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**‘Comparisons are odious’: how comparable are equivalent proverbs across languages?**

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## Abstract

An in-depth contrastive study on two paremiological internationalisms, *A rolling stone gathers no moss* and *The cowl does not make the monk*, and their equivalents in French, Spanish and Italian, reveals their similarities and differences. Only by contrasting equivalent proverbs in diachronic and synchronic corpora can one retrace their formal and semantic development but also their frequency of use. Extralinguistic cultural changes and developments in societies have a direct impact on how modern speakers interpret traditional proverbs, whose original meaning may evolve as much as to even acquire the opposite sense that was common and generally accepted in ancient or medieval times.

**Key-words:** contrastive paremiology, equivalent proverbs, corpus linguistics, frequency of use, variation in meaning

## Introduction

European languages share many sayings and proverbs such as ‘Comparisons are odious’ in English, *Les comparaisons sont odieuses* in French, *Las comparaciones son odiosas* in Spanish and *I paragoni sono odiosi* in Italian. Proverbs such as these are formally and semantically equivalent but they may differ greatly as far as frequency and context of use are concerned. This paper enquires into the degree of comparability of two well-known proverbs, namely *A rolling stone gathers no moss* and *The cowl does not make the monk*, and their equivalents in French, Spanish and Italian.

As the two proverbs under study are ancient proverbs, it will be possible to draw a cross-linguistic comparison concerning contexts of use in the past and variations in meaning. Therefore, together with the contrastive investigation, there will be a comparative research, carried out diachronically, on aspects mainly related to pragmatics and semantics. The ultimate goal is to deepen our understanding of the role of paremiology in the history of European culture by retracing the path taken, over the centuries, by two of the tesserae belonging to the large and rich mosaic of the common wisdom of modern Europe.

Only by using very large synchronic corpora can one compare the vitality of proverbs across languages and the way in which they are used in our time and age. The *TenTen* corpora are a set of comparable corpora of several billion words compiled from the Internet between 2011 and 2017 which allow both a quantitative and a qualitative analysis of the current use of proverbs. In addition to the synchronic corpora, online newspaper archives and other databases will be used to search for further examples that will contribute to a more fine-grained approach to their contexts of use.

## Diachronic and multilingual analysis of *A rolling stone gathers no moss*

*A rolling stone gathers no moss* is found in nearly every language and is known to have existed for at least three thousand years. Traditionally this proverb has been used to emphasize the advantage of geographical stability as can be read in Nathan Bailey's 1721 *Etymological English Dictionary* (see quotation below). The meaning is clear: moss grows very slowly from spores which need time to anchor themselves, so a still, undisturbed stone makes a good foundation for moss to root and flourish. Similarly, a productive life can only come from settling down in one place.

A rolling stone gathers no moss. There are a set of people in the world of so unsettled and restless a temper, and such admirers of novelty, that they can never be long pleased with one way of living no more than to continue long in one habitation; but before they are well entered upon one business, dip into another; and before they are well settled in one habitation, remove to another; so that they are always busily beginning to live, but by reason of fickleness and impatience, never arrive at a way of living: such persons fall under the doom of this proverb, which is designed to fix the volatility of their tempers, by laying before them the ill consequences of such fickleness and inconstancy. *Saxum volutum non obducitur musco*, say the *Latins*; Λίθος κυλινδόμενος τὸ φύκος οὐ ποιεῖ, the *Greeks*; *Pierre qui roule n'amasse point de mousse*, the *French*, and *Pietra mossa non fa muschio*, the *Italians* (Bailey, Nathan. 1721. *An Universal Etymological English Dictionary*. London: E. Bell).

If we focus our attention on the last part of the definition, we find references to Latin and Greek accompanied by equivalents not only in English, but also in French and Italian.

*Saxum volutum non obducitur musco* probably corresponds to the earliest known Latin attestation and can be traced back to the Middle Ages, erroneously attributed to Seneca or to the *Sententiae* by Publilius Syrus. We can find it, in this form, in the *Sprichwörter* recorded by Hans Walther (27559a) and then in the *Adagia* by Erasmus of Rotterdam (*Saxum volutes non obducitur musco*, 2374, ed. Lelli), where the Greek Λίθος κυλινδόμενος τὸ φύκος οὐ ποιεῖ is translated as *Musco lapis volutus haud obducitur*. From Erasmus's comment, *Id totidem pene verbis etiam hodie dicunt* (This proverb is used nowadays with more or less the same words), it is clear that the saying was widespread in his time and circulated in an almost identical form in the cultured circles of Europe, among the members of the *res publica litterarum* who knew and spoke Latin.

Absent in the collections of Zenobius and Diogenianus (second century A. D.), this παροιμία was certainly alive and kicking in the Byzantine age. This is demonstrated by its presence in the collection of Apostolius (10, 72), who is the probable source of Erasmus<sup>1</sup>.

The *Adagia* made this proverb famous throughout Europe. This is confirmed by the presence

of *Pietra mossa non fa muschio* in the *Dizionario* by Augusto Arthaber (n° 1087). However, there are several elements that lead us to think that the spread of the proverb took place also locally, orally and popularly. A double channel of dissemination, therefore, leads to hypothesize an already medieval circulation. In fact, there are no clear indications of classical precedents in Erasmus's comment.

Erasmus does not give clear indications of the ancient authors: he does not mention Publilius Syrus or even Pliny the Elder but attributes a more generic sentence by Seneca (*Planta quae saepe transfertur non coalescit*, epist. 2, 3) to Quintilianus. As it has already been mentioned, Erasmus uses as the entry, in his *Adagia*, the Latin sentence found in the collection of medieval proverbs by Hans Walther: *Saxum volutum non obducitur musco* (Walther, *vide supra*).

According to Renzo Tosi (n° 784), this proverb would be a specific actualization of a more generic proverb that warned against constant changes such as Κουδαμοῦ καὶ πανταχοῦ (“From nowhere and from everywhere”) and the above mentioned *Non conualescit planta quae saepe transfertur* (Tosi, n° 782-783). In any case, morality is conservative and remained so from the fourteenth to the twentieth century, so much so that we can speak of a real *topos* of European culture against instability.

In the Spanish diachronic corpus CORDE, *Piedra movediza nunca moho la cobija* occurs seven times between 1300 and 1624<sup>2</sup>. However, the presence in the typical Spanish genre of the picaresque novel is significant and equally interesting is the negative semantic value attached to it. The *Refranero Latino* by Jesús Cantera Ortiz de Urbina also records *Piedra que rueda no mata moscas*, as the Spanish equivalent of the Latin *sententia* by Publilius Syrus (Cantera Ortiz de Urbina 136/1766). It is also mentioned *No cría musgo la piedra que sin parar rueda* (Socas: 34). As for French, *Pierre qui roule n'amasse pas mousse* appears for the first time in the sixteenth century and is kept alive in aphoristic and manipulated forms such as *Robespierre qui roule n'amasse pas mousse* (Margarito; Henri 2003: 27). However, much older variants are known such as *Pierre volage ne queult mousse* (13<sup>th</sup> c., Le Roux de Lincy: 354). In the Anglo-Saxon context we can go back to a version of *Piers Plowman* by William Langland (*The Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs*). Also interesting is the presence in John Heywood's collection and in Sir Humphrey Gilbert as *Syldon mossyth the stone fat oftyn ys tornnyd & wende* (Furnivall 1869: 39).

In Italian literature this proverb goes back to Petrarch. In the second epistle of the ninth book of the *Seniles* he speaks of his constant restlessness (II 9, 1, Rizzo: 72). Then he recalls the memory of his late steward in Vacluse, Raymond Monet, who used to tease him

good-naturedly for his constant travelling. When he saw him leave or return, he used to say: *Ut video, sepe rotaberis; nunquam vero, michi crede, ditaberis* (II 9, 6, Rizzo: 74). After all, a peculiarity of this proverb is precisely the positive value of moss interpreted as wealth. Later on, Petrarch wrote: *Proverbium vetus est nostrorum hominum: «Non facit muscum sepe volutus lapis»* (II 9, 9, Rizzo: 74).

Who was Petrarch referring to with *nostrorum hominum*? Most probably to the people of Tuscany of those times. And this tells us about its oral dissemination, among the ordinary people, which is confirmed in a couple of variant forms: *Pietra che va rotolando non coglie mosche* and *Sasso che non sta fermo, non vi si ferman mosche*, already attested in Giusti-Capponi (1853), where *mosche* ('flies') is but the phonological misunderstanding of *muschio* ('moss'). The version with flies instead of moss does not occur either in the most recent collection of Proverbs by Giuseppe Giusti<sup>3</sup> or in earlier Italian paremiographical collections such as that of Francesco Serdonati (16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries) where, however, we find other variants: *Acqua che corre non fa muschio; Albero sovente trasportato, non prende vita; Alber spesso trapiantato, mai di frutti è caricato; Pietra che non si ferma non mena mai muschio*.

Serdonati's variants confirm that, in our proverbial phrase, the word musk corresponds to fruit, of which it is a metaphor. The connotation is therefore positive, while that of "rolling" is negative. The armature of the phrase - to quote Milner - is clear and non-reversible, at least according to what emerges from the results of this diachronic study. In the synchronic part of our research, however, we will see that, as time goes by, the semantic taxonomy is not so linear: things will change, society will change, and the traditional meaning will be joined by an opposite one, which led the scholar to count our saying among the *locutions renversées* (Milner: 61).

There are also different semantic nuances among the dialectal variants, as in the Calabrian *'A petra chi 'o pigghja lippu s'a leva 'a hjumara*, where the reference to the river that carries away the stone that fails to take *lippu* (i.e., the moss, but also the green matter of stagnant water) makes the perspective more desperate than in, for example, *Sasso che ruzzola 'un fa carpaccia*, still used today in the Val d'Orcia, in Tuscany, as Silvia Rizzo has well demonstrated in one of her essays. In the case of the Calabrian variant, the term *lippu* is a metaphor for something that could even save us. The study of the dialectal variants, of which there are many, would therefore merit further study. Indeed, just by thumbing through the dictionary of Riccardo Schwamenthal and Michele Straniero, one can find a dozen dialectal variant forms of *Pietra mossa non fa muschio* (n° 4435) in regions that span the whole of the

peninsula: from Friuli to Piedmont via Veneto, Abruzzo and Molise, to Calabria, as we have just seen, and Sicily.

### **Diachronic and multilingual analysis of *The habit does not make the monk***

Travelling is something dangerous or is a concept found in the second proverb, *The robe does not make the monk*, also interesting for its semantic variation. In medieval times many travellers were monks and received hospitality everywhere because of the clothes they wore. However, not only the monks wore the robe, but also other people, such as thieves and people of ill repute who had entirely different purposes.

So, the idea of the inherent danger of travelling is indirectly associated with the second proverb we are dealing with: *The habit does not make the monk*. In medieval times, in fact, many travellers were monks and received hospitality because of the clothes they wore. But those who hid under the habit were not always monks.

*The habit does not make the monk* is a well-known proverb that recurs in various languages, such as the Spanish *No hace el hábito al monje*, the French *L'habit ne fait pas le moine* and the English *The gown does not make the friar*, to name but a few. Commonly it means two things: “the dress distinguishes a condition of people, it does not give them all the same value” and “appearances do not make the substance” (TB, s.v. *abito*). This proverb has a Latin origin as well. The word “habit” can be rendered by various words: *habitus*, *cucullus*, *vestimentum*... and the conclusion is always *non facit monachum*. There is actually a more extensive and very old version: *L'abito non fa monaco né frate, né l'arme il cavaliere, ma il buon cuore e la prodezza dell'opera*. It dates back to the 14<sup>th</sup> century and can be found in Zuccherò Bencivenni, *Esposizione del Paternostro* (Rigoli), a text belonging to the didactic-religious genre.

The first attestation, from the eleventh century, is from Saint Anselm: *Non tonsura facit monachum, non horrida vestis, sed virtus animi* (*De contemp. mund.*). As we know, there were variant forms in the classical world, such as *Barba non facit philosophum*, in which, however, the element that characterizes the medieval era, the monk in his habit, is obviously missing. The same applies to the Italian variant, also present in Serdonati's collection, such as *Freno indorato non migliora il cavallo né guaina d'oro coltello di piombo*, according to which external ornaments are not enough to make people better. The form *migliora* instead of *migliora* documents a popular circulation which also affects the variant *L'abito non fa il monaco*.

Also, in this case we start from the Middle Ages to get to the present day through the double channel of literature and of oral circulation in colloquial contexts. Let's see in particular some literary attestations, from Shakespeare (*Enrico VIII*, a. 3, sc. 1) to Balzac (*Trattato della vita elegante*), going through Mal Lara (IV 25, *haze*, RM) and focusing on the case of Italian: Alessandro Manzoni, *The Betrothed*, chapter 19 (Poggi Salani: 572-573).

The scene involves two characters, a churchman, the Provincial Father, and a secular man, the Count Zio, who speak about a third character, Fra Cristoforo, and his reputation. The Provincial Father refers to the "glory of the religious habit" and says that Friar Cristoforo has changed since he took his vows. "Vorrei crederlo: lo dico con il cuore: vorrei crederlo" replies Count Zio, "ma alle volte, come dice il proverbio... l'abito non fa il monaco". He would have rather said "the wolf loses its fur but not its vice" - observes Manzoni - but eventually he replaced it by a softer, although less pertinent, proverb, "che non veniva in taglio esattamente" ovvero "non era propriamente adatto al caso". Yet a parallelism between the two proverbs can be seen in the word *abito*, which here probably alludes to one of the meanings found in early Italian, namely: "intrinsic disposition to act or develop in a certain way" (TLIO, s.v. *abito*). In particular, the reference is to the ancient locution *abito dell'animo* ("habit of the soul"), which would be precisely Fra Cristoforo's inclination, that is, a very bad inclination, not to become a monk. As we read immediately afterwards, *Il lupo perde il pelo ma non il vizio*, and this is precisely the implicit meaning of the word "habit", which in some way anticipates the censured proverb, an indication of Count Zio's true feelings.

So, in conclusion, what we want to highlight here is the meaning of the word *abito*, which, in this context, seems to take on a different sense from that of "clothing". Just as the wolf does not lose his habit, so Fra Cristoforo remains the person he is and does not lose his habit, that is, his bad habits. The hypothesis we put forward is that, in this specific context, the Italian word *abito* does not only indicate the religious clothing, but also alludes to Fra Cristoforo's "habit" of living immoderately. This is a particular nuance that would connect the two proverbs on the model of *habitus* (Lat.) and *hábito* (Sp.), polysemic words that mean not only "clothing" but also "habit". Fra Cristoforo does not lose his habit, his true "habit". Besides, the Count Zio is a Spaniard and also Don Rodrigo's uncle. So, Manzoni would have played with three languages in one word.

### ***The habit makes the monk***

The polysemic value of the word *abito* is found in the proverb *The habit makes the monk*. In

fact, one can also say *The habit makes the monk*, which must not be taken as an anti-proverb<sup>4</sup>, but as another distinct traditional proverb. In the Italian language alone, consider the following: *Acquista reputazione, e póniti a sedere*; *Alla cera si conoscono gli huomini*; *Alla barba si conosce l'huomo*; *Al parlar si conosce l'huomo*; *Al suono si conosce la saldezza del vaso*; *Chi cattivo è, e buono è tenuto, può fare il male e non è creduto*; *Come disse il Bernia: 'Parla, ch'io ti vegga'*; *I panni rifanno le stanghe*; *Parla, ch'io ti conosca*; *Una testa con lingua vale il doppio*; *Una testa senza lingua non vale una pettinga*. These are ancient variants dating back at least to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, where the dress corresponds to terms such as reputation, looks and others that have more or less to do with the appearance not only external, but also internal, which, in general, relates precisely to the reputation enjoyed by each person. In short, according to this tradition, appearance does not deceive, but counts, since both the way one dresses and the way one speaks can tell us something about a person's character, his or her mentality and interiority; not to mention the advantages that can be derived from an appreciated appearance: *Bien vestido, bien recibido*, goes the *refrán* and means that he who is well dressed is well received. So, it seems reductive to consider *The habit makes the monk* as a simple ironic variant, dependent on *The habit doesn't make the monk*. It is but fair and reasonable to acknowledge *The habit makes the monk* as an autonomous proverb, endowed with its own tradition that sees the word *dress* take on a broader meaning, no longer restricted to the monk's dress taken literally. Society changes and with it the paremiological tradition of which it is considered an expression. The reasons and effects of these changes will be discussed in more detail in the following pages.

### **Synchronic and multilingual analysis of *A rolling stone gathers no moss***

If we have a look at dictionary definitions, we can observe that the meaning of *A rolling stone gathers no moss* has evolved from its origins despite the fact that the *Collins online dictionary* still defines it from a negative perspective. The *Cambridge online dictionary*, however, marks it as old-fashioned and provides both the negative and the positive connotations attached to it, which is quite revealing of the way in which the proverb is used today.

Said to mean that, if a person keeps moving from one place to another, they will not get many friends or possessions. (collins.dictionary.com)

Old-fashioned saying. Said to mean that a person who is always travelling and changing jobs has the advantage of having no responsibilities, but also has disadvantages such as having no

permanent place to live. (dictionary.cambridge.org)

In this sense, George Lundberg (see quotation below) points out the generation gap as regards the interpretation of this proverb, and writes “my interpretation of the proverb in this traditional manner brought out expressions of surprise and disagreement among the members of a class of advanced undergraduates”. He concludes by saying that his students understand the meaning as “go where the opportunities seem best at a given time; don’t get tied down to any single place or occupation, in short don’t let moss grow on you”, which summarizes rather well the famous American sense of mobility and independence.

A case of the latter kind recently came to my attention accidentally when I had occasion before a class to discuss the general character of proverbs as early forms of social “laws” governing social, political, and economic events. I quoted in this connection as an example, “A rolling stone gathers no moss”, which I had always thought represented the advice of sages to young people against excessive geographic mobility. During the long centuries of relative geographic stability of agricultural populations, the proverb with its original meaning perhaps had considerable validity. In any event, my interpretation of the proverb in this traditional manner brought out expressions of surprise and disagreement among the members of a class of advanced undergraduates. They reported that they had always thought the proverb had exactly the opposite meaning, namely, that anyone who wants to “amount to anything”, and especially to accumulate worldly goods, had better to be on the move—go wherever the opportunities seem best at a given time; don’t get tied down to any single place or occupation; in short, “don’t let moss grow on you.” (Lundberg 1958: 215)

Later on, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett argues that not only are there intercultural differences in the understanding and variation from individual to individual but also that the proverb has come to mean that “It is good to keep moving because then one does not become weighed down with a family and material possessions” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1973: 113).

### **Contemporary contextual use of *A rolling stone gathers no moss***

The negative associations that *gathering moss* has acquired can clearly be seen in the following two examples taken from the press. In (1) the constituent *moss* is associated with problems and in (2) the example encourages readers to keep their proverbial stone clean by “staying active and always on the move”, again a clear and direct reference to the positiveness of mobility and independence, two of the principles of modern American culture.

- 1.(1) Just as **a rolling stone gathers no moss**, an active body gathers fewer problems as the years go by. (*Castlegar News*, 13/08/2013)

(2) **A rolling stone gathers no moss.** Keep your proverbial stone clean by staying busy and constantly on the move. (*The Chronicle Herald*, 19/09/2013)

It should be added that the derivative words *mossy* and *mossback*, which literally mean “covered in moss”, have developed a common figurative sense, especially in American English, denoting an extremely conservative or reactionary attitude or describing someone attached to antiquated ideas, which obviously adds to the current negative interpretation of gathering moss.

When looking at frequency, we realize that the proverb is hardly used today, even though the different variant forms, to be found mainly in Italian and in Spanish, have also been included in the results of this research.

<b>English</b> <b>enTenTen15</b>	<b>French</b> <b>enTenTen17</b>	<b>Spanish</b> <b>esTenTen18</b>	<b>Italian</b> <b>itTenTen16</b>
65 / - 0.01	90 / 0.01	21 / - 0.01	4 / - 0.01

Table 1. Frequency of *A rolling stone gathers no moss*

It is interesting that that same semantic difference linked to a generation gap is also found in Canadian French as can be observed in (3) which is a conversation between a father and his son. The father has to explain to his son the original or traditional meaning of the expression as the youth interprets it in the aforementioned “American sense”.

(3) [Son] Un jour que je discutais avec mon père des aléas de ma vie, il m’a dit comme ça : attention, **Pierre qui roule n’amasse pas mousse**. Mais je réplique aussitôt : je suis loin d’amasser de la mousse, je ne m’enriche pas, j’ai étudié à Jonquière, j’ai travaillé au journal *Le Droit* à Ottawa, je suis déménagé avec ma famille à Montréal où j’ai travaillé à RDS et TVA, on ne peut pas dire que je me suis endormi dans la routine, je suis un «rolling stone» dans l’âme...

[Father] Oh un instant mon gars, m’a repris le paternel, **Pierre qui roule n’amasse pas mousse**, ça veut dire tout le contraire tu sauras. Ça signifie qu’un homme qui change souvent de profession n’accumule pas de confort, contrairement à la pierre, nue de sa nature, qui gagne en se garnissant de mousse. (*L’Express Week-end Drummondville*, 27/05/2018)

No examples have been found in the online archives of the Spanish newspapers *El País* and *ABC*. (4) is the only example found in another Spanish newspaper, *La Vanguardia*, which again is quite revealing of the semantic evolution of the proverb. Both the modern and the traditional interpretation are explained and the journalist concludes by adding that “the second interpretation belongs to the past whereas the first represents our current vision of the world”, or otherwise stated by Salvador Dalí “one has to be in continuous movement”.

(4) Dicen que “**pedra que rueda no cría moho**” o “**pedra movediza, nunca moho la cobija**”. Algunas interpretaciones destacan que lo óptimo para no quedar atrapados en un tiempo pasado es no dejar de moverse, de hacer cosas. Salvador Dalí llegó incluso a precisar que para ocupar un sitio, entiéndase un lugar de privilegio, uno debe estar en continuo movimiento. Pero la motivación original del refrán fue considerar bueno permanecer en un solo lugar, estable, arraigado y al resguardo de la intemperie. La segunda interpretación pertenece al pasado, mientras que la primera representa nuestra actual visión del mundo. (*La Vanguardia*, 27/03/2017)

A similar lack of examples concerns Italian: extremely few occurrences in the *TenTen* corpus and no occurrences at all in the online archives of the newspaper *La Repubblica*. Example (5) comes from an Italian travel website and shows the modern sense of the proverb (an English proverb according to them) that is interpreted as “people who are always on the move stay young”.

(5) “**Su una pietra che rotola non cresce il muschio**”... celebre proverbio inglese che sta a significare: “la gente sempre in movimento si mantiene giovane”. E’ proprio quello che cerchiamo di fare nel CX CLUB: vietato dormire sugli allori, bearsi troppo degli obiettivi raggiunti. (*cxclub.it* 2016)

### Contemporary contextual use of *The cowl does not make the monk*

As for the second proverb, *The cowl does not make the monk*, as can be seen in the corpus results, and always from a synchronic perspective, it is very infrequent in English and in Spanish but rather more common in French and Italian.

English enTenTen15	French enTenTen17	Spanish esTenTen18	Italian itTenTen16
17 / - 0.01	736 / 0.11	638 / 0.03	592 / 0.10

Table 2, Frequency of *The cowl does not make the monk*.

The proverb, that means that you cannot know what something or someone is like by looking only at their appearance, faces stiff competition from another proverb, *You can’t judge a book by its cover*, that bears the exact meaning and can be used in the same contexts. Corpus results speak for themselves: the cowl and the monk have fallen out of fashion and have been supplanted by the book and its cover.

corpus	proverb	hits	p.m.w.
enTenTen15	The cowl does not make the monk	22	- 0.01
enTenTen15	You can’t judge a book by its cover	1,538	0.08

Table 3, Comparison of frequency between *The cowl does not make the monk* and *You can't judge a book by its cover*

It has been extremely difficult to find examples of the contemporary use of this proverb in English compared to the other three languages. In the very few examples we have found, the proverb is used metalinguistically either preceded by the introductory phrase “as the saying goes”, as in (6), or interpreted as a translation of an original French proverb equivalent of “Don't judge a book by its cover”, as in (7).

(6) First, as the saying goes, **the habit does not actually make the monk**. While we can't help coming to quick conclusions on the basis of first impressions, we should remember to hold them lightly, as they may well be wrong. And it seems better to concentrate on developing our self than relying on our possessions to do the work for us. (*Financial Times*, 04/09/2015)

(7) There's a French saying that goes like this: *L'habit ne fait pas le moine*. (Literal translation: **Clothes do not make the monk**.) It's the equivalent of “Don't judge a book by its cover.” (*States News Services*, 23/05/2020)

The next two examples in French, (8) and (9), show how the traditional sense of the proverb is contradicted: reality shows that the traditional meaning of the proverb is not true, everyday experience contradicts the message found in the proverb. Yes, appearance matters and people are being judged not for what they are but for the way they look.

(8) Affirmant, plus assurée : « **L'habit ne fait pas le moine** mais il dit quelque chose de nous et de notre comportement par rapport à l'art qu'on pratique. » (*Les Echos*, 27/07/2018)

(9) **L'habit ne fait pas le moine** mais il y contribue. JP Morgan relâche la bride à son code vestimentaire - ni tongs ni jeans déchirés quand même - pour rester en phase avec les clients, voire les recrues, qui cultivent une mode plus décontractée, comme à la Silicon Valley. (*Les Echos*, 06/06/2016)

The same observation as with French can be made concerning Spanish: the underlined words in (10) translate as “Even though they say that the habit does not make the monk, the new relation between a man and his attire certainly does”. In (11) we can read “The well-known proverb *The habit does not make the monk* proves ineffective in this programme”.

(10) Y es que para seleccionar un traje hay que ser congruente. Aunque se diga que **el hábito no hace al monje**, en la nueva relación entre un hombre y su atuendo, sí. (*Reforma*, 04/03/2017)

(11) El refrán por todos conocido, “**el hábito no hace al monje**”, no se cumple en este programa. Sin un vestuario acorde a la interpretación, se perdería en gran medida la esencia... (*Teletica.com*, 11/08/2020)

Finally, the Italian proverb follows suit and we can read that “it is not true that the habit does

not make the monk” in (12) and that “the habit does not make the monk, but speaks volumes about the person wearing it” in (13).

(12) E sono loro [...] a indicare a legioni di giovani che non era vero che “l’abito non fa il monaco” e che invece i vestiti erano in grado di parlare, in maniera immediata, vistosa, e di raccontare la personalità, le idee, i sentimenti di chi li indossava. (*La Repubblica*, 14/06/2019)

(13) Inutile ricordarlo, l’abbigliamento è il modo di presentarsi, e io non mi stanco di ripetere che il vestito non fa il monaco, ma racconta tutto di chi lo indossa». (*La Repubblica*, 29/04/2013)

## Conclusions

We can conclude by saying that the first proverb, *A rolling stone gathers no moss*, although very frequent from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries with a negative meaning, is very infrequent nowadays in all four languages and has experienced a dramatic semantic change from a negative to a positive meaning.

As far as *The cowl does not make the monk*, it has been very frequent from the Middle Ages until today, particularly in French starting from 1700. The meaning, over the centuries, is clear and it’s against appearances. However, it depends on the contexts of use. This second proverb is very infrequent nowadays in English and in Spanish and a little more common in French and in Italian. Its meaning tends to be contradicted in context.

## Endnotes

1. After the fall of Constantinople (1453), Apostolius travelled to Italy and was under the protection of the cardinal Bessarione. He was the author of a collection of Byzantine paroemiae that came to be known by Erasmus who visited Venice several times in those years and stayed with the printer Aldus Manutius.
2. Among these, the presence of the *refrán* in *La Celestina* is particularly noteworthy. Here we cite the Lobera et al. edition where it is stated that, in modern Spanish, the proverb would have taken on an opposite meaning (Lobera et al.: 292; 713; see also Campos & Barella: n° 2833; Rizzo: 92). See also Lampugnani; Messina Fajardo.
3. Follow the comment «Chi girovaga non fa roba» that means... In the latest edition, which repropose «il Giusti vero» (Benucci 2011: 7), without the mediation of Gino Capponi, we do not find the above-mentioned variants with *mosche*, but only proverbs with *muschio*, namely: *Pietra mossa non fa muschio* (n° 2348) and *Sasso che rotola non fa muschio* (n° 2535).
4. According to Wolfgang Mieder (see references), the concept of antiproverb is related to humour, irony or satire and is often associated with journalists that “enjoy “playing” with proverbs, creating revealing antiproverbs that will get the attention of the readers, who then want to read the entire article.” (Mieder 2004: 250).

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