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Much Ado About Nothing: An Inter Cultural Approach to the World of Proverbs

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MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING: AN INTER CULTURAL APPROACH TO THE WORLD OF PROVERBS

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Proverbs are generally viewed as witty sayings conjured up by wise sages of ages past. Upon closer examination, however, one finds that they in fact belong to everyday speech and are often used unconsciously. When attention is focused on these curious aspects of our language questions arise. We find that proverbs actually provide us with many insights into not only English but foreign languages as well.

What kind of approach is appropriate in a foreign setting? When we try direct translation of the words, a proverb loses all meaning. Likewise, when we translate the meaning, inner structure and "the spice" of a proverb are often sacrificed.

The correct approach includes looking for similarities in the context in which the proverbs are used and the message they are trying to convey. This necessarily means considering culture, customs, and traditions, not simply language in and of itself. It is precisely this inter cultural analysis that I intend to make using proverbs from German and Russian languages as examples.