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A contrastive study of proverbalization

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This article deals with a linguistic phenomenon which, in analogy with the well established term ‘pronominalization’, may be called ‘proverbalization’. In comparison with its counterpart in the nominal sphere, this phenomenon, despite its crucial importance to any language possessing the verb category, has received little attention in modern linguistic research. The article compares, synchronically and diachronically, the proverbal systems of English, French and Swedish. In order to obtain maximal analytic efficiency, by excluding factors not directly relevant to the purpose of the analysis, the article focuses on one particular case of proverbalization, namely the one in which it occurs in a comparative clause as a result of this clause having a verb identical to that of the main clause but taking an object different from that of the main clause verb: $X - V_1 - O_1$ – Comparative Connector – $X/Y - V_1 - O_2$.

Keywords: proverb, proverbalization, pronominalization, English/French/Swedish

1. Introduction

Every language needs a verb which allows for avoiding repetition or synonymization within a sentence or in two consecutive sentences. This verb of “replacement” — ‘do’ in English, *faire* in French, *göra* in Swedish — stands in the same relation to “ordinary” verbs as do the pronouns of a language to its nouns. It is therefore for a good reason that in recent grammatical terminology the term ‘proverb’ has begun to be used to denote this verb, on the analogy of ‘pronoun’/*pronom/pronomen*. For instance, this is the term found in *Svenska Akademiens språklära* (Hultman 2003:145), while *Svenska Akademiens grammatik* [= SAG] (Teleman et al. 1999b:238) contents itself with pointing out, in a remark, the possibility of introducing the term ‘*pro-verb*’ into the framework of a grammatical model referring to such concepts as ‘*pro-substantiv*’, ‘*pro-adjektiv*’, ‘*pro-sats*’ (“pro-clause”). In French one quite often meets with the term ‘*pro-verbe*’, for instance in Grevisse (1993:288,

1127) and in *Grammaire du français contemporain* (Chevalier et al. 1988:98). Since in this language the word ‘proverbe’ is occupied by the meaning “maxim”, one usually refrains from using the word without a hyphen. The situation is the same in English, where the term ‘pro-verb’ is often used, but then primarily in order to denote a verb expressing “any unidentified or unspecified process” (Halliday and Hasan 1976:125), as, for instance, in “I’m glad he’s doing something” (ibid.:128). Halliday and Hasan distinguish this ‘do’ from ‘substitute *do*’ (ibid.:117.), which, unlike ‘pro-verb *do*’, is always anaphoric (although not coreferential; cf. Apothéloz 1995:118–120). The same designation — ‘substitute *do*’ — occurs in Denison (1993:271). In English, however, the terminological situation is unclear and somewhat confused, as shown, for instance, by the fact that the phenomenon called ‘substitute *do*’ by Halliday and Hasan is actually termed ‘pro-verb *do*’ in *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language* (Huddleston and Pullum 2002:99–100), while Quirk et al. (1985:877) regard ‘do’ as a ‘pro-verb’ in a sentence like “What is she doing?” but as a ‘pro-predicate’ that which Halliday and Hasan call ‘substitute *do*’. The situation is further complicated by the fact that Quirk et al. (1985:874–875) recognize two types of ‘pro-predicate *do*’ depending on whether the verb has auxiliary or main verb status. In the former case, according to these authors (ibid.:874), we have to do with a case of “ellipsis of the predication”, and only in the latter with a real “substitution for the predicate”. This distinction is not made, however, in *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English* (Biber et al. 1999:72), which simply and solely speaks of ‘do’ as a ‘pro-predicate’.

A Swedish term which builds on the analogy with ‘*pronomen*’ (“pronoun”) is ‘*pronominellt verb*’ (“pronominal verb”), which is used by Thorell (1977:76) in his grammar of the Swedish language, a choice which, despite the contradictory character of the term, is motivated in the following straightforward manner: “The verb *göra* (“do”) can replace other verbs and can thus be called ‘pronominellt verb’ (“pronominal verb”)” [my translation from Swedish]. This terminology has been adopted by the authors of SAG, who, however, by changing this denomination into ‘*pronominell verbfras*’ (“pronominal verb phrase”) (Teleman et al. 1999a:214, 1999b:539 *et passim*) have wanted on the one hand to emphasize the ‘representative capacity’ of the verb, on the other to make it clear that *göra* does in fact constitute a ‘phrase’ together with the anaphoric pronoun — typically *det* (“it”) — with which it is normally combined: *Fler pianister spelade här i fjol än vad som gjorde det i förfjol* (1999c:265) (literally: “More pianists played here last year than what did it the year before”). It is noteworthy that SAG speaks alternately of “the pronominal verb phrase *göra (det)* (“do (it)”)” and of “the replacement verb *göra*” [my translations] (1999c:265, 267). As a French counterpart to Swedish ‘*pronominellt verb*’ appears the term ‘*pronom verbal*’,¹ introduced, it seems, by the Danish linguist Louis Hjelmslev — in an article published in 1937 (Hjelmslev 1937:57) — as an expedient

solution, the obvious term — ‘*proverbe*’ — being inaccessible. Also, it is only natural that French linguists should have had recourse to the Latin term ‘*verbum vicarium*’, the verb *facere* having had proverbal function in Latin. This is the case with, for instance, Le Bidois and Le Bidois (1971:290) and Sandfeld (1965:447). Nor is it surprising that this term has been francisized into ‘*verbe vicaire*’ (e.g. Le Goffic 1993:395 and Combettes 2003:196) and anglicized into ‘vicarious do’ (e.g. Visser 2002:511 *et passim*).

As regards French, the best term, in my view, is ‘*verbe suppléant*’ (I have used it in a monograph devoted to “*la suppléance verbale en français moderne*”, Eriksson 1985), because the verb ‘*suppléer*’, which can here be given the meaning “fill up”, suggests that the function of the verb is ‘representing’ rather than simply ‘substituting’. The phenomenon in itself can then be termed ‘*suppléance verbale*’ (Eriksson 1985) or ‘*suppléance du verbe*’ (Moignet 1960).

For the purpose of obtaining the highest degree possible of language neutrality, however, I will henceforth call the verb ‘proverb’ and the phenomenon ‘proverbalization’.

2. Proverbalization vs. pronominalization

There are very good reasons for making a close connexion between proverbalization (by a proverb) and pronominalization (by a pronoun). Both phenomena answer the purpose of satisfying an imperative need of expression, showing a striking parallelism in several respects: They are both anaphoric and coreferential elements. These characteristics, in their turn, are the condition for the quality that constitutes the very basis of their existence, namely their ‘representative power’, i.e. their ability to “represent” linguistic structures of a syntactically great complexity. The proverb, like the pronoun, possesses this ability. In the same way as personal pronouns are able to represent noun phrases whose syntactic complexity is limited only by our possibility of interpreting their semantic contents, the representation of the proverb can embrace the whole of the verb phrase of which the “replaced” verb forms the core. Consequently, proverbalization offers a way of determining and verifying the structural scope of the verb phrase, as does pronominalization in the case of the noun phrase: “Cette opération de substitution permet en effet d’évaluer avec précision le degré de cohésion du syntagme verbal.” (Combettes 2003:196). The use of the proverb is then syntactically rather than stylistically motivated and verb repetition is not always an alternative to proverbalization, since the proverb is “a VP-substitute” and not “a verb-substitute” (Denison 1993:271). It means simplifying excessively the linguistic reality to maintain that the two phenomena are always interchangeable and, even, that this possibility is a self-evident

truth, as is sometimes done ('of course', '*évidemment*'): "[...] repetition of the head word [instead of its replacement by *faire*] is, of course, always possible grammatically." (Rees 1960:505) — "Au lieu d'employer *faire*, on peut évidemment se contenter de répéter le verbe." (Togeby 1983:214).

It follows that proverbalization cannot be reduced to a simple means of stylistic variation, as claimed by Le Bidois and Le Bidois (1971:289: "un procédé qui s'explique par le désir de varier l'expression"), but provides a syntactic instrument essentially identical to pronominalization and as such no more submitted than that operation to diachronic frequency fluctuation, another assertion often made by linguists in connexion with the evolution of proverbalization in the French language:

"The material gathered from these sources serves, in the first place, to confirm the grammarians' general remarks on the decline in the use of the *verbum vicarium* in the modern language, both literary and familiar, in comparison with the ready recourse which was had to it up to the seventeenth century." (Rees 1960:504).

A similar connexion between pronominalization and proverbalization is made in *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*, where the former is considered a coreference phenomenon, but the latter only a substitution phenomenon. One of the differences — perhaps the most important one — between substitution and coreference is said to lie in the fact that "a substitute pro-form can be replaced by the antecedent without unacceptability on structural grounds and without change of meaning" (Quirk et al. 1985:864). Apart from the questionable idea of not attributing referential status to verbal actions, one can establish that the possibility of repetition is far from guaranteed. The reason for this is to be found precisely in the great flexibility of the proverb with respect to representation. In principle one can say that the more syntactically complex the represented verb phrase, the less it is probable that repetition or synonymization should offer a structurally acceptable alternative to proverbalization. The repeated/synonymized verb simply does not possess the faculty of the proverb to "capture" the entire semantic contents of the represented structure, but is a purely lexical form, a "place holder", not a syntactic instrument. In the following French sentence both proverbalization and pronominalization of necessity occur in the comparative clause:

- (1) a. *Les ouvriers de l'entreprise Dardart se rendirent au café Le Transatlantique pour prendre l'apéritif, comme ils le faisaient une fois par semaine.*
(Robert Sabatier, *Les Allumettes suédoises*, Albin Michel 1972: 28)
- b. *"[...], comme les ouvriers se rendaient une fois par semaine."
- c. *"[...], comme les ouvriers de l'entreprise Dardart se rendaient au café Le Transatlantique pour prendre l'apéritif une fois par semaine."

Neither by simply repeating the core of the two phrases (*les ouvriers* and *se rendirent*, respectively) (1b), nor by repeating each phrase as a whole (1c) could one arrive at a formulation avoiding “unacceptability on structural grounds” (Quirk et al. 1985:864). Pronominalization (*les ouvriers de l'entreprise Dardart > ils*) and proverbalization (*se rendirent au café Le Transatlantique pour prendre l'apéritif > faisaient*) are in all important respects two identical linguistic operations. What makes proverbalization necessary here is thus the syntactic complexity of the main verb phrase with its two adverbials, the first of which — the prepositional phrase *au café Le Transatlantique*, indicating spatial destination — is a syntactically indispensable modifier of the verb *se rendre*, while the other, in the form of an infinitive phrase (*pour prendre l'apéritif*), is optionally subordinated to the combination of verb + first adverbial, the whole forming a single verb phrase, whose syntactic complexity and cohesion make proverbalization obligatory in order for its semantic contents to be resumed in the comparative clause.

From the above it follows that the proverb is a syntactic instrument of great generality, likely to be found in most languages possessing the verb category.² In the same way as in a given language there are pronouns if there are nouns, there is also a proverb if there are verbs. It therefore seems reasonable to assume that the proverb is a universal linguistic category in as high a degree as the pronoun. The first linguist to have pointed out the indispensable character of the proverb with reference to that of the pronoun was, it seems, Louis Hjelmslev who, in an article from 1937 on “la nature du pronom”, writes as follows: “Il faut qu'il existe des ‘proverbes’, ou, puisque cet expédient terminologique nous est fermé, disons des pronoms verbaux au même titre que les pronoms nominaux.” (Hjelmslev 1937:57).

3. A microstructure

A good way of studying contrastively the mechanisms of proverbalization is to restrict the analysis to one single structure where other factors than those relevant to its objectives do not risk influencing negatively the results of the analysis. A suitable microstructure of that kind would be that particular type of comparative clause in which the verb takes a direct or an indirect object not identical with that of the main clause. We will then deal with the following structure:

$X - V_1 - O_1 - \text{Comparative Connector (CC)} - X/Y - V_1 - O_2$

Example: ‘They (X) treated (V_1) him (O_1) as (CC) you (X/Y) treat (V_1) a dog (O_2).’

This is a fairly frequent structure in the three languages we are concerned with here: English, French and Swedish. What makes a contrastive study interesting is the fact that these languages behave differently with regard to the use of the proverb within the structure in question and that the structure has developed in different ways in each one of them. Both synchronic and diachronic data are relevant to the contrastive analysis.

4. Three levels

The structure illustrates situations of linguistic conflict on three levels. The first one is binary and concerns the choice between verb repetition and proverbalization before the object of the comparative clause. For all three languages it is true that the repetitive construction is by far the most frequent. In a French corpus composed of some 250 novels published after 1945 it turned out that the authors had chosen verb repetition in approximately 80% of the cases, as compared with only 20% of verb replacement. An example like the following thus conforms to the norm:

- (2) a. *Je la [votre lettre] lirai tous les jours, comme un Chrétien lit l'Évangile.*
(Elsa Triolet, *Luna-Park*, Gallimard 1959:43)
- b. "I will read it [your letter] every day, as a Christian reads the Gospels."
- c. "*Jag ska läsa det [ditt brev] varje dag, som en kristen läser Evangeliet.*"

The main explanation for this state of things is the mere presence of the object, this construction clearly favouring verb repetition. Another decisive factor, as I have tried to show in the earlier mentioned monograph (Eriksson 1985), is the formal scope of the verb phrase to be represented: Generally speaking one can say that the tendency towards proverbalization increases with the extension of the verbal representation and, accordingly, with the syntactic complexity of the main verb phrase. Yet other factors of importance are the meaning of the main verb, the proverbalization tendency increasing with the force of its 'verbal value' ("valeur verbale", Le Bidois 1952:149,), and the voice of the main verb, proverbalization being less felicitous with a main verb in the passive voice. All these factors are language neutral. However, there are also language specific factors, such as the formal constitution of the object: For instance, in modern spoken French a pronominal object makes proverbalization impossible (3a), which is not the case in English (3b):

- (3) a. **Tu ne m'aimes pas autant que je fais toi.*
- b. "You don't love me as much as I do you."

On level 2 there is also a dichotomy. In the proverbial construction the object can be joined directly to the proverb ('direct construction') or be separated from it by a preposition ('indirect construction'). On this level significant language differences appear. While English primarily uses the direct construction, Swedish, on the whole, only uses the indirect one. In French the situation is somewhat more complicated, this language possessing, alongside the indirect, 'prepositional' one, a stylistic use of the direct, 'non-prepositional' construction as an archaic variant.

Finally, on the third level, concerning the occurrence of prepositional variation within the indirect construction, French once again stands out in presenting no less than four different prepositions: *de*, *pour*, *avec*, *à* (the distributional characteristics of which cannot be dealt with in this article). Swedish has the one preposition *med*, while English typically has the direct construction. However, Visser (2002:515) gives examples to show that in the past indirect construction with the preposition 'to' was not foreign to the English language:

- (4) Constantin threatened Athanasius [...] so much manye a Prince doth to him. (Stapleton)
- (5) I had a sight which confounded me at once, as I doubt not it would have done to any woman in the world. (Defoe)
- (6) She let him go — as a cat might have done to a mouse. (Dickens)

More important than this, however, is the fact that in present-day English, as it manifests itself on Google, one finds the beginnings of a tendency to introduce the preposition 'with' as a link between proverb and object. This seems particularly to be the case if the comparative connector ('as' or 'than') is preceded by modifiers like 'just' (7)–(10), 'exactly' (11), 'same' (12) or the two last in combination (13):

- (7) Identify it [the snake] and if it is not venomous, appreciate it and leave it alone just as you do with songbirds in your garden.
(<http://www.flmnh.ufl.edu/herpetology/FL-GUIDE/gettingalong.htm>)
- (8) Get to know your online friends just as you do with all your friends.
(<http://www.police.wa.gov.au/Services/Services.asp?ChildAbuse>)
- (9) You will learn languages naturally — just as you do with your first language!
(<http://www.analomba.com/>)
- (10) The daily workouts on that plan should be viewed as your appointments that you need to keep, just as you do with business meetings.
(<http://www.ultramaxtri.com/triathlon>)

- (11) This would allow you to power your domain with Spam Slicer technology while using it exactly as you do with your email forwarding or aliasing service.
(<http://www.spamslicer.com/visitorhelp01.html>)
- (12) Take failures with the same ease as you do with your successes.
(<http://www.northsouth.org/founder.asp>)
- (13) But you can actually use a flash animation and you can scale it, exactly the same way as you do with an image. (kay.zombiecoder.com/wsg/WSG2006-03-30_Nick_Cowie.pdf)

It is obvious too that the tendency towards prepositional insertion increases when the representation carried by the proverb is extensive, which is often the case when the main verb has adverbial modifiers as in (14): ‘to an already existing page’; (15): ‘where it will not be frosted’. But less extensive adverbials too have the effect of provoking prepositional insertion as in (16): ‘in folders’; (17): ‘to your ear’. In all these examples prepositional insertion seems not only natural, but almost necessary. It becomes altogether indispensable when the comparative clause precedes the main clause as in (18):

- (14) You cannot simply apply a full-screen theme to an already existing page as you do with a standard theme.
(<http://www.kepthemes.com/faq01.htm>)
- (15) Overwinter your tree where it will not be frosted, just as you do with your fuchsia baskets.
(<http://www.americanfuchsiasociety.org/%20fuchsia%articles/fuchsiatree.html>)
- (16) You can listen to your most important voice messages first and save and organize your voice mail in folders as you do with your e-mail.
(<http://www.preferredtechnology.com/solutions/voip/index.html>)
- (17) Your hands are completely free when using a headset as there is no need to hold it to your ear (as you do with a USB or ordinary phone).
(<http://www.telix.com/faq.asp>)
- (18) As you do with your driver, you need to swing this club with a sweeping motion.
(http://www.zandergolf.com/articles/caveman_nov04.html)

5. The diachronic aspect

The differences between the languages as regards the choice of construction are the result of the historical development, as shown by the fact that the direct construction was originally the only one known to all three languages. As for English, instances of this construction are well recorded both in Old and Middle English texts, as shown in (19)–(20) and (21)–(22) respectively:

- (19) [...] & heora hergas towearp, swa he ealle dyde þe he awer mette. (Ælfred; cit. Visser 2002: 512)
- (20) [...] þæt ic hig bære on minum bosume, swa fostor moder deþ cyld. (Ælfric; cit. Visser 2002: 512)
- (21) He us honteth ase hund hare doh. (Polit. Songs; cit. Visser 2002: 512)
- (22) He folwede hem so hund dos hare. (Havelok; cit. Visser 2002: 512)

In Swedish too the object seems originally to have been construed directly, which is shown in examples (23) and (24) taken from *Svenska Akademiens Ordbok* [SAOB: “The Dictionary of the Swedish Academy”] (1929, X: 1728) and dating from around 1540 and 1700 respectively:

- (23) At wij motte kunna [...] så wel [...] bruka [gåvorna] [...] [Herren] til loff och prijs, som hine [martyrerna] giorde theres gåffuor. (Olaus Petri)
“[...] so that we could use the gifts according to God, as the martyrs did theirs.”
- (24) [Han] fattade mig i hallsen som Rääfuen giör lammet. (Växjö domkapitels akter)
“He grabbed me by the neck, as the fox does the lamb.”

Modern Swedish would here require the presence of the preposition *med* (“*som martyrerna gjorde med*/*Ø *deras gåvor*” — “*som räven gör med*/*Ø *lammet*”), a fact which is only presented as a variant in SAOB (1929:1728: “[...] in certain cases replaced by a construction in which the modifier is introduced by the preposition *med*” [my translation]). SAG is therefore right in considering the direct construction to be ungrammatical: “According to the general rules [...] *göra* [“do”] cannot refer to a transitive verb if the object indicates a comparison” (1999d: 611) [my translation]. The following examples are given:

- (25) *Hon älskade Mattias högre än hon älskade*/**gjorde* *Tomas*.
“She loved Mattias more than she loved/did Tomas.”
- (26) *Jag gav Anders högre betyg än jag gav*/**gjorde* *Per*.
“I gave Anders higher marks than I gave/did Per.”

Now, the remarkable thing about the description found in SAG is that no mention at all is made of the indirect construction, in spite of the fact that the transition from direct to indirect construction is a completely generalized phenomenon in contemporary Swedish. This is true regardless of the fact that in the particular case of (25), the insertion of *med* would yield a semantically awkward sentence on account of the different meanings attached to the verb *älska* in direct and in indirect construction: *älska någon* = “love somebody” — *älska med någon* = “make love to somebody”. A Google search on the sequence *som man gör med* (“as you do/one does with”) confirms however the completion of the transition in question. A very large number of the 861 hits were of the following type:

- (27) *Man har lärt känna Van Veeteren som man gör med någon som ska bli en god vän.*
 (http://www.bokus.com/cgi-bin/more_book_info.cgi?ISBN=9100104922)
 “One has got to know Van Veeteren as one does with someone about to become a good friend.”
- (28) *Den här boken kan du läsa som man gör med de flesta böcker.*
 (<http://www.ltkalmar.se/fhc/Verktyslada/Pa%20tal%20om/pdfarkiv/alkohol.pdf>)
 “You can read this book as one does with most books.”
- (29) *Genom att behandla dem med samma respekt som man gör med vuxna, får vi dem att samarbeta och känna sig uppskattade.*
 (<http://www.lakarforbundet.se/.../Barn%20och%20Ungdomspsykiatri/CWDAhelagruppledarmanualen-maj%2005.pdf>)
 “By treating them with the same respect as one does with grown-ups, we make them cooperate and feel appreciated.”
- (30) *Jag satt och studerade henne ingående, så som man gör med ett nyfött spädbarn.* (web.comhem.se/~u78900111/mamma/mamma3.html)
 “I was watching her closely, as one does with a newborn baby.”
- (31) *Det betyder alltså att man hanterar försäkringsbolagen ungefär som man gör med kommunerna.*
 (<http://www.riksdagen.se/debatt/200304/prot/71/sam/71SAM.ASP>)
 “It thus means that they treat the insurance companies more or less as they do with the town districts.”
- (32) *Om man skulle kunna ta fast nerladdare i den utsträckning som man gör med snabbare skulle en mycket stor grupp människor sitta inlåsta.*
 (pcforall.idg.se/.../synpunkter.asp?id=20050906173655_PFA274.dbp&read=true&project)

“If they were able to catch downloaders to the extent that they do with shoplifters, a very large group of people would be locked up.”

- (33) *På sätt och vis kunde man naturligtvis avfärda Pålsson på samma sätt som man gör med ett naivt barn som hamnat i trotsåldern.* (tryckfrihet.blogspot.com/2005_06_01_tryckfrihet_archive.html)

“In a way one could of course dismiss Pålsson in the same way as you do with a naive child having reached the defiant age.”

This holds good not only when the object is direct, but also when it is indirect (as it is also in example (26) quoted from SAG above):

- (34) *Därför lovade han/hon dig tystnadsplikt precis som man gör med vem som helst man träffar.* (ungdomsmottagningen.se/question.php?qa=2762)

“That is why he/she promised you professional secrecy exactly as one does with any person one meets.”

Here the representation of the proverb includes the direct object (*tystnadsplikt*), which makes it formally complex to such a degree that repetition of the verb would be virtually inapplicable: “[...] precis som man lovar vem som helst man träffar tystnadsplikt”, which is not the case in (27)–(33), where it would be perfectly natural to repeat the main verb instead of resorting to the construction consisting of the proverb *göra* followed by the preposition *med*. Once again, then, we are witnessing the extent to which the competition between verb repetition and proverbialization is closely linked to the extension of the verbal representation.

Swedish, unlike English, exhibits a development in the use of the sequence proverb + object that from a direct, transitive construction leads to an indirect, intransitive one. This is also true of French, where the direct construction is well attested from the earliest times (cf. (35)) and where it seems to have reigned supreme until the end of the Middle Ages. My oldest examples of the indirect construction date from the first half of the 16th century and were found in Rabelais’ *Pantagruel*, published in 1532 (cf. (36)–(37)). But, generally speaking, 16th-century examples are very scarce (isolated examples in Montaigne and Marguerite de Navarre), which is also true of classical French, a period in which the direct construction is still clearly predominant (cf. (38)–(39)). It is not until the first half of the 19th century that one can observe signs of generalization in the use of the indirect construction, a process which is almost completed by the end of that century. This generalization, however, as opposed to what took place in Swedish, did not prevent a small number of writers from sticking to the old construction, for example Marcel Proust (cf. (40)) and André Gide (cf. (41)). Strikingly, this group also includes late 20th-century writers like Michel Tournier (cf. (42)) and François Nourissier (cf. (43)):

- (35) *Plus aiment il traisun e murdrrie Qu'il ne fesist trestut l'or de Galice.* (La Chanson de Roland: v. 1475–6; ed. Gérard Moignet: 1969: 122, Paris: Bordas)
“He loves treason and murdering more than he would have done all the gold of Galicia.”
- (36) *En icelle facon, saulva, après Dieu, ladicte Arche de periller, car il lui bailloit le bransle avecques les jambes, et du pied la tournoit où il vouloit, comme on fait du gouvernail d'une navire.* (Rabelais, *Pantagruel*: 1965:I: 227, Paris: Garnier)
“In this way he saved, after God, the ark from going down, for he seized the helm with his legs and turned it the way he wanted with his foot, as you do with the helm of a ship.”
- (37) *Par Golfarin, nepveu de Mahon, si tu bouges d'ici, je te mettray au fond de mes chausses, comme on fait d'un suppositoire.* (Ibid.: 333)
“By Golfarin, nephew of Mohammed, if you move away from here I'll put you at the back of my trousers, as one does with a suppository.”
- (38) *Je veux bien que vous me traitiez comme on fait les dieux.* (La Fontaine; cit. Regnier, H., *Œuvres de J. de La Fontaine*, 1892:I: 367, Paris: Hachette)
“I would like you to treat me as one does the gods.”
- (39) *Vous devriez l'apprendre, Monsieur, comme vous faites la danse.* (Molière; cit. Livet, C.-L., *Lexique de la langue de Molière*, 1896:II: 320, Paris: H. Welter)
“You should learn it, Sir, as you do dancing.”
- (40) *Elle prenait le parti de Debussy comme elle aurait fait celui d'une de ses amies dont on eût incriminé la conduite.* (M. Proust, *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, 1954:II: 812, Paris: Gallimard “Pléiade”)
“She took sides with Debussy, as she would have done that of a female friend whose conduct had been incriminated.”
- (41) *Parut la Légende ailée de Wieland, que Griffin m'envoya, comme il faisait ses autres livres.* (A. Gide, *Si le grain ne meurt*, 1945: 268, Paris: Gallimard)
“Then appeared “La Légende ailée” de Wieland, which Griffin sent me, as he did his other books.”
- (42) *En somme, je fécondais cette terre comme j'aurais fait une épouse.* (M. Tournier, *Vendredi ou les Limbes du Pacifique*, 1975: 229, Paris: “Folio”)
“In short, I fertilized this soil as I would have done a wife.”
- (43) *Benoît [...] m'observe comme ferait un policier le suspect qu'il file, résolu à me pincer à la première occasion.* (F. Nourissier, *Une histoire française*, 1979: 166, Paris: “Le Livre de Poche”)
“Benoît is observing me as a policeman would do a suspect he is shadowing, determined to pinch me at the first opportunity.”

The situation of French is also complicated by the existence of no less than four prepositions in the role of intermediary between proverb and object: *de*, *pour*, *avec*, *à*, here enumerated in order of frequency. *De* is by far the most common preposition (more than half of the occurrences in my corpus) and furthermore the oldest. However, it is not unlikely that in the most recent French usage *avec* (the nearest equivalent of Swedish *med* and of English 'with') is about to become the most frequent preposition, despite the fact that my earliest examples of this preposition date from the nineteen-forties, this rapid development possibly being in accordance with a current French tendency to assign to *avec* the role of a 'préposition à tout faire'. A search on Google serves to confirm this hypothesis: It turns out that *comme on /le/ fait avec* is a far more frequent sequence than *comme on /le/ fait d'un/d'une/de/des* or than the sequences *comme on /le/ fait pour* and *comme on /le/ fait à un/à une/à des/aux*. This investigation into French usage then reveals an early development from direct to indirect construction on level 2, and a later one on level 3 from the prepositions *de*, *pour* et *à* to the preposition *avec*.

6. The present situation

As it seems, *avec* is gaining ground chiefly at the expense of the preposition *de*, but also, to some degree, of *pour*. In most cases there seems to be a clear cause and effect relation between the scope of the proverbial representation and the use of *avec*: The weakening of the transitivity caused by the insertion of the preposition at the same time increases the representative capacity of the proverb. Consequently, *avec* being the one of the four prepositions that brings about the most important transitivity weakening, the need for this preposition is particularly strongly felt in those cases where the main verb takes modifiers (especially adverbials). Examples (44)–(47) are taken from Google:

- (44) *On le suit par peur et par obligation, et non par admiration et par amour comme on le fait avec le leader.* (pages.infinit.net/espoir3/le_dominateur_et_le_domine.htm)
 "They follow him from fear and compulsion, not from admiration and love as one does with the leader."
- (45) *Les nazis ont déshumanisé les juifs, en les identifiant par un numéro tatoué sur le bras, comme on le fait avec les animaux.*
 (<http://www.sixmillion.org/Cadres/textfrancais.html>)
 "The Nazis dehumanized the Jews, by identifying them with a number tattooed on their arm, as one does with animals."

- (46) *On aurait pu les faire adopter par unanimité, ou par division, comme on le fait avec les députés adultes.* (Carrefour-education.qc.ca/actualite/billets.asp?affiche=true&no=127)
 “They could have been adopted by unanimity, or by division, as one does with adult representatives.”
- (47) *Chez Ndiaye on avait même installé l’ordinateur dehors sur une chaise, comme on le fait avec la télé [...].* (62.210.218.174/~xof/spip/article.php3?id_article=40)
 “At Ndiaye’s place they had even put the computer outside, on a chair, as you do with the telly.”

Particularly characteristic, in this connexion, are adverbial modifiers introduced by the prepositions *par* (cf. (48) and (49)) and *sur* (cf. (50)) and denoting parts of the body, which yields a construction semantically close to a dative construction (cf. (48): *Vous m’avez prise par la main* = “*Vous m’avez pris la main*”). Here too, *avec* is constantly preferred to the other prepositions in its object-connecting role, as it would also be in the properly dative construction. Examples (48)–(50) are taken from Google:

- (48) *Vous m’avez prise par la main, comme on le fait avec un enfant que l’on veut guider dans les sentiers où se cachent les poètes et les amants.*
 (<http://www.humanite.presse.fr/journal/2004-01-28/2004-01-28-386950>)
 “You took me by the hand, as you do with a child you want to guide in the paths where poets and lovers hide.”
- (49) *Je le prends par la queue, comme on le fait avec un saumon et j’ai réussi à l’embarquer [...].*
 (<http://www3.sympatico.ca/louis.verrette/crisbjame.html>)
 “I take it by the tail, as you do with a salmon and I managed to board it.”
- (50) *Puis il m’avait serré sur sa poitrine, comme on le fait avec un enfant chéri.*
 (<http://www.bonnesnouvelles.net/voyage.htm>)
 “Then he clasped me to his chest as you do with a cherished child.”

What finally proves the advantage of the preposition *avec* over the other prepositions is the fact that it tends to prevail even when the representation of the proverb is restricted to the finite verb of the main clause (cf. (51)–(53)). This is especially so when the main clause is in the passive form (cf. (54)–(56)). Examples (51)–(56) are taken from Google:

- (51) *En agissant ainsi, il vous respectera comme on le fait avec un vrai partenaire.*
 (<http://www.jeanpierrelauzier.com/client.html>)
 “By acting in this way he will respect you as one does with a real partner.”

- (52) *Tous commencent à l'appeler Nicola, comme on le fait avec une personne qui fait partie de la famille.*
(<http://www.socialist-utopia.org/node/view/315>)
“Everybody starts calling her Nicola, as you do with someone belonging to the family.”
- (53) *Avec les écrans actuels, impossible de lire un roman (par exemple) comme on le fait avec un livre “traditionnel”.* (mmdl.free.fr/blog-m/?p=306)
“With today’s screens it’s impossible to read a novel (for example) as you do with a “traditional” book.”
- (54) *Mais nous savons bien que ces chiffres ne peuvent pas être comparés comme on le fait avec ceux d’il y a 5 ans [...].* (danielpoupeville.hautefort.com/)
“But we know that these figures cannot be compared as one does with those from five years ago.”
- (55) *Un animal n’est pas objet et ne peut pas être abîmé ni jeté comme on le fait avec une peluche, des chaussures, un sac, un jeu, etc.* (animones.vegan.fr/les-animaleries.html)
“An animal is not an object and cannot be ruined or thrown away as you do with a peel, shoes, a bag, a game etc.”
- (56) *En dépit de similitudes avec le paludisme la dengue n’est pas soignée comme on le fait avec celui-ci, avertit M. Goda.*
(<http://www.comores-online.com/mwezinet/sante/dengue.htm>)
“In spite of the similarities with malaria, dengue fever is not treated as one does with that illness, informs Mr. Goda.”

The three languages have thus developed three different models for handling the proverb + object structure: English one with primarily (but not exclusively) the direct construction, Swedish one with exclusively the indirect construction but with only one possible preposition (*med*), and French one also with only the indirect construction (disregarding the strictly literary use of direct construction for stylistic reasons) but with a set of prepositions (*de, pour, avec, à*). These models have been fixed as units in the languages. In the same way as proverbalization can be regarded as grammaticalization, so the inserted preposition can be seen as a grammatical tool in those languages where this insertion has occurred. Proverb and preposition have come to form a grammatical unit not liable to be broken by a lexical element. This is why in Swedish the preposition remains *med* even when the main verb takes a preposition other than *med*. This phenomenon is the least surprising when the combination of preposition and (pro)noun in the main clause fills the syntactic function of prepositional object, since here the preposition is intimately linked to the preceding verb, to the extent, in fact, of being selected by

its nature. In the following sentences it would therefore be difficult to replace the ‘grammatical’ preposition *med* by the actual ‘lexical’ one. Examples (57)–(61) are taken from Google:

- (57) *Man måste våga **prata om** det, precis som man gör **med** nära-dödenupplevelser.* (??“gör om”) (paranormal.se/topic/kundaliniskildring_elisabeth.html)
 “One must dare to talk about it, exactly as one does with near-death experiences.”
- (58) *Så därför tror jag att man inte ska ge bort sin kropp, utan **bjuda på** den som man gör **med** något lyxigt man tycker om.* (??“gör på”) (http://www.rfsu.se/templates/template_178.asp_Q_number_E_24548_A_category_E_11361)
 “That’s why I think that one should not give away one’s body, but offer it as you do with something luxurious you like.”
- (59) *Just nu slåss man och **grälar om** ljudfilmen, som man gör **med** allt nytt här i världen. Men under tiden glömmar man stumfilmen.* (??“gör om”) (<http://www.fsfl.se/backspegel/1930-3.html>)
 “Right now they are fighting and arguing about the sound film, as they do with everything that is new in the world. But in the meantime they forget about the silent film.”
- (60) *[...] och **betala för** denna som man gör **med** all annan sakkunskap.* (??“gör för”) (Eskilstuna.se/upload/8614/remissvar.pdf)
 “[...] and pay for it as one does with all other know-how.”
- (61) *Man ska **förhålla sig till** drickandet som man gör **med** andningen, sömnen och blinkandet — låta kroppen sköta det. När man blir törstig så dricker man.* (??“gör till”) (strangnet.se/blog/index.php/sv?cat=79)
 “One should relate to drinking as one does with breathing, sleeping and blinking — let the body handle it. When thirsty, one drinks.”

A main verb in the form of a prepositional verb (cf. (62): *ta hand om* — “take care of”), an implicit prepositional object (cf. (63): *vänja sig vid [något]* — “get used to [something]”) or a prepositional object in the form of an infinitive phrase in the comparative clause (cf. (64): *att lära sig t.ex. läsa* — “to learn to read, for instance”) are other factors contributing to obstructing prepositional repetition. Examples (62)–(64) are taken from Google:

- (62) *Utnyttjar de [männen] bara vår modersinstinkt, att **ta hand om** dem som man gör **med** små barn?* (??“gör om”) (user.tninet.se/~hxxz666j/bok3.html)
 “Are they [men] only exploiting our maternal instinct, to take care of them as one does with small children?”

- (63) *Så småningom vande vi oss som man gör med det mesta.* (??“gör vid”; vänja sig vid/*med något — “get used to/*with something”) (<http://www.algonet.se/~hakand/lkf/r970810.htm>)
“Gradually we got used, as one does with most things.”
- (64) *Man kan se på detta som man gör med att lära sig t.ex. läsa.* (??“gör på”) (http://www10.goteborg.se/lundbyskolor/bracke_ostergard/attention.htm)
“One can look upon this as one does with learning to read, for instance.”

Repeating the preposition becomes almost ungrammatical when the main verb, in addition to the prepositional object, takes an adverbial. In (65) this adverbial is *som* “hon” (“as ‘she’”) and in (66) *med ett milt överseende* (“with mild indulgence”). Verbal complementation of such a complexity calls for an altogether grammaticalized representation. Examples (65)–(66) are taken from Google:

- (65) *Sanna på Salt & Sill talar om sin krog som “hon”, precis som man gör med fartyg.* (*“gör om”) (http://www.vastsvenskmersmak.com/templates/article_906.aspx)
“Sanna of Salt & Sill [“Salt & Herring”] speaks of her restaurant as “she”, exactly as you do with ships.”
- (66) *Men ändå har de en modern touch som gör att man inte bara lyssnar på dom med ett milt överseende, som man gör med den “riktiga” progg-musiken.* (*“gör på”) (<http://www.subliminalsounds.se/DOK/dungen2%20svensk.html>)
“But still they have a modern touch that makes you listen to them not just with mild indulgence, as you do with “real” prog-music.”

The Swedish Academy Grammar (Teleman et al. 1999d:611) indicates the possibility of using the proverb instead of the repeated verb before a ‘*bundet adverbial*’ (“bound adverbial”) [= prepositional or indirect object], unlike what is — though wrongly — considered to be the case with the direct object, but nothing is said of the tendency in present-day Swedish to resort to the preposition *med*. The following examples are given in SAG. In both of them the ‘grammatical’ preposition *med* would be more in keeping with modern usage than the ‘lexical’ ones given (*vid* and *till* respectively):

- (67) *Jag vande mig vid Mattias fortare än jag vande mig/gjorde (det) vid Tomas.* (cf.: “än jag gjorde med Tomas” — “than I did with Tomas”) — “I got used quicker to Mattias than I got used to/did (with) Tomas.”
- (68) *Jag gav högre betyg till Anders än jag gav/gjorde till Per.* (cf.: “än jag gjorde med Per” — “than I did with Per”) — “I gave higher marks to Anders than I gave to/did (with) Per.”

It is slightly more surprising to observe the constant use of *med* even when the main clause preposition introduces an adverbial rather than an object, the reason being that the preposition is here more loosely linked to the verb and results from the nature of the adverbial modifier. The fact that, in spite of this, *med* is consistently chosen cannot but strengthen the impression that in current Swedish usage *göra med* has become a highly stereotyped combination, preferred more or less mechanically to the corresponding 'lexical' mode of expression. Examples (69)–(74) are taken from Google:

- (69) *Jag borde rensa **bland** mina skivor som man gör **med** kläder.* (??*"gör bland kläder"*) (fenomena.blogg.se/5_bsta_lterna_just_nu.html)
 "I should sort out my records, as you do with your clothes."
- (70) *De ville kika i den [digitalkameran] som man gör **med** en vanlig kamera.* (??*"gör i en vanlig kamera"*)
 (http://www.sarnat.educ.goteborg.se/IT_ARB/eksjo.htm)
 "They wanted to look into it [the digital camera] as you do with an ordinary camera."
- (71) *[...] man fastnar i icareklamen på samma sätt som man gör **med** t.ex. en dokusåpa.* (??*"gör i en dokusåpa"*) (blogg.passagen.se/marko004/20050831)
 "[...] you get caught in the ICA [well known Swedish supermarket chain] commercials as you do with, for instance, a documentary soap opera."
- (72) *Vad gäller biobränsle går det inte bara att blanda etanol i jetbränsle som man gör **med** bensinen.* (??*"gör i bensinen"*)
 (http://www.flygtorget.se/nyheter/debatt/detaljer.asp?ID=3938&KatID=1&sida=8)
 "As regards bio fuel, one cannot just put ethanol into jet fuel as you do with petrol."
- (73) *Man surfar in till kameran på samma sätt som man gör **med** en webbsida.* (??*"gör till en webbsida"*)
 (http://www.inwarehouse.se/searchResult.aspx?ManufacturerId=12875)
 "You surf the camera in the same way as you do with a web page."
- (74) *Genom detta arrangemang kan man tänka sig, att Gud lägger tyglar på församlingen ungefär som man gör **med** en häst.* (**"gör på en häst"*)
 (http://www.crossnet.se/uttrycket/text/proftal.htm)
 "By this arrangement one can imagine God curbing [literally: "putting bridles on"] the congregation in much the same way as you do with a horse."

Example (74) is particularly interesting since the expression *lägga tyglar på* (literally: "put bridles on") is first used figuratively, thus as an idiom (~ *på församlingen*),

then literally (~ *på en häst*), the linguistic consequence of which is a syntactic shift, the prepositional phrase having object function in the first case (*på församlingen* “on the congregation”) and adverbial function in the second (*på en häst* “on a horse”). This makes repetition of the preposition *på* (“on”) grammatically impossible: **“Gud lägger tyglar på församlingen ungefär som man gör på en häst”*.

Proverbalization, then, is in Swedish coupled with the insertion of the syntactically motivated and semantically unspecified preposition *med*. We have seen that this is not so in English, where the combination *do* + direct object holds the same function as the combination *göra* + *med* + direct object does in Swedish. The English non-prepositional construction has in fact reached the same high degree of fossilization as the Swedish prepositional one, which is shown by the fact that the direct construction is applied even when the main verb takes a preposition. Since the English language lacks a grammatically defined preposition corresponding to *med* in Swedish and to the French quartet *de-pour-avec-à*, there is no option but to use the non-prepositional construction, the repetitive one not always being applicable for grammatical reasons (the representative scope particularly). Once again, then, we observe how grammatically and lexically defined forms are virtually incompatible. In English the representative function rests solely on the proverb in its capacity as the only grammatical form available in that language. The efficiency of the proverb *do* in this capacity is clearly demonstrated by the fact that it is capable of assuming the representation of adverbial elements contained in the main clause. Thus, the non-prepositional *do*-construction too possesses great representative power. In the following sentence from Google, for instance, the proverb represents the prepositional verb ‘look at’ as well as the adverbial ‘critically’ (“just as you look critically at a book”, cf. (75a)). The possibility of combining prepositional repetition with proverbalization here seems to be out of the question (cf. (75b)):

- (75) a. It is important to look critically at a web site, just as you do a book.
(<http://www.andover.edu/library/selsites/web.htm>)
b. ?“It is important to look critically at a web site, just as you do at a book.”

Below I will quote a number of other examples that illustrate the same phenomenon. Here too the material is gathered from Google searches, this time on the two sequences ‘as you do a book’ and ‘as you do a dog/dogs’. First a few examples in which the prepositional phrase of the main clause is a prepositional object, following a simple verb (‘feel about’, etc.) (cf. (76)–(78)) or occurring after a multi-word verb construction (‘get involved in’, etc.) (cf. (79)–(81)):

- (76) Do you feel the same way about the mosquito as you do a dog?
(http://www.skeptictank.org/.../sporum/sporum/comments.cgi?session_id=bc4cf5c88dc23ee&op=threadlist&cid=525)

- (77) In the past we have had numerous cats, small furries etc but you can't interact with them as you do a dog.
(http://www.dogweb.co.uk/talkdogs/what-makes-us-love-our-dogs_8086.html?page=2&pp=15)
- (78) [...] although unfortunately the law says you do not have to stop for a cat as you do a dog.
(http://www.thisiswiltshire.co.uk/wiltshire/archive/2003/11/14/trow_news_letters3ZM.html)
- (79) Now granted [*sic*] unless the book was awful, the movie will rarely be as good as the book was because you don't get as closely involved in a movie as you do a book.
(http://www.sheroescentral.com/dcboard.php?az=show_topic&forum=8&topic_id=27720&mesg_id=27720&...)
- (80) [...] being if you have never known a cow or loved a chicken it is highly unlikely you will feel the same empathy for it as you do a dog in the same position.
(<http://www.pets.ca/forum/showpost.php?p=68939&postcount=14>)
- (81) You seem to have as poor an opinion of women as you do dogs, and I resent it.
(<http://donswaim.com/ambrose/gertrude.html>)

In other cases the prepositional modifier is rather to be considered as an adverbial. Here we have to do with verbs like 'read (from)' (cf. (82)) and verbal expressions like 'place value (on)' (cf. (83)), 'get return (from)' (cf. (84)), etc. The principle remains the same: Prepositional repetition seems inapplicable. Examples (82)–(86) are taken from Google:

- (82) The e-books are too easy to rip off and you don't get the same experience reading from a computer as you do a book.
(<http://www.cosforums.com/printthread.php?t=59217>)
- (83) Do you place the same value on a human life as you do a dog?
(<http://www.mlive.com/forums/huntfish/index.ssf?artid=3681>)
- (84) I also think that you don't get half the return from a child as you do a dog.
(<http://www.phorum.surrealm.net/viewtopic.php?p=60079&sid=bc18164453e9669997e8513ecc600797>)
- (85) I wouldn't argue that you get as much companionship from a snake as you do a dog, but I really object to calling them revolting!
(<http://www.modelersunderground.com/forums/index.php?s=7ce0ec1a4d1e93a10c9ef788b867860b&showtopic=5258>)

- (86) We have three cats too but you don't have the same bond with a cat as you do a dog, probably because they are more dependent on you.
(<http://www.mumsnet.com/Talk?topicid=9&thrtreadid=34941&stamp=040908192349>)

It must be stressed however that occasionally, when the representative burden is felt to be too strong, the preposition 'with' is introduced in order to loosen the transitivity of the combination *do* + object, thereby allowing for the proverb to assume the required representation. Insertion occurs, as in French, even when it brings about a change of preposition. In English, as opposed to French, this phenomenon is by no means generalized: It is in no way as frequent as in French, where the combination of the proverb *faire* and the preposition *avec* must be considered as highly grammaticalized. In English, on the other hand, prepositional change is on the whole exceptional. It seems the most natural — and the most called for — after a main verb taking an adverbial (cf. (87)), while being more remarkable in connexion with a prepositional (cf. (88)–(91)) or an indirect (cf. (92)–(93)) object. Examples (87)–(93) are taken from Google:

- (87) You don't look through a viewfinder as you do with a film strip camera.
(<http://goinside.com/97/11/qv700.html>)
- (88) Try looking at things from a new point of view just as you do with your writing.
(<http://www.cameraontheroad.com/?p=244>)
- (89) You have to work with your feelings first and make yourself feel as much for your disfavored child as you do with the favored one.
(http://www.webmd.com/content/article/1/1700_50681)
- (90) There is something about it that you just do not get tired of as fast as you do with other things.
(<http://blogs.msdn.com/heatherleigh/archive/2006/08/21/710896.aspx>)
- (91) The stylus is small but you get used to it as you do with the rear jog wheel, flip cover and buttons along the lower edge.
(<http://www.amazon.co.uk/Sony-PEG-TH55-Clie/dp/B0001KNRWM>)
- (92) If you talk to children with as much consideration as you do with your friends, you will be on the way to great relationships.
(ag.udel.edu/extension/fam/FM/issue/winningways.htm)
- (93) Why would you not offer them your expert advice on browsers, just as you do with friends off-line?
(http://www.mezzoblue.com/archives/2003/06/04/how_i_learn/)

French, as we have seen, presents a more complicated overall picture, with four prepositions competing with each other and with the original construction being retained as an archaic literary variant. The replacement of the direct construction by an indirect prepositional one probably stems from a need to weaken the transitivity of the proverb, thereby increasing its representative capacity. This is equally true of the Swedish preposition *med* and of the sporadic — though perhaps spreading — use of ‘with’ in English. In the monograph on French proverbialization that I published in 1985 I showed that there is a clear connexion between prepositional insertion and representative scope. However, in French, there are clear signs of a grammaticalization process in so far as the preposition *avec*, which, as we have seen, is the newcomer in the French prepositional quartet, has started to detach itself from it with regard to degree of grammaticalization. This new development can be seen from the tendency of *avec* to “replace” *à* when the main verb takes an indirect (dative) object (cf. (94)–(95)) and — more remarkably — from the observation that this ‘replacement’ also concerns the prepositional object. An illustration of this is (96), where *avec* represents the prepositional main clause verb *s’approcher de* and in the comparative clause “replaces” *de*, which, from a general point of view, stands out as the most grammatically characterized preposition in French and which here would seem to be the natural choice in view of the fact that this is the preposition taken by the verb *s’approcher*:

- (94) *On ne dit pas “non” à un perroquet comme on le fait avec un chien, on utilise le bon énoncé “ne gruge pas, ne mord pas, touche pas”.*
(Google: <http://www.csp-valleedesforts.com/fumepas.htm>)
“You don’t say “no” to a parrot as you do with a dog, you use the good phrase “don’t gnaw, don’t bite, don’t touch.”
- (95) *Et, comme autrefois, quand vous parler m’intimidait trop, je vous écris. Comme je faisais aussi avec mon mari, dans les premiers temps.* (Henry de Montherlant, *Les Lépreuses*, 1959: 1531, Paris: Gallimard “Pléiade”)
“And, as in the past, when talking to you intimidated me too much, I write to you. As I also did with my husband.”
- (96) *Il n’ose pas s’approcher d’eux comme il le fait avec les menuisiers. Il les admire mais il ne sera pas forgeron.* (Marie Cardinal, *Le Passé empiété*, 1983: 74, Paris: Grasset)
“He does not dare to approach them, as he does with the carpenters. He admires them, but he will not become a blacksmith.”

When, in dative function, the word governed by the preposition in the comparative clause is not nominal but pronominal the shift from *à* to *avec* is inevitable (cf. (97)), in the same way as the insertion of *de*, *pour* or *avec* — but not *à* — is compulsory when its head is pronominal (cf. (98)–(99)):

- (97) *J'ai envie de lui dire **comme** Thérèse le **fait avec** moi* : "Essuie-toi, va te laver les dents." (Max Gallo, *L'Oiseau des origines*, 1974: 25, Paris: Robert Laffont) (*"comme Thérèse le fait à moi")
 "I feel like saying to him, as Thérèse does with me: "Get dry, brush your teeth."
- (98) *Si je m'autorise à les tromper, quel que soit le prétexte, je les encourage à la pareille: à **me** traiter **comme** j'ai **fait d'eux***. (Vercors, *Les Yeux et la lumière*, 1948: 82, Paris: Minuit) (*"comme j'ai fait eux")
 "If I take the liberty of betraying them, under whatever pretext, I encourage them to do the same: to treat me as I have done with them."
- (99) *Ma mère, ma déesse, ma Sainte Vierge, ma splendeur. Je ne veux pas qu'Albert la touche **comme** il l'a **fait pour** moi*. (Lucien Bodard, *Anne Marie*, 1981: 399, Paris: Grasset) (*"comme il [l']a fait moi")
 "My mother, my goddess, my Virgin Mary, my splendour, I don't want Albert to touch her, as he did with me."

On Google one finds numerous examples of a prepositional shift of that sort. In this respect, as in (96), the combination *faire* + *avec* "replaces" not only prepositional verbs taking *de* (cf. (100)–(102)), but also those taking prepositions like *à* (cf. (103)–(104)) and *sur* (cf. (105)–(106)):

- (100) [...] *j'ai recommencé à fumer plus d'un paquet par jour, en **me délectant de** chaque cigarette **comme** on le **fait avec** du chocolat en ouvrant la tablette*. (<http://www.hi3.fr/dotclear/index.php?2006/06/18/98-tenue-d-eve>)
 "I have begun smoking a packet a day again, relishing every cigarette as one does with chocolate as one opens a bar."
- (101) *Toujours laisser faire car c'est normal qu'elle veuille redevenir bébé, elle aimerait bien qu'on **s'occupe d'elle comme** on le **fait avec** sa petite sœur*. (<http://www.infobebes.com/htm/bebe/sos-grande-soeur-jalouse,m-181865.aspx>)
 "Never bother because it's normal that she wants to become a child again, she would very much like to be treated as they do with her baby sister."
- (102) *J'aime pas qu'on **se moque d'une** idéologie **comme** on le **fait avec** la gauche*. (<http://www.voir.ca/livres/livres.aspx?iIDArticle=30982>)
 "I don't like people to make fun of an ideology, as they do with the Left."
- (103) *Si on s'intéressait un tant soit peu **au** cyclisme, **à** la boxe **comme** on le **fait avec** le football, on aurait eu plusieurs grands prix africains [...]*. (http://www.bendre.africa-web.org/article.php3?id_article=1166)
 "If they took the slightest interest in cycling, in boxing, as they do with football, they would have won several African prizes."

- (104) *S'adresser à la PA malade **comme on le fait avec** un adulte plus jeune.*
 (<http://www-sante.ujf-grenoble.fr/sante/corpus/disciplines/geria/vieillessement/59/leconimprim.pdf>)
 “Address the patient as you do with a younger adult.”
- (105) *[...] et une sorte de “super manuel” qui permet de **travailler sur** des documents **comme on le fait avec** les manuels, les articles de presse.*
 (<http://www.clionautes.org/spip.php?article639>)
 “a kind of “super manual” which permits you to work on documents as you do with textbooks, newspaper articles.”
- (106) *Lorsqu'on **jette un premier regard sur** ce livre, furtivement, presque machinalement, **comme on le fait avec** tous les livres, on est arrêté par la couverture.*
 (<http://www.ville-caen.fr/Ecoles/evenement/PrixLitteraire/prix2005/critPhilippeHuet.htm>)
 “When one takes a first look at this book, furtively, almost mechanically, as one does with all books, the cover catches one's attention.”

Examples of prepositional insertion in connexion with an indirect object (*à > avec*) are also very frequent on Google. If the main verb is provided with an adverbial (as *d'avance* in (107)) or a prepositional object (as *de choses banales* in (108)), the change from *à* to *avec* even seems compulsory, while this is not the case in (109)–(110), where the only main verb modifier, besides the indirect object, is the direct object:

- (107) *J'aurais dû **lui** donner les questions **d'avance** **comme on le fait avec** certains VIP.*
 (<http://www.gapali.be/gapali/20030913/25ans.html>)
 “I should have given him the questions in advance, as one does with certain VIPs.”
- (108) *J'essaierais de **leur** parler **de choses banales**, **comme on le fait avec** n'importe qui [...].*
 (zarabes.blogspot.com/archive/2005/04/28/vaste_coup_de_filet_antidroque_mardi_dernier_a_la_reunion.html)
 “I would try to talk to them about commonplace things, as you do with anyone.”
- (109) *Il doit savoir qu'on **lui** donne tout le temps de parler, **comme on le fait avec** tout le monde, et il doit apprendre, à son tour, à donner la même possibilité [...].*
 (laboiteaoutils.fpfa.ab.ca/publi_p2.html)
 “He should know that he will be given the time to speak, as one does with everybody, and he should learn, in his turn, to offer the same possibility.”

- (110) *Peut-être aussi, parce qu'elle était là tout près de moi, **me** racontant des pages de sa vie **comme** on le fait **avec** une amie.*

(http://www.passion-theatre.org/cgi-bin/pti_lol/spectacle/affiche/fiche.pl?id_planning=3093)

"Perhaps also because she was standing quite close to me, telling me pages from her life in the way you do with a female friend."

Nor is this so in the previously mentioned (cf. (48)–(50)) case with a 'possessive dative', where prepositional change is clearly facultative (cf. (111)–(112)):

- (111) *[...] puisqu'on n'a aucune difficulté à imaginer le bourreau saisissant le condamné et **lui** bouchant le nez, **comme** on le fait **avec** les bébés anorexiques.* (= "comme on /le/ fait aux bébés anorexiques")

(<http://www.humanite.presse.fr/journal/2005-07-28/2005-07-28-811188>)

"since you have no difficulty in imagining the hangman grabbing the condemned person and shutting his nose, as one does with anorectic babies."

- (112) *On **leur** tapote les joues, **comme** on le fait **avec** les enfants pour les encourager à continuer à se bien comporter [...].* (= "comme on /le/ fait aux enfants")

(<http://www.mafhoum.com/press7/220C33.htm>)

"One pats their cheek, as one does with children in order to encourage them to go on behaving well."

7. Conclusion

Proverbalization is a linguistic phenomenon of great generality. In fact, it seems as indispensable to language in the verbal sphere as is pronominalization in the nominal sphere. This is the reason why the proverb is found in most languages possessing the verb category. In the present study we have seen that the tendency towards proverbalization remains — only somewhat weakened — even when, in a comparative clause, the verb takes an object. We have also seen that, from a common base, each of the three languages examined has developed its own system, quite distinct from those of the other languages. However, they all have one fundamental characteristic in common: In none of them does the presence of an object form an obstacle to proverbalization. Only, they handle it in different ways: In English 'do' has become a highly grammaticalized form, capable of performing alone its representative task, although in very recent English there are indications that the preposition 'with' has begun to establish itself in the role of intermediary element. In Swedish the proverb *göra* needs the "support" of an altogether grammaticalized preposition — *med*. In French no less than four prepositions supply the verb with this "support". French is also the only language to demonstrate a

diachronic development in the use of the prepositions: *Avec* — which never occurs before 1940 — is at present on the point of taking over the role earlier assigned to *pour*, *à* and, above all, *de*. The reasons for this development are probably mainly psychological: *Avec* is felt to be semantically more neutral and accordingly more suitable than the other prepositions as a grammatical tool. Also, there is a feeling that *avec* produces a more clear-cut break in the transitivity of the verb, which becomes more urgent as its representation scope increases.

Notes

1. The direct French equivalent of ‘*pronominalt verb*’ would of course be ‘*verbe pronominal*’, a term which, however, is inapplicable because of its meaning “reflexive verb”.
2. However, it does not exist, it seems, in non-Indo-European languages like Finnish (Ingo 2004:233–234) and Hungarian (personal communication).

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