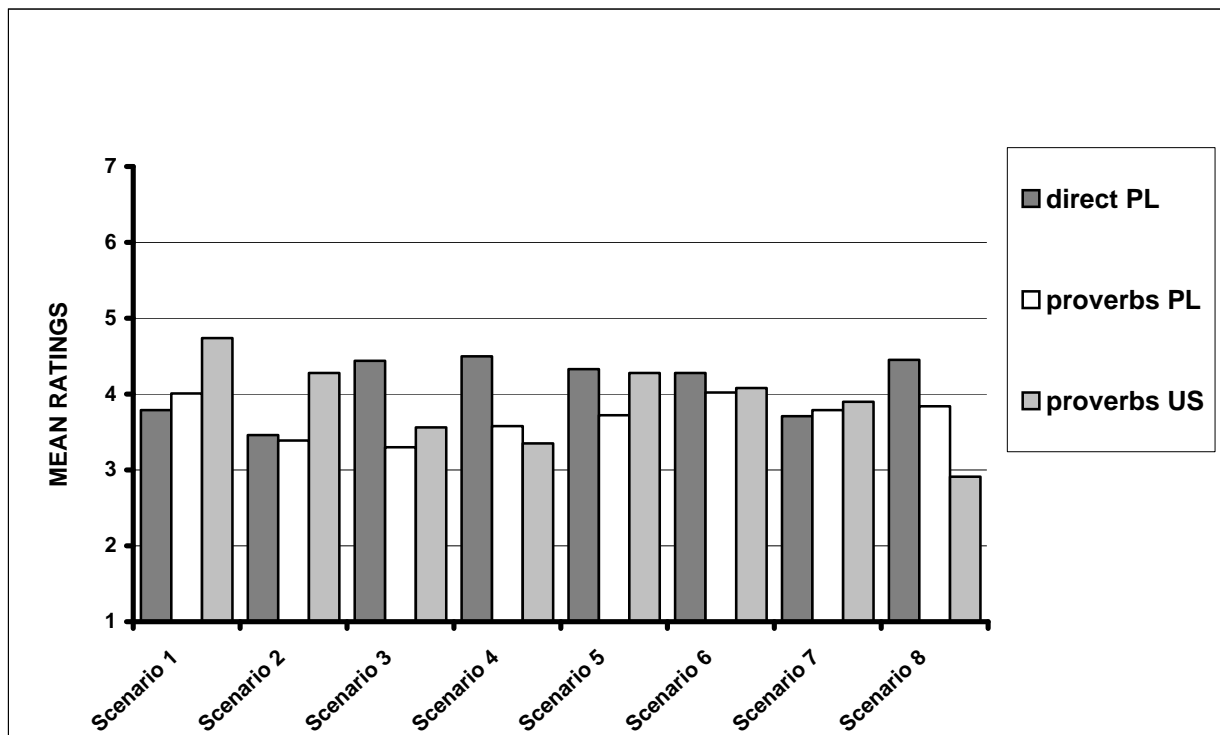


Figure 6. Ratings of recommendations discouraging from risk taking in various scenarios.



Figures 5 and 6 show the mean ratings of recommendations encouraging and discouraging risk taking in various scenarios. As can be seen, the ratings of proverbs encouraging risk taking differ in various scenarios. 8 (scenarios) x 2 (country groups) ANOVA revealed a significant scenario effect ($F = 16.23, p < .001$), and country groups ($F = 10.72, p < .001$). Similarly, the ratings of proverbs discouraging risk taking differ in various scenarios. 8 (scenarios) x 2 (country groups) ANOVA revealed significant scenario effect ($F = 5.17, p < .001$), but no country effect.

Moreover, for recommendations encouraging risk, 8 (scenarios) x 2 (types of recommendation) ANOVA revealed a significant scenario effect ($F = 14.91, p < .001$), and no effect of type of recommendation. For recommendations discouraging risk, 8 (scenarios) x 2 (types of recommendation) ANOVA revealed a significant scenario ($F = 2.90, p < .01$), and a significant effect of the type of recommendation ($F = 16.90, p < .001$). For the majority of scenarios, direct recommendations discouraging risk taking were rated higher when expressed in direct form than when expressed in a proverbial-metaphorical form.

As in Study 2, correlations within a group of proverbs encouraging or discouraging risk taking are positive but moderately high, both for the Polish and American samples (see Table 3). Also, as in Study 2, correlations close to zero were found for antonymous proverbs -

encouraging and discouraging risk taking. Moreover, all the correlations were higher for direct recommendations than for proverbs.

Table 3. Mean correlations among the ratings of recommendations encouraging and discouraging for risk taking in the same scenario.

Sample \ Proverbs	encouraging / encouraging	discouraging / discouraging	encouraging / discouraging
USA – proverbs	+0.36	+0.020	+0.10
PL – proverbs	+0.33	+0.017	-0.19
PL – direct recommendations	+0.55	+0.50	-0.38

Figure 7. Indices of inconsistency in ratings of proverbs and of direct recommendations in eight scenarios.

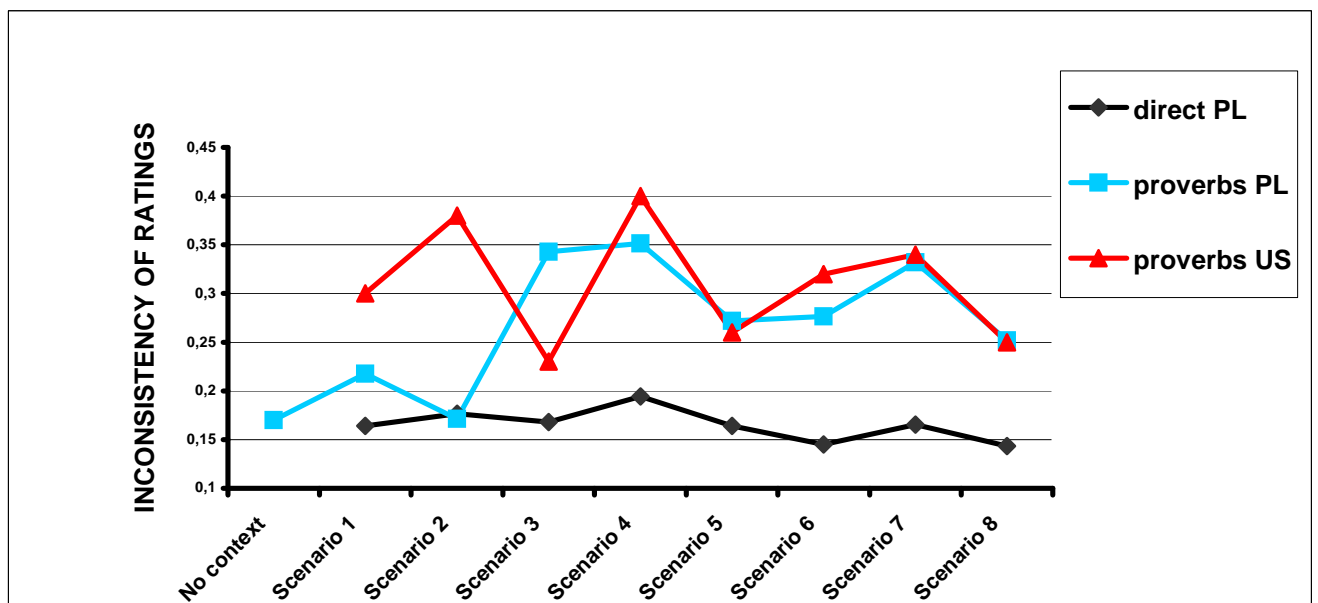


Figure 7 shows the indices of inconsistency in the ratings of proverbs (in both the Polish and American samples) and of direct recommendations (Polish sample) in various scenarios. 8 (scenarios) x 2 (country groups) ANOVA revealed a significant scenario effect ($F= 2.14, p<.05$) but no country effect. Thus, inconsistency for some scenarios was significantly higher than for others. Moreover, 8 (scenarios) x 2 (types of recommendation) ANOVA revealed a significant scenario effect ($F= 2.74, p<.01$), and a significant type of recommendation effect ($F= 57.06, p<.001$). Inconsistency is systematically higher for proverbs than for direct recommendations.

Finally, a comparison of consistency ratings between proverbs given without a context and proverbs given with a context revealed significant effects except when the first two scenarios were used, (t-test, $p < .05$). Inconsistency is systematically higher for proverbs given without a context than for the same proverbs given in a context.

5. GENERAL DISCUSSION

As could be expected, the ratings of accuracy of recommendations given by different proverbs in Studies 2 and 3 varied across risky scenarios. In some scenarios the respondents assigned higher ratings to proverbs encouraging risk taking, and in other scenarios to proverbs discouraging risk taking. Interestingly, the differences between country groups concerning this differentiation were not very high. This suggests that at least in some naturalistic risky scenarios people are surprisingly unanimous about what to choose. However, we also noticed that in most scenarios, neither proverbs encouraging nor discouraging risk taking received extremely high ratings. This is in some disagreement with the findings by Teigen (1986), Furnham (1987), and others where people tended to evaluate highly the truthfulness or accuracy of various proverbs. Contrary to this, in the context of risky scenarios, proverbs did not turn out to be particularly valued pieces of advice.

Additionally, our hypothesis that recommendations given in the form of proverbs should be rated higher than direct recommendations definitely received no support. Study 3 revealed that for risky scenarios proverbs were not rated as better recommendations than direct recommendations. In the case of recommendations encouraging risk there was no difference in evaluating the two types of recommendations, and in case of recommendations discouraging risk direct recommendations were rated higher than proverbs. Thus, in the context of risky scenarios proverbs as metaphoric recommendations are not valued higher than direct recommendations. This is, again, in disagreement with other findings on evaluations of proverbs (Teigen, 1986; Furnham, 1987). Perhaps, when proverbs are evaluated without context, people have a general tendency to accept them, regardless of the direction of advice they gave. (We will come back to this later.). However, when an individual has to deal with a concrete risky scenario and is contemplating which option should be chosen, the direct recommendations expressed in literary language are more transparent for him than proverbs expressed in a metaphorical way. Indeed, in order to apply a proverbial recommendation at least two steps are needed: (a) to transform its metaphorical meaning into a literal meaning, and (b) to apply it to a particular scenario. Probably such a mental effort is superfluous for an individual dealing with a concrete risky scenario.

In Study 3 we observed two further facts. One was that the ratings of accuracy of recommendation given in proverbs presented without any context were, generally, quite high. Moreover, the ratings of proverbs presented in concrete scenarios were in most cases lower than the ratings of the same proverbs presented without any context (and only in a few cases were both ratings equal). These findings seem to be in perfect agreement with the idea of paremiology that when the proverb is presented without a context, the person automatically retrieves the most appropriate context that fits this proverb. This is the source of the highly positive ratings of proverbs presented without any context. In fact, in a preliminary Study 1 we found that each of the proverbs presented without a context activated its favorite context. On the other hand, in concrete scenarios the same proverbs can be seen as not so perfectly suitable for a given context and, therefore, their ratings are not so high as in the case of proverbs presented without a context.

We now turn to the question of inconsistency in evaluating the accuracy of contradictory recommendations. In both Studies 2 and 3 we found positive, but not very high correlations among ratings of compatible (either encouraging or discouraging risk taking) proverbs, and no significant (negative) correlations among antonymous proverbs (encouraging and discouraging risk taking). Moderately positive correlations among the ratings of compatible proverbs once again support the idea that proverbs identical in respect to their basic meaning can be evaluated differently depending on the metaphor they contain. One metaphor may be perceived as better in a particular context, while in a different context a different metaphor is seen as better. Similarly, antonymous proverbs with different metaphors do not have to be perfectly negatively correlated.

What is striking, however, is that correlations between antonymous proverbs - encouraging and discouraging risk taking - are close to zero. This means that the recommendations of antonymous proverbs can be evaluated either as both inaccurate or (what is stranger) as both accurate. In other words, the respondents tended to accept contradictory recommendations. The same phenomenon is even more directly visible in the measure called the index of inconsistency in the ratings of antonymous proverbs.

In Study 3 we examined two questions concerning inconsistency in evaluating the accuracy of contradictory recommendations. One question was whether the metaphorical character of the proverbs makes their meaning not quite transparent and people can therefore easily misperceive the basic meanings of antonymous proverbs. In accordance with this line, we put forward the hypothesis that rating the quality of contradictory recommendations given in a form of proverbs should induce a higher level of inconsistency than rating the quality of

contradictory direct recommendations. This hypothesis was supported by the results obtained. Correlations between concordant recommendations (either encouraging or discouraging risk taking) were more positive for direct recommendations than for proverbs. Similarly, correlations among antonymous recommendations were more negative for direct recommendations than for proverbs. Finally, inconsistency indices were systematically higher for proverbs than for direct recommendations. All these results are in agreement with the interpretation that proverbs, by their metaphorical character, are not fully transparent and, therefore, people can misperceive their meanings.

The second question concerning inconsistency was whether the acceptance of the contradictory proverbs would be more prominent when the proverbs are presented without a context or when the same proverbs are presented in concrete contexts. Our study showed that for most cases, the acceptance of the contradictory proverbs was more prominent when the proverbs were presented in concrete risky contexts than when the same proverbs were presented without a context. This indicates that it is not only the nature of the proverbs, as was suggested by other studies (Teigen, 1986; Furnham, 1987), but the uncertainty about what to choose while in risky situations that makes people tend to accept or reject simultaneously contradictory recommendations. Presumably, antonymous proverbs are considered in such situations as different arguments for and against choosing one of two alternatives. In such situations people can tend to evaluate contradictory recommendations (moderately) positively. What is of particular interest from this perspective is that the level of inconsistency differed across scenarios. Interestingly, both the Polish and American samples rated the accuracy of contradictory recommendations with the highest inconsistency in the scenario about the reaction to flood warnings, as if the decision in this situation was the most difficult. Similarly, a high level of inconsistency was observed in the scenario about tax evasion. By contrast, in the scenarios about selling stocks and starting one's own business American respondents were more inconsistent than Polish respondents, as if Americans were less certain than Poles about what to choose in these two situations. Perhaps the Polish sample had too little experience in these activities. This could be just a sign of lesser or greater indecision in choosing between two alternatives. Unfortunately, we have no data on the level of indecision of respondents, especially as our manipulation with uncertainty was not successful. In further studies we should try to find out directly about the relationship between the level of inconsistency in the ratings of antonymous proverbs and the level of indecision about what to do in a given situation.

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