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SELECTED FEMALE KINSHIP TERMS IN POLISH, ENGLISH, AND CHINESE: A CONTRASTIVE PERSPECTIVE

Agnieszka Uberman

Institute of Modern Languages, University of Rzeszów, Poland

Zuzanna Uberman

*Student of Faculty of Oriental Studies, the Chinese Language Department,
University of Warsaw, Poland*

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Abstract: The study is aimed at depicting how the family relationships of selected female members, i.e. mothers, grandmothers, daughters, sisters, are reflected in languages under investigation. A contrastive semantic analysis of the lexicon, including idiomatic expressions and proverbs, will expose similarities and differences between Polish, English, and Chinese. The research study attempts to point to and highlight the culturally conditioned motivations. In the analysis, the standard variety of Chinese (Potonghua – Mandarin Chinese and Romanisation to pinyin) is considered.

Key words: kinship terms, female, lexicon, idioms, proverbs, contrastive semantics.

1. Introduction and methodology

Language and culture are inextricably tied together; one conditions the other. As noted by Skandera:

"it is generally accepted that a language, especially its lexicon, influences its speakers' cultural patterns of thought and perception in various ways, for example through a culture-specific segmentation of the extralinguistic reality, the frequency of occurrence of particular lexical items, or the existence of keywords or key word combinations revealing core cultural values" (2007: v)

The present article discusses the intricacies of relations between culture and language embodied in linguistic means of expression. The focus of analysis is the lexicon of family relations, in particular that designating females. The position of mothers, daughters, and sisters is analysed from the semantic perspective reflected in the lexical stock in English, Polish, and Chinese. However, in order to be able to see the rationale behind the meanings expressed in the languages under consideration, it seems essential to first briefly outline the family as a social group, to embed it in the linguo-social context, the various relations within this group, and the gender roles traditionally ascribed to its members. It has to be stressed that the present paper is not aimed at showing a detailed social structure, nor is it focused on socio-demographic analysis. The cursory outline of the family relations and gender roles serves the purpose of sketching out the background and possible motivation for numerous phrases and expressions rooted in the contrasted languages (see Section 2. *Defining family*). The concepts of family and diverse gender roles are presented on the basis of the available literature on the topic (Asano-Cavanagh 2017; Chan & Shaw 2016; Chia et al. 1997; Choi & Peng 2016; Satyen et al. 2020; Simlat-Žuk 2015; Smart 2006; Tang & Tang 2001; VanLear 2009; Woodhams et al. 2015; Young & Willmott 1957, 1973).

Within a family structure, irrespective of the location of the family, members are addressed by particular names referring to the roles and relations within the social unit under consideration. The concept is addressed in Section 3 entitled *Kinship terms*. An important observation has been made by experts researching kinship terms, who claim that the terms show/reflect basic human relations (Faubion 2006; Radcliff-Brown 1952; Turner 1987; Underhill 2011; Wallace & Atkins 1960). Kinship terms seem to be not only "genealogically constrained", but they also refer to individuals and objects/phenomena outside the kinship network (Hirschfeld 1986), for instance 'mother tongue', 'sister state', etc., the latter examples created as metaphorical extensions of basic kinship terms. It is also essential to note that certain kinship terms, including 'mother', are considered to be semantic primitives and cultural keywords (Goddard 2005; Wierzbicka 1992, 1997).

Societies as well as particular language and culture communities have their own, frequently unique, ways of understanding and interpreting the reality they live in. Some of them are universal to humankind, others are culture-specific, and this feature is often mirrored in the language used to describe the world they live in and the phenomena that surround them and affect their daily living (Sharifian 2011, 2017).

The discussion that is the central part of the considerations in the present article (Section 4 *Female kinship terms in English, Polish, and Chinese*) aims to show how female family members are depicted in English, Polish, and Chinese, and whether the images that emerge from the analysed lexical units: phrases, idioms, and proverbs found in the compared languages are equivalent, or if female family members are differently perceived by the language and culture communities under consideration. In each section devoted to a single kinship term, i.e. 'mother', 'grandmother', 'daughter', and 'sister', the expressions and phrases with the said lexemes are presented and compared, while the following subsections are aimed at showing proverbs in which the abovementioned items are a constitutive element. Semantic similarities and differences are brought up and briefly discussed. The analysis of the material gathered from numerous lexicographic (printed as well as online) sources has shown that 'mother' is by far the most productive kinship term of the group under analysis. This clearly supports its position as a cultural keyword and a semantic primitive.

2. Defining family

People have a natural, innate tendency to gather in groups. Solitary living is a relatively uncommon incidence. It is the family that appears to be the basic social group in human societies all over the globe. As noted by VanLear "family is the primal relational experience for most people" (2009: 599).

Family is defined by Oxford English dictionary as

"a group of people living as a household, traditionally consisting of parents and their children, and also (chiefly in early use) any servants, boarders, etc.; any household consisting of people who have long-term commitments to each other and are (usually) raising children; such a group as a fundamental social unit or institution" (OED, s.a.)

A different sense of the same term is presented as follows: "a group of people consisting of one set of parents and their children, whether living together or not. In wider sense: any group of people connected by blood, marriage, adoption, etc." (Family, s.a.).

Smart (2006: 189-195) succinctly characterises family as a social phenomenon and a basic form of daily existence. This social construct can be analysed from a number of perspectives. Families have been considered as either homogenous groups of individuals living together, with a clear division of duties, precisely outlined social roles and frequently with a single head of household. They have also been regarded as tangible or abstract networks that are tied by interpersonal relations and commitments rather than a formal structure. It has to be noted, however, that "the family is a naturalized concept, by which it is meant that it is taken-for-granted as natural – notwithstanding how much families differ and change" (ibid., 189). This point of view is also supported by VanLear who states, on the basis of statistics in the USA, that with the gradually increasing divorce rate

"single-parent and blended families have become as commonplace as the traditional nuclear family with a father, mother, and biological children. Likewise, the rise of long-term cohabitation has created a social unit, sometimes called a common-law marriage¹, that has also challenged traditional conceptions of family. Laws protecting children have also led to increasing numbers of children being removed from their biological parents and adopted or placed in foster care. Likewise, there are cross-cultural variations in what constitutes a family and what a family looks like. Polygamy is accepted in some cultures or subcultures but not in others. Different cultures have different traditions for where to draw the boundaries of the extended family. All of these variations have political and legal implications" (2009: 599)

In its earliest stage of sociological analysis (Family, socialization..., 1955), the family in the United Kingdom and the United States was perceived not as a natural collectivity but a social system instead. As summarised by Smart, the family was portrayed as "the

handmaiden of larger social forces, and its core function was to produce socially appropriate (well socialized) citizens of the next generation to take their place in the economy and wider society" (2006: 190). Women, men, and children were seen as having different family roles and functions that suited the needs of the society. Hence, men were the breadwinners and the heads of the household, while the unpaid duties of women consisted in caring for their children and their homes. Attention was given to the ideal of the nuclear family.

Young and Willmott (1957) concentrated on changing family life and focused more on the extended family profile, sustaining the intergenerational links as well as placing families within the communities of the neighbourhood. The post-war period of the 1950s brought about changes in the structure and perceptions of the family, with the working-class family pictured as "a site of warmth and mutual support between husband and wife" attempting to "retrieve it from the widespread belief [...] that it was a wretched place, dominated by male violence, drunkenness, grime, and relentless childbirth" (Smart 2006: 191). Young and Willmott (1957) claimed there were fewer broken homes as compared to earlier decades.

The 1970s saw another change of the family model and a new type of family emerged. As noted by Smart after Young and Willmott (1973), "this family was described as home-centered or "privatized," as nuclear rather than part of an extended kinship network, and, most significantly, as having much less segregated roles for husbands and wives" (2006: 190). All these viewpoints, however, were male-dominated. With the rise of the feminist approach in the UK and the USA in the 1970s, the vision of a family as a "companionate" and democratic institution was challenged. Instead of the idea of the symmetrical family, the studies showed that women started to move to the labour market, which did not reduce their workload in household chores. While wives accepted additional duties, husbands did not take over women's housework or childcare.

With time, the abovementioned roles have evolved as well as diversified. Women are no longer confined to their households as housewives. The gender roles have also been significantly transformed in the modern society. Irrespective of the attitude taken to define what a family is and what the concept stands for, certain gender roles are identifiable, many of which are frequently of a culturally-induced nature.

Simlat-Žuk (2015) claims that the contemporary society and a new type of social relations have encouraged a novel way of defining a family. What has been changing is the character of family ties, which results in the emergence of family forms alternative to the nuclear family model (two parents and one or two children) or an extended family. Such forms include, among others: singles (male or female), single parents, various forms of cohabitation², DINKS relationships (i.e. *Double Income No Kids*), as well as patchwork families³, to mention the most typical types. The relationships created between family members in such alternative family formats are not weaker or less intensive than in the case of the traditional models. As observed and pointed out by Bielińska-Gardziel (2009), in Poland the advocates of liberalism and feminism have noticed a crisis of the traditional family and the loosening of family ties (cf. Osovska & Tomniuk 2019; Panasenko 2013). In their view, however, these processes are not worrying; instead, they are a natural stage of development of the contemporary society. Gender issues also affect language forms, as exemplified by urbanonymy (see, for example, Gałkowski 2020).

The system adopted in China is that of patriarchy. Choi and Peng stress the fact that:

"Men's dominance over women in Chinese society was traditionally based on a rigid system of sex segregation that reserved the public realm for men, secluding and confining women to the domestic sphere [...]. The Chinese character for "wife" graphically depicts her as a domestic figure (neiren): it represents a female figure with a broom (婦). Although the Communist revolution encouraged women's participation in production, thus dramatically reducing the "outside/inside" segregation of the sexes, to date none of the reforms have fundamentally altered the fact that the domestic sphere is women's responsibility" (2016: 5)

Male dominance in families is also discussed by Evans (2008). To exemplify this point further, Choi and Peng (2016: 3) refer to Yao, a forty five-year-old security guard from Hunan, who was a helpful and caring husband. He got involved in many household chores, and his wife had a decisive voice in decisions made for their family. His case is quoted as an exception to the rule, i.e. the traditional 'male dominance' and 'female subordination'.

Considering the traditional family structure, a household was commonly shared by three generations, which also had to perform the traditional roles of providing care for the elderly and the young. Choi and Peng claim that "the cultural ideal of the large, extended Chinese family, consisting of at least three generations – the patriarch and his wife, his married sons and their wives, and their grandchildren" is no longer valid (ibid.). The exodus of rural workers into cities in order to take up jobs to support their families has resulted in villages being inhabited by young children and elderly grandparents. This migration of villagers to urban areas breaks the foundation of traditional peasant patriarchy:

*"the advantage and control men have over women, derived from the exclusion of women as full members of their natal families before marriage and their confinement to the domestic realm after marriage. Parents traditionally favored sons over daughters, because sons were the successors to the family name, lineage, and bloodline and were expected to support their parents in old age. Parents invested more in sons than daughters in the terms of education, housing, and land, because sons were a form of old-age security, while daughters were viewed as only temporary members of the household on whom the parents could not count. When a daughter married, she had to move to live with or near her husband's family and transfer her allegiance to them, a practice variously termed "patrilocal residence," "patrilocality," or "virilocal marriage." The saying that describes a married daughter as "water splashing out," the labeling of daughters as "a loss" (*peibenhua*), and the custom of having the mother's face look toward the outward door when giving birth to daughters all symbolized the outsider status of a Chinese daughter in her natal family. It is also no coincidence that the Chinese character for "marry" (*jia* 嫁) represents a female figure outside the family" (ibid., 4)*

However, the one-child policy has brought about some transformation to daughters' second-class status in families. It is now legitimate for women (only-child daughters) to live close to or with their parents after marriage and care for their elders (Unger 1993), however patrilocality is still more of the norm. Also, the migrations of marriages

to urban areas contribute to the process of sharing parental and household duties. Because peasants moving to cities earn low wages, both spouses are forced to earn a living, and since they cannot afford paid child care, their household chores and parental duties must be shared (Choi & Peng 2016). This appears to be a compromise to the traditionally ascribed gender roles. Diversity of gender roles and socio-cultural attitudes in Chinese society are discussed in various research studies (e.g., Chan & Shaw 2016; Chia et al. 1997; Satyen et al. 2020; Tang & Tang 2001; Woodhams et al. 2015).

Asian cultures as well as related forms of behaviour differ from those predominant in the Western World countries. Asano-Cavanagh notes with reference to the Japanese society, that:

"Japanese parents tend to raise their children according to traditional gender roles. [...] Researchers have drawn attention to the strong relationship between the way in which men and women are discursively portrayed in media and speakers' ideals of how men and women are supposed to behave in society [...]. The images and symbols used in the media industry act as socialising agents for influencing people's assumptions in terms of appropriate appearance and attitude for males and females. Unlike its English counterpart cute, kawaii is repeatedly utilised by the media to reinforce femininity in young girls. Thus, the expressions that appear in the public media reflect and consequently reinforce cultural assumptions shared by the members of that society. Advertising conveys messages about gender roles, and these messages need to be viewed in light of cultural expectations, and the values of the target audience" (2017: 213)

Having briefly addressed the family as a form of social organisation and interaction, we will now turn our attention to how its various members are portrayed in language and how their roles are fixed in language use. As it has been noted above, there is certain diversity across cultures which undoubtedly can have its reflection in language use. We will attempt to show if the differences are indeed observable at the level of language and linguistic expression.

3. Kinship terms

Radcliff-Brown identifies kinship as "a system of dyadic relations between person and person in a community, the behavior of any two persons in any of these relations is

regulated in some way and to a greater or lesser extent by social usage" (1952: 289). Faubion states that kinship is "socially universal, this is probably the most basic of institutional modalities of human organization" (2006: 313).

As noted by Wallace and Atkins, the meaning of kinship terms

"has traditionally been rendered [...] by a simple and direct procedure: each term is matched with a primitive English term (e.g., "mother"), with a relative product of two or more primitive English terms (e.g., "mother's brother"), or with a group of such primitive and/or relative product terms. Each primitive English term and each English relative product denotes an English "kin-type" (1960: 58)

In their analysis, the experts applied the method of componential analysis, assuming that "each kinship term can be decomposed into a set of primitive kin-types and their combinations. The primitive kin-types are represented as features" (Baik & Chae 2010: 349). These early attempts at providing the conceptual or the psychological meanings of the lexicon in question were later verified, examined, and developed by other researchers. Romney and D'Andrade (1964) introduced a set of 10 features, which however, did not account for the relations between younger and older family members. Hirschfeld discussed kinship terms with reference to genealogy and cognition. He noted that kinship terms cannot be considered only with reference to genealogical constraints; they are not "limited to some culturally specific subset of genealogically related individuals" (1986: 217). Instead, "the terms referring to persons within a kinship network thus defined also are used to refer to individuals (and frequently things) outside it" (ibid.).

Researchers have attempted to account for meanings entrenched in lexical units of this type as well as relations between those meanings from a variety of angles. Nevertheless, irrespective of the approach adopted for the meaning and matrix analysis, kinship terms share some universal features, which are mirrored in linguistic expressions available in human languages. We will try to address them in the analysis of female kinship terms.

While discussing cultural linguistics, Sharifian states that "many features of human languages are entrenched or embedded in cultural conceptualisations" (2017: 2) and they motivate the use of human languages. Individual examples of the cultural conceptualisations take the form of cultural schemas, cultural categories, and cultural metaphors.

It is interesting to note after Sharifian that

"as a central aspect of cultural cognition, language serves [...] as a "collective memory bank" of the cultural cognition of a speech community. Many aspects of a speech community's language are shaped by elements of cultural cognition that have prevailed at different stages in the history of that community and that have left traces in subsequent linguistic practice. In this sense, language can be viewed as a primary mechanism for "storing" and communicating cultural cognition, acting both as a memory bank and a fluid vehicle for the (re-)transmission of cultural cognition" (2017: 5)

Cultural cognition, in its turn, offers a foundation for understanding cultural conceptualisations and the way they are realised in language. Moreover, cultural conceptualisations can be exemplified or reflected in other aspects of human lives, including art, literature, cultural events, folk songs, rituals, emotions as well as non-verbal behaviour.

Cultural categories and subcategories can be described as "patterns of distributed knowledge across the cultural group" (Sharifian 2011: 5) or referred to as "those culturally constructed conceptual categories [...] that are primarily reflected in the lexicon of human languages" (Sharifian 2017: 7). It has to be noted that kinship terms are regarded as one of the abovementioned categories and subcategories. Other instances include colours, emotions, attributes, foodstuffs, events, etc.

Cultural schemas and subschemas reflect beliefs, rules, norms, and expectations of behaviour in addition to "values relating to various aspects and components of experience"; while cultural metaphors are "cross-domain conceptualisations grounded in cultural traditions such as folk medicine, worldview⁴, or a spiritual belief system" (ibid.).

It has to be stressed, after Sharifian, that

"Cultural conceptualisations are developed through interactions between the members of a cultural group and enable them to think as if in one mind, somehow more or less in a similar fashion. These conceptualisations are negotiated and renegotiated through time and across generations. Both inter-generational discourse and intra-generational discourse often reflect such negotiative processes. Discourse may be used as a tool for maintaining cultural conceptualisations through time" (2011: 5)

Within the group of cultural conceptualisations, the following can be listed (ibid.): event schemes, role schemas, image schemas, proposition-schemas as well as emotion schemas. For the purpose of the present study, we shall shortly consider role schemas. They are defined by Augoustinos and Walker as "knowledge structure that people have of specific role positions in cultural group" (1995: 39). As noted by Sharifian, various cultural schemas and categories can be formed in diverse cultural groups about the same role. An instance is provided of Aboriginal Australians for many of whom:

"the word for 'mother' evokes a role category, which would extend well beyond the biological mother and among certain Aboriginal people it may even include some male members of the extended family, such as an uncle [...]. The associated role schemas often involve knowledge about obligations and responsibilities between children and the person referred to as 'mother' " (2011: 9)

It is also important to note after Turner (1987; quoted in Underhill 2011: 57) that kinship relations are "a central conceptual domain for all human beings, although different cultures configure that conceptual domain quite differently". It is, therefore, 'mother' that will be considered first in the following discussion in Section 4 (*Female kinship terms in English, Polish, and Chinese*).

3.1 Semantic primitives – cultural keywords: 'Mother'

As rightly noted by Lee:

"Conventional ways of saying things are subtle indices of cultural preoccupations and values, subtle because their automatic, routine, habitual nature renders them largely out of awareness for members of the culture, just as any other routine behavioural pattern, socially acquired in the course of enculturation, may remain out of awareness until violated in some way by cultural rebels, visitors or novices" (2007: 471)

Not surprisingly, diverse cultures have different ways of addressing issues and concepts unique to their identity. There are also language-specific names which refer to explicit things and phenomena characteristic of a given language community. Wierzbicka (1997) also points out that every nation has its own social institutions and traditions, whose names are present in the mother tongue but they are absent from other languages. There are, however, certain concepts, values, attitudes, and notions that are universally shared by communities across cultures. The linguistic means applied to name them are cultural keywords. While discussing cultural keywords, Wierzbicka states that analyzing them might guide individuals "to the center of a whole complex of cultural values and attitudes" (1997: 17). Cultural keywords are defined by Goddard as "highly salient and deeply culture-laden words which act as focal points around which whole cultural domains are organized" (2005: 78).

Wierzbicka points out that "kinship terminologies can be explicated across language and culture boundaries because there are certain universal human concepts, relevant to kinship, which have apparently been lexicalised in the ordinary vocabulary of almost all human languages. The concepts in question are 'mother' and 'father' " (1992: 332). 'Mother' and 'father' are semantic primitives. As noted in Wierzbicka in reference to kinship terms:

"the concepts of (biological) 'mother' and 'father' play an important role in the semantic system of a language even if the words for 'father' and 'mother' are also used in this language in a classificatory sense. This is manifested, among other things, in the existence of numerous words whose meaning is based on these concepts" (ibid., 333)

She also states: "The English word *mother* is used as a religious title (as in *Mother Superior*), as well as a term for birth giver, but words such as *step-mother*, *mother-in-law*, *orphan*, *maternity*, or *motherhood* are derived semantically, quite unambiguously, from the sense 'birth giver'. This in itself constitutes a proof [...] that the sense 'birth giver' is a separate (and of course primary) sense of the English word *mother*" (ibid.).

According to the principles of Natural Semantic Metalanguage description, Wierzbicka (1996: 155) provides her own definition of 'mother'. As a criticism to Lakoff's (1987) model, her definition comprises the biological, sociological, and psychological modules of the concept in question, and reads as follows:

X is Y's mother. =

- (a) at one time, before now, Y was very small
- (b) at that time, Y was inside X
- (c) at that time, Y was like a part of X
- (d) because of this, people can think something like this about X:
'X wants to do good things for Y
X doesn't want bad things to happen to Y'

The above theoretical issues have outlined the concept of family terms and the core status of the cultural keywords. The considerations to follow will attempt to discuss how the female kinship terms are exemplified in the phraseology (expressions, idioms, and proverbs) of the compared languages.

4. Female kinship terms in English, Polish, and Chinese

The lexicons of most human languages contain expressions, proverbs, and idioms that comprise kinship terms. The following discussion will not address the componential analysis of individual kinship terms. Instead, in the discussion to follow, an attempt will be made to show how family members are presented in the lexicon of the contrasted languages, i.e. in phrases as well as idioms, and proverbs. The presentation starts with an English term and its Polish as well as Chinese equivalents shall be provided, if they exist. Semantic parallels as well as observed differences will be noted, should they manifest themselves.

4.1 Mother (Eng) – matka (Pl) – 母亲 (mǔ qīn) (Chn)

The term 'mother' (Mother (a), *s.a.*) is defined in Oxford English dictionary (OED, *s.a.*) with reference to numerous senses. In the present discussion only selected senses will

be discussed; most of those that are marked as obsolete and offensive will not be analysed. The one pertaining to the present research and the most prototypical is related to human beings, and reads as follows: "The female parent of a human being; a woman in relation to a child or children to whom she has given birth; (also, in extended use) a woman who undertakes the responsibilities of a parent towards a child, esp. a stepmother" (Mother (a), *s.a.*). The dictionary adds the following explanatory note on the use of the term:

"Mother is frequently preceded by a possessive (as 'my mother') or used as a form of address (where, except occasionally in poetic language, my is commonly omitted); it is also used without possessive [...] in the manner of a proper name (this usage was, in the middle of the 19th cent., regarded as unfashionable or vulgar, and later as colloquial)" (ibid.)

At present, more colloquial equivalents of the term are preferable and in more current use, including *mum*, *mam*, *mom*, *mummy*, *ma* or *mama*. As a form of address, *mother* is now viewed as formal or archaic.

Similarly, a Polish source defines 'mother', i.e. *matka*, first of all, as a woman who has given birth to a child and usually raises it (WSJP 2018). As forms of address, customarily *mama* for 'mom' or 'mum' and *mamusia*, *mamunia*, or *mateczka* for 'mummy' are used, the former of which is neutral while the others express much more endearment or show greater affection.

Moreover, as highlighted by Bartmiński, in "the Polish linguistic worldview, the mother occupies a high position in the axiological, family-oriented, national, and religious sense. MATKA (MOTHER) is a rich concept, based on a rich experiential basis, common to many cultures and languages" (2009: 132).

The Chinese 母亲 (*mǔ qīn*) signifies "mother" (Mother (b), *s.a.*). According to an online source (ibid.), 母 is a character as old as the first writing evidences in China. Dating back to the Shang dynasty (1600–1046 BC), this character was found on oracle

bone inscriptions – 甲骨文 (jiǎ gǔ wén). It has the original meaning of a female. It resembled a kneeling female with her hands crossed and two additional lines which were meant to be her breasts. Therefore, the meaning of the character was a fertile woman, able to breastfeed her babies.

Names for mother include also: 母 (mǔ) – mother, 生母 (shēng mǔ) – birth mother, 妈妈 (mā mā) – mama, mother, mommy, 妈 (mā) – mom, mother, 亲妈 (qīn mā) – biological mother, one's own mother, 宝妈 (bǎo mā) – a mom (mother of a young child), 老妈 (lǎo mā) – mother, mom, 姆妈 (mǔ mā) – mother, mom (dialect), 娘 (niáng) – mother, 老娘 (lǎo niáng) – my old mother, and 𪛗 (jiě) – mother.

As noted in OED (*s.a.*), apart from its main prototypical meaning presented above, the term 'mother' refers also to "the female parent of an animal", and in this sense it is frequently applied to domesticated or farm animals. The term also designates "a female ancestor, esp. with reference to Eve, frequently as **our first mother**". Moreover, the expression is "used as a respectful (or mock-respectful) form of address to an elderly woman, esp. to one of little means or education. Also used (instead of *Mrs*) before the surname (or occasionally the forename) of such a person". Such use, however, is now chiefly regional and considered to be archaic. 'Mother' is also used with reference to a mother-in-law and it is typically applied as a form of address (mainly in the USA).

When preceded by 'the' the term describes "womanly qualities (as taken to be inherited from the mother); maternal qualities or instincts, esp. maternal affection". In colloquial language, but also regionally, 'mother' is used by a father while addressing or referring to "the mother of his children".

Interestingly, in colloquial use, 'mother' stands for "a female owner of a pet, esp. of a dog".

Another sense of 'mother' is expressed when considering "a quality, institution, place, etc., that produces, protects, nurtures, or sustains people, ideas, etc.". Here the following subsenses of the term can be listed:

- a. "A quality, condition, event, etc., that gives rise to or is the source of something. Also: a place regarded as engendering or nourishing something. Chiefly with *of*, or as a title", e.g., *necessity is **the mother of invention***;
- b. "The earth regarded as the source, nurturer, or sustainer of humanity", i.e. ***Mother Earth***;
- c. "A country, city, etc., in relation to its natives. Also: a river in relation to those who inhabit its banks. In later use frequently prefixed to the name of a country, river, etc."; e.g., ***Mother England***;
- d. "The Christian Church; (hence) any particular Christian church. Frequently in ***holy mother***";
- e. Now obsolete: "A university, college, etc., in relation to its past or present members". Compare ***Alma Mater*** – a given person's former school, college, or university;
- f. "Nature regarded as a fundamental, esp. protecting or nurturing, force. Chiefly personified in ***Mother Nature***";
- g. "A city, country, institution, etc., from which another originates as an offshoot; spec. a city or country in relation to its colonies. Also prefixed to the name of a country, etc."

In scientific or technical applications, mainly in biology, anatomy, geology, etc., 'mother' designates "the source of a material substance or object; a main stem or channel from which branches arise; a structure that gives rise to similar structures; the parent stock on which something grows" (OED, *s.a.*); in other words, metaphorically such substance or object is likened to the giver of life, the supplier of nutrition or sustenance for growth and development.

It is also worthy of note that in traditional Chinese medicine, especially in acupuncture, 'mother' stands for "an organ of the body regarded as the source of nourishment of the

next corresponding organ in the five element cycle [...]; an organ to which treatment may be given in order to heal or 'tonify' another organ" (ibid.).

With reference to record-making, 'mother' is "a disc with grooves that is made from the plating of an electrotyped master matrix and is used to make a stamper for gramophone records, compact discs, etc." (OED, *s.a.*).

Both (Eng) ***Mother Earth*** and (Eng) ***Mother Nature*** also have their Polish and Chinese equivalents. In Polish ***Matka Ziemia*** and ***Matka Natura*** respectively are exact equivalents of the English terms, and they signify the earth and nature which are the basis of human life and the source of all goods (Kłosińska et al. 2018: 235). In Chinese, as noted in an online dictionary (<https://www.mdbg.net/chinese/dictionary>), the above expressions are represented as follows:

(Eng) ***Mother Earth*** – (Chn) 大地 / 大方 (dà dì / dà fāng) (characters are not related to 'mother') 大 (dà) – big, great vast; 地 (dì) – earth, ground, region; 方 (fāng) – a square, rectangle; a region (Mother Earth, *s.a.*).

(Eng) ***Mother Nature*** – (Chn) 造化 (zào huà) – good luck / Nature (as the mother of all things) (characters are not related to 'mother') 造 (zào) – to construct, build; 化 (huà) – change, reform (Mother Nature, *s.a.*).

As noted after Bartmiński (2009: 148), Polish dictionaries also provide other meanings of the Polish ***matka*** ('mother') which are derived from the basic, prototypical meaning. They refer to:

"2. 'the female of animals; the one that has off spring'; 3. 'in some insects, e.g. bees: the female capable of reproduction; the queen'; 4. 'something that supplies sustenance, nurturance, care etc. (e.g., mother-earth, mother ship)'; 5. 'the title of certain nuns, especially those with higher functions'; 6. 'the most important player, e.g. in rounders'; 7. inf. 'one's own wife, an elderly woman, usually in the country'. (Newer dictionaries, e.g. ISJP, 2000; USJP, 2003, add: 'the female who has given birth to and usually raises a child'.)" (ibid.)

Let us now consider the lexicon of the compared languages in search for phrases, idioms, and proverbs featuring 'mother' as their constitutive element.

OED (*s.a.*) notes that in numerous compounds in English, 'mother' is used attributively with the sense "of or relating to a mother", e.g., *mother arms*, *mother heart*, *mother-mind*, *mother-smile*, etc. It can also be used with the sense "inherited or learned from one's mother, native", as in *mother dialect*, *mother speech*, or *mother-temper*.

In Chinese, after an online dictionary (<https://www.mdbg.net/chinese/dictionary>), (Eng) *mother tongue* is represented by characters 母语 (mǔ yǔ) – mother, female (mǔ); language, words (yǔ). We can also refer to it as 本族语 (běn zú yǔ) – native language / mother tongue, which in literal translation means: 本 (běn) – root, origin; 族 (zú) – a family clan, ethnic group, tribe; 语 (yǔ) – language, words (Mother Tongue, *s.a.*).

In appositive use, the term 'mother' is applied with the sense "that is the source or origin of others, or (occasionally) that fulfils a protective or nurturing role", as in *mother colony*, *mother-lodge*, or "designating an animal that is a mother, or (more generally) is of breeding age", e.g., *mother cat*, *mother cow*, *mother sheep*, etc. The term is also used with the sense "designating a woman or female figure who is a mother". In medicine and biology, this term designates "a structure which gives rise to similar, often smaller, structures", e.g., *mother nucleus*.

Similarly, Room defines 'mother' as "properly a female parent; hence, figuratively, the origin of anything, the head or headquarters of a religious or other community, the source of something" (2002: 795). Hence, (Eng) *mother tongue* designates a native language; (Eng) *mother wit* is "native wit; a ready reply; the wit that 'our mother gave us' " (ibid., 796).

OED (*s.a.*) lists a colloquial saying (Eng) *does your mother know you're out?* defining it as "a jeering or condescending question addressed to a person whose behaviour is

regarded as juvenile or inappropriate". There seems to be no equivalent phrase in Polish or Chinese.

If the food tastes or is (Eng) *just like mother makes*, it has "the good qualities of home cooking, exactly to one's taste" (OED, *s.a.*). In Polish, the equivalent is a popular expression *jak u mamy* (literally: just like at Mother's place⁵) which conveys the same favourable opinion of the taste, i.e. good quality of the produce.

(Eng) *To be mother* means "to serve out food or drink, spec. to the person who pours the tea". In Polish, the lexeme *matkować (komuś)* (lit. 'to mother (someone)') means to substitute for someone's mother, to take care of someone, care for someone like a mother (WSJP 2018), while the figurative meaning ascribed to the expression is (Pl) *mieć nad czymś pieczę*, i.e. to be responsible for something, to have something under one's care (WSPA 2004: 728). The same is expressed by the expression (Pl) *być komuś, dla kogoś matką* ('be a mother to someone') (Kłosińska et al. 2018: 235). Therefore, the Polish meaning range is wider and not only food-related.

In Chinese, 母仪天下 (*mǔ yí tiān xià*) – to be a motherly model of the whole nation – is said of the Empress. This could be compared to someone described as the 'Mother of the Nation', or the religiously worshipped figure such as in Polish *Maryja, Królowa Polski*, i.e. the Mother of God, considered the Queen of Poland. Here it also relates to (Chn) 国母, i.e., empress dowager / first lady, which is comprised of the characters 国 (*guó*) – country, nation and 母 (*mǔ*) – mother (literally: country/nation mother) (Chen 1991: 502). This expression is culturally-conditioned as it reflects the reality in China and has no parallels in English or Polish

It needs to be pointed out that in Polish the expression *matka Polka* ('mother Pole') represents a symbol of a Polish woman, a mother, a patriot, a protector of family values

(Kłosińska et al. 2018: 235). (Pl) *Matka dzieciom* ('a mother for children') (ibid.) describes a woman who devotes all of her time to her children.

(Eng) *To be old enough to be someone's mother / father* means "to be as old as someone's parents. (Usually a way of saying that a person is too old)" (Spears 1997: 11). The phrase is used to discuss the age of a person. Its Polish counterpart – *ktoś mógłby być czyimś ojcem / matką* ('someone could be someone else's father/mother') expresses the same unfavourably oriented opinion about the age of the person under consideration.

If someone is said to be (Eng) *tied to one's mother's apron strings*, they are "dominated by one's mother, dependent on one's mother" (Spears 1997: 84). In Polish, this meaning is rendered by the expression *Trzymać się maminej spódnicy / maminego fartuszka* ('to hold on to one's mother's skirt / mother's apron') (Kłosińska et al. 2018: 571). The Polish source also notes immaturity, childishness, and lack of independence as the meanings ascribed to the phrase.

(Eng) *To have imbibed something with one's mother's milk* means "to have learnt or experienced something from early childhood on; to be accustomed to something already as a child at home" (Piirainen 2012: 153). A similar meaning is expressed by the Polish equivalent *wyssać coś z mlekiem matki* ('to suck something in with one's mother's milk'). The Polish source adds an additional meaning, namely "to have inherited some traits, skills from the ancestors, from the mother" (Kłosińska et al. 2018: 235).

In Chinese, mother's milk is evoked in the idiom 乳臭未干 (rǔ xiù wèi gān) – "smell of mother's milk not yet dried", which indicates that someone is still immature and inexperienced / still wet behind the ears

(<https://www.mdbg.net/chinese/dictionary?page=worddict&wdrst=0&wdqb=mother>).

There is no reference, unlike in the English and Polish examples above, to inheriting certain features or knowledge accumulated since early childhood. It is, however, equivalent to the Polish phrase *mieć mleko pod nosem* ('to have milk under one's nose'), which means to be inexperienced, immature, and/or young (Bąba & Liberek 2002: 394; Kłosińska et al. 2018: 251). The Polish phrase makes no direct reference to 'mother', though this may be implied.

In Polish there is a humorous religion-related expression containing the lexeme 'mother'. Poles are known to be quite religious and observe many celebrations and holidays commemorating the Mother of God. Hence a witty extension was coined which is connected with the day when salary is paid; such a day is called (Pl) *Matki Boskiej pieniężnej* ('(the day of) Mother of God (patron of) money') (Kłosińska et al. 2018: 235). Another expression of Polish origin, i.e. *Więcej was matka nie miała?* ('didn't you mother have more of you?') (ibid.) is used in colloquial language. It expresses surprise at an unexpectedly large number of people who have turned up for a meeting, event, etc. in one place. Both of the examples are language- and culture-specific.

4.1.1 'Mother' in proverbs

It has been widely discussed in the literature on the subject that proverbs are the embodiment of the cultural mindset of a culture and language community (Bartmiński 2009; Kochman-Haładyj 2021; Manser 2007; Mieder 2004; Petrova 2003, 2019; Stashko 2017; Stone 2006; Uberman 2020, etc). Schipper notes that available definitions of a proverb highlight the following characteristics: "(1) its concise fixed artistic form; (2) its evaluative and conservative function in society; (3) its authoritative validity; and (4) its anonymous origin" (2010: 22).

Paremiologists agree that each culture "gravitates around its own system of values" (Petrova 2019: 292). In the contrastive-semantic analysis to follow, our aim is, therefore, to show if these values expressed in proverbs extracted from the Polish,

English and Chinese corpora are similar or distinct, and to what extent the cultural conceptualisations overlap.

The focus on gender in proverbs has been researched by numerous scholars (Jędrzejko 2010; Kochman-Haładaj 2021; Schipper 2010; Skuza 2012; Świerczyńska 1994, 2019; to mention but a few). In her consideration on the proverbs related to women, Schipper points out that:

"Proverbs about women tend to reflect the old habit of setting 'us' against 'them', not in terms of culture but in terms of sexual embodiment. It is true that today for the first time in history men and women are being equally educated and doing the same jobs, but this truth holds only for the happy few, globally speaking. We have to be aware of the numerous impediments invented and cherished over the centuries, and all over the world, to prevent this from happening. It is quite significant that many proverbs tend to sketch equal access to education and roles as a most unwelcome or even nightmarish scenario" (2010: 13)

The equality is not always welcome. It is important to note that proverbs about women also say a lot about men in particular societies. Nevertheless, Schipper states that:

"proverbs wholeheartedly acknowledge procreation as an indispensable female quality, and motherhood as a crucial domain of life. [...] Being able to give birth is apparently considered so unique that numerous proverbs express not only respect but also fear vis-à-vis this awesome creativity" (ibid., 16)

The features and qualities of a mother are present in maxims of numerous languages the world over. There are numerous proverbs which are built on the principle of comparing a certain notion or characteristic to the other one which is its creator, i.e. one leads to the other. Instances of proverbs, predominantly English, structured *X is the mother of Y* are presented and discussed below.

(Eng) ***Absence is the mother of disillusion*** is a proverb considered to be a regional expression in the USA, and it means that "a period of separation may enable you to consider people or things more objectively and see them in a truer but less favourable light" (Manser 2007: 1). No Polish or Chinese proverb has been noted with the equivalent meaning.

(Eng) *Covetousness is the mother of mischief and ruin* (Stone 2006: 81) clearly is a criticism of greediness and materialism, which produce unfortunate results.

(Eng) *Diligence is the mother of good luck* means that "a man's success in life will be proportionate to his efforts" (ODP 2008: 135); "those who work hardest are most likely to enjoy good fortune" (Manser 2007: 56).

(Eng) *Experience is the mother of wisdom* means that one "cannot attain great wisdom or knowledge other than by practical experience and learning from your mistakes" (ibid., 95).

(Eng) *Necessity is the mother of invention* (ODP 2008: 355) has a direct Polish equivalent – *Potrzeba jest matką wynalazków* ('necessity is the mother of inventions') (Kłosińska et al. 2018: 385). The proverb means that a difficult situation or a lack of something forces an individual to look for new solutions to the issue.

However, the proverb (Pl) *Nadzieja matką głupich* ('hope is the mother of fools') (ibid., 268) is not as complementary, since it describes a situation in which someone trusts in something or someone else too much, without objectively assessing the circumstances. It could be compared to the English maxim *Trust is the mother of deceit* (Stone 2006: 444). However, in the latter, being dishonest as resulting from receiving extensive and undeserved trust is foregrounded, which is not the case in the Polish proverb.

(Eng) *Sloth is the mother of poverty* is a criticism of laziness: "the less work you do, the less money you will earn" (Manser 2007: 245). In Polish, the proverb with the equivalent meaning makes no reference to the mother figure. Instead, different imagery is employed where gold and stones are evoked: (Pl) *Kto się nie leni, robi złoto z kamieni* (Kłosińska et al. 2018: 210) ('he/she who is not lazy/idle makes gold out of a stone'). This means that when you fail, you have to try again to reach the set goal. Also,

hard work and its rewards seem to be indicated in the Chinese proverb 失败是成功之母 (shī bài shì chéng gōng zhī mǔ), which means "Failure is the mother of success" (<https://www.mdbg.net/chinese/dictionary?page=worddict&wdrst=0&wdqb=mother>).

In the following part of the discussion, various proverbs containing the lexeme *mother* are discussed. Their internal structure, however, does not follow the pattern *X is the mother of Y*, listed in the first part of this section.

(Eng) *Praise the child and you make love to the mother* (ODP 2008: 405-6) means, as noted by Manser (2007: 226), that "parents – especially mothers – are pleased and flattered by compliments paid to their children". This proverb has the Polish counterpart *Kto dziecko chwali, ten matkę po sercu głaszcze* (Hermann & Syjud 2008: 110) ('he/she who praises a child, strokes the mother's heart'). Similarly, (Pl) *Dziecko za rączkę, matkę za serce* (Świerczyńska 2019: 43) ('[catch/grab/hold] a child by the hand, his/her mother by the heart') might suggest that a mother's heart melts when her child is praised, treated generously or with great attention, care, and fondness. Schipper (2010: 131) notes the English equivalent of the proverb – *If you take the child by the hand, you take the mother by the heart*. A similar proverb in English, provided by Świerczyńska (2019: 43), makes no reference to the mother, but a nurse is mentioned instead: *Many kiss the child for the nurse's sake*.

It is important to stress that respect for elders is essential in raising next generations. The children who see how older people are treated are likely to replicate this pattern of behaviour in the future, as illustrated by the Polish maxim *Kto nie słucha ojca, matki, będą go bić własne dzieci* (Hermann & Syjud 2008: 110) ('he/she who does not obey his/her father and mother will be beaten by his/her own children'). Apparently, respect shown to one's parents is a precondition for prosperity in the future: (Pl) *Słuchaj ojca, matki; da Bóg i dostatki* (ibid., 116) ('obey your father and mother; God will give you affluence/wealth').

Virginity is portrayed as desirable and important; lack of chastity and care has far-reaching consequences and results in pregnancies. In support of this belief, Schipper (2010: 97) quotes the following proverb from American English: *An impatient virgin becomes a mother without being a bride*, which additionally stresses misbehaviour before marriage. The wedding celebration is shown as an important day in a girl's life, full of emotions not only for the bride but also for her mother: (Eng) *All brides are child brides in their mother's eyes* (ibid., 99).

(Eng) *Every river runs to its mamma* (Schipper 2010: 128) points to the prominence of mothers in everyone's life. A maxim highlighting the importance of mothers is noted by Fergusson in the following words: (Eng) *An ounce of mother is worth a ton of priest*, and their influence is stressed by the proverb (Eng) *The mother's side is the surest* (1983: 177), semantically close to (Pl) *Nie ma jak u mamy*. Uniqueness of a mother is highlighted by the Polish proverb *Drugiej matki nie znajdziesz* (Hermann & Syjud 2008: 106) ('You will not find a second mother'). Exceptional maternal qualities and endless love for one's children are accentuated in (Eng) *God could not be everywhere, therefore he decided to make mothers* (Schipper 2010: 128). Mother's love, care, and protectiveness are found in the English saying *When the boy's foot is broken, he finds his mother's yard* (ibid., 129).

Every mother believes her children to be the best: (Eng) *There is only one pretty child in the world and every mother has it*; (Eng) *Every mother thinks it is on her own child the sun rises* (Schipper 2010: 131). In Polish, this is expressed by the proverb *U swej matki każdy gładki* (Hermann & Syjud 2008: 116) ('everyone (every child) is well-fed for one's own mother'). Similarly, a Chinese proverb says 母不嫌儿丑 (mǔ bù xián er chǒu) meaning "all mothers love their children, no matter how ugly their faces may be" (Chen 1991: 502).

The unparalleled trust is exemplified by the English proverb (of Irish origin) *Give your love to your wife but tell your secrets to your mother* (Schipper 2010: 129). Mothers also tend to be overprotective and worry about their offspring, as exemplified by (Eng) *You can't weigh worries but many a mother has a heavy heart* (ibid., 132). The Chinese proverb 养儿不知娘辛苦 (Yǎng er bu zhī niáng xīn kǔ) – *The child knows not what trouble it has given its mother* (Scarborough 1875: 358) is comparable in meaning.

Many Polish proverbs employ the imagery related to the care, love, and happiness embodied by the mother. It is a universal trait of mothers to love their children unconditionally. This truth is expressed by the Polish proverb *Dla każdej matki mile jej dzieci* (Hermann & Syjud 2008: 105) ('every mother loves her children'). The Chinese proverb 母亲眼里无丑儿 (mǔ qīn yǎn lǐ wú chǒu er) similarly notes that "every baby is beautiful in the eyes of its mother" (Chen 1991: 502); also 母疼其儿 (mǔ téng qí er) "the mother always has warm affection for her children" (ibid.). Love, however, cannot mean that a mother lets her children do whatever they wish; therefore, punishment is introduced for mischief or misbehaviour, as exemplified by the proverbs (Pl) *Błogosławione są matki, co za złe karzą swe dzieci* (Hermann & Syjud 2008: 104) ('blessed are the mothers who punish their children for mischief '); or (Pl) *Matka tłucze, ale uczy* (ibid., 112) ('a mother beats, but she teaches'). However, no matter what the child does or how badly he/she behaves, their mother will always love them. This feature is noted in the Chinese examples 母亲向着孩子 (mǔ qīn xiàng zhe hái zi) – "a mother will usually stand up for her children (no matter what they have done)" (Chen 1991: 502) as well as 母子无隔宿之恨 (mǔ zǐ wú gé sù zhī hèn) – "no mother in the world can be angry with her son for long" (ibid.). Well-behaved children are also compared to a mother's treasure in (Pl) *Dobre dzieci to skarb matki* (Hermann & Syjud 2008: 106) ('good children are a mother's treasure'). If children are loved and well taken care of, they are happy and care-free. Such an image is manifested in the proverb (Pl) *Gdzie u dzieci matka, tam i główka gładka* (ibid., 107) ('when/if children

have a mother, they have sleek heads'). It has to be noted that in Chinese culture sons are more precious to their mothers. This is exemplified by the following instance: (Chn) 母爱幼子 (mǔ'ài yòu zǐ) – "a mother dotes on her youngest son; most mothers are much kinder to their youngest sons than they are to the others" (Chen 1991: 502).

Mothers are caretakers and mostly responsible for raising children. This is evidenced by the Polish proverb *Dziecię matka piastuje, a sierotę Bóg* (Hermann & Syjud 2008: 106) ('a child is taken care of by his/her mother, an orphan by God'). (Pl) *Do ludzi po rozum, do matki po serce* (ibid., 105) ('[turn] to people for wisdom, to mother for heart') is a maxim showing mothers' protectiveness and care as well as profound love for their children. (Pl) *Od matki dobre i ostatki* (ibid., 114) ('from a mother also the last of the food is good') means that riches are not as significant as a mother's love and protection. The Chinese idiom 母慈子孝 (mǔ cí zǐ xiào) – "a kind mother brings up children dutiful to their family" (Chen 1991: 502) focuses on proper upbringing and children's responsibility for their families.

(Pl) *Pokorne cielę dwie matki ssie* ('a humble calf sucks at two mothers') (Kłosińska et al. 2018: 44) praises modesty; it is more profitable to be humble rather than arrogant or insolent. The English equivalent, which is a Biblical extension, makes no reference to any kinship terms; instead, prosperity is foregrounded as compensation for good behaviour, i.e. *The meek shall inherit the earth* – "humility will ultimately be rewarded" (Manser 2007: 186). Its Polish equivalent is 'Błogosławieni cisi; albowiem oni posiadą/odziedziczą ziemię').

The immensity of mother care, love, and devotion is accentuated in the proverb (Eng) *A mother can take care of ten children, but sometimes ten children can't take care of one mother* (Schipper 2010: 137). It shows that caregiving is the core of any mother's life. In Polish, the proverb which foregrounds parental love employs the imagery of a father figure and male descendants instead, i.e. *Jeden ojciec dziesięciu*

synów wychowa, a dziesięciu synów jednego ojca nie mogą (Hermann & Syjud 2008: 108) ('one father will raise ten sons, but ten sons cannot raise one father').

A Chinese proverb notes that a large family is quite hard to keep and take care of: 儿多母苦, 盐多菜苦 (er duō mǔ kǔ, yán duō cài kǔ), which means that "just as too much salt makes food taste bad, too many children make a mother's life hard" (Sun 2011).

Another English proverb says *A child that has lost his mother, his help is behind* (Schipper 2010: 138). It stresses the fact that losing one's mother is a serious issue, a disaster, especially when the child is still young, as mothers in general, in most social and cultural contexts, devote more attention to their children, hence their influence on their children's future behaviour is more pronounced. This is especially visible in early childhood.

Losing one's mother is a catastrophe for every child. Even punishment exerted by one's mother is better than praise by one's stepmother. This truth is exemplified in the following Polish proverb *Lepiej jak matka bije, niż macocha głaszcze* (Hermann & Syjud 2008: 110) ('it is better to be slapped by one's mother than stroked by one's stepmother'). Nobody can substitute for a mother, even if the attitude provided by the person is not as harsh as one's mother's.

A mother loves her children, and children should love and respect their mother. This is exemplified by the Polish proverbs *Matka miła, choćby biła* (ibid., 112) ('a mother is dear, even if she slaps [you]'); *Macochy się bój, matkę kochaj, szanuj obie* (ibid., 111) ('fear your stepmother, love your mother, respect both'). The latter additionally stresses the fact that a stepmother is never as kind as one's birth parent.

Great anxiety about sons is reflected in the Chinese proverb 儿行千里母担忧 (Er xíng qiānlǐ mǔ dānyōu) – "when children travel far, mothers worry"

(<https://baike.baidu.com/item/儿行千里母担忧/6686637>). As observed by Schipper (2010: 133), who provides the alternative version *A mother worries about her son when he is travelling far away*, the proverb shows that sons are more likely to take hazardous decisions than their female siblings and are in more danger. Similarly, as already noted above with reference to love and care, the maxim 母爱幼子 (mǔ'ài yòuzǐ) ("a mother dotes on her youngest son; most mothers are much kinder to their youngest sons than they are to the others") foregrounds the youngest son's status in the family.

The son is often the source of pride and wealth for the Chinese family. This is exemplified by the idiom 母以子贵 (mǔ yǐ zǐ guì) meaning that "the mother won honor through her illustrious son; a wealthy son makes his mother become respected everywhere" (Chen 1991: 502).

A strong mother-son relation is exemplified by the Irish saying (Eng) *A boy's best friend is his mother and there's no spangle⁶ stronger than her apron string* (Schipper 2010: 134). In Chinese, this bond is illustrated by the proverb 长子不离宗堂，幺儿不离娘房 (Zhǎngzǐ bùlǐ zōng táng, yāo er bu lí niáng fang) – *Near the ancestral home the eldest must reside; near to his mother's room the youngest must abide* (Scarborough 1875: 357). Schipper (2010: 134) provides a more modern English version of the proverb, i.e. *The eldest son should not leave the family home; the youngest does not leave his mother's room*. This proverb, however, also points to possessiveness.

It is universally believed that men are brought up to be strong and independent, but breaking the close relation with one's mother appears to be difficult, as depicted by the American proverb *Mother' darlings make but milk-porridge heroes* (ibid., 136). A man in such a relationship is named in Polish *maminsynek* ('mammy's boy'). The relations between mothers, sons, and sons' female friends or wives are a point of consideration in several maxims. The mother should not interfere in her son's

relationships. This is demonstrated by the English proverb (of Irish origin) *The boy's best friend is his mother, until he becomes himself his sweetheart's best friend* (ibid., 134). Sometimes, however, the relations are tense, as shown in this Chinese proverb: 宠妻别母子不孝, 替儿嫌妻母不贤 (Chǒng qī bié mǔzǐ bùxiào, tì er xián qī mǔ bù xián) – *He is unfilial who loves wife more than mother; she is unwise who hates for him her son's wife* (Scarborough 1875: 359). Schipper (2010: 135) lists this proverb in the following English form: *The son who loves his wife more than his mother is unfilial; the mother who joins the son in hating his wife is not good.*

Relationships between mothers and daughters are also the topic of many proverbs. (Eng) *The daughter of a good mother will be the mother of a good daughter* (ibid.) shows a universal truth of virtue being passed down from generation to generation as well as the fact that kind treatment of a young person makes him/her a kind person in the future. It is the mother who exerts the most influence on bringing up children; even an unsuitable father does not influence the daughter: (Eng) *Choose a good mother's daughter, though her father were the Devil* (ibid., 136). (Eng) *He that would the daughter win, must with the mother first begin* (Manser 2007: 134) seems to explain the following truth: "if you want to win a young woman's affections or persuade her to marry you, it is important to make a favourable impression on her mother". Stone (2006: 80) provides a variant of the proverb: (Eng) *He who would win the daughter must first win her mother.*

(Eng) *Like mother, like daughter* (of Latin origin: "Qualis mater, talis filia"), a variant of (Eng) *Like father, like son* (of Korean origin) (ODP 2008: 183) describes a similarity of appearance and/or behaviour; "daughters tend to resemble their mothers in character and behaviour" (Manser 2007: 183). The source also notes the synonymous maxim (Eng) *As is the mother, so is the daughter*. In Chinese 有其父/母必有其子/女 (yǒu qí fù/mǔ bì yǒu qí zǐ/nǚ) – "like father/mother like son/daughter": 父 (fù) – father, 子 (zǐ) – son / 母 (mǔ) – mother, 女 (nǚ) – daughter; both variants are possible;

the meaning is also explained referring to the animal kingdom, i.e. "like cow, like calf" (DTTEW 2012: 179). Also the Chinese idiom 十朵菊花九朵黄, 十个女儿都像娘 (shí duǒ jú huā jiǔ duǒ huáng, shí gè nǚ'ér dōu xiàng niáng), which means literally "ten chrysanthemums, nine (of them) yellow, ten daughters, they all resemble the mother" – 形容女儿的很多方面都像母亲 (xíng róng nǚ'ér de hěn duō fāng miàn dōu xiàng mǔ qīn), stresses the similarity between mothers and daughters (Sun 2011).

Mieder (2004) states that both proverbs (Eng) *Like mother, like daughter* as well as (Eng) *Like father, like son* have been current in the English language since the early sixteenth century. In Polish, the proverb *Jaka matka, taka natka* (Kłosińska et al. 2018: 235) ('like mother, like tops (leaves)') means that children are similar to their mother. An analogous Polish proverb refers only to mother-daughter similarity of appearance, character, etc., i.e. (Pl) *Jaki bochen, taka skórka, jaka matka, taka córka* (ibid.) ('as is the loaf, so is the crust, as is the mother, so is the daughter'). The source adds that the meaning refers to the fact that children take after their parents' personalities, especially their vices (ibid., 49). The Chinese proverb: 十朵菊花九朵黄, 十个女儿都像娘 (shí duǒ jú huā jiǔ duǒ huáng, shí gè nǚ'ér dōu xiàng niáng) noted above means that the daughter is in many respects like her mother (Sun 2011). Thus, it can be considered equivalent to English *Like mother, like daughter* and Polish *Jaka matka, taka córka*. As stated by Schipper (2010: 61), the general resemblance of daughters to mothers referred to in the proverbs above is expressed by the English *The child follows the womb*, where the mother is implied, but not mentioned directly.

(Eng) *A dram of mother's wit is better than a pound of school smarts* (Stone 2006: 477) is a compliment paid to the life knowledge of mothers, who are viewed as more experienced in comparison to teachers in schools. The proverb with the same meaning in Polish is *Dobra matka więcej nauczy niż sto nauczycieli* (Hermann & Syjud 2008: 105) ('a good mother will teach more than a hundred teachers').

(Eng) *Step on a crack, break your mother's back* means that "it is unlucky to walk on the cracks between paving slabs on the sidewalk; a childish superstition, or used in a children's game" (Manser 2007: 252).

The English proverb *Children suck the mother when they are young and the father when they are old* (Stone 2006: 65) seems to clearly specify the family roles – the mother takes care of the family members and the father is the breadwinner responsible for finances in the household.

The remaining female kinship terms to be discussed below are jointly far less productive in terms of lexicon than the lexeme *mother* presented above.

4.2 Grandmother

A grandmother (Grandmother (a), *s.a.*) is defined in the online Oxford English dictionary as "1. a. The mother of one's father or mother; b. *figurative* A person or thing from which another person or thing is ultimately derived; (also) the original and outstanding example of something; 2. A female ancestor" (OED, *s.a.*).

In Chinese, there are various names to represent 'grandmother' (Grandmother (b), *s.a.*). They vary depending on the lineage, some are formal, some informal, etc. The online dictionary (*ibid.*) lists the following sets of characters designating 'grandmother': 奶奶 (nǎi nai) – (informal) grandma (paternal grandmother) / (respectful) mistress of the house, 姥姥 (lǎo lao) – (coll.) mother's mother / maternal grandmother, 外婆 (wài pó) – (coll.) mother's mother / maternal grandmother, 老娘 (lǎo niáng) – my old mother, maternal grandmother, 祖母 (zǔ mǔ) – father's mother, parental grandmother, 王母 (wáng mǔ) – (literary) paternal grandmother, 老老 (lǎo lao) – maternal grandmother / same as 姥姥.

There are relatively few phrases listed in OED with the lexeme *grandmother*. One of them, noted as obsolete, i.e. ***this beats my grandmother*** (OED, *s.a.*) used to be applied to talk "of something that excites astonishment". The originally American phrase ***your (my) grandmother!*** is "said in response to something with which one disagrees". No Polish or Chinese equivalents can be identified for the quoted phrases.

(Eng) ***To shoot one's granny / grandmother*** is a phrase labelled as American in origin and means "to fancy you have discovered what was well known before".

Grandmother's footsteps or ***grandmother's steps*** is a chiefly British expression for "a children's game in which one player turns round often and without warning with the aim of catching the other players stealthily creeping up to touch him or her on the back" (OED, *s.a.*). In Polish an imagery of a witch is employed instead, as the game is called ***Raz, dwa, trzy, Baba Jaga patrzy*** ('one, two, three, a witch is looking').

In Polish, the exclamation ***Jak babcię kocham!*** (WSJP 2018) ('as I love grandma') is a form of imploring that is used to strengthen the utterance and make it more credible.

4.2.1 Proverbs related to grandmothers

A grandmother is typically associated with love and patience bestowed on her grandchildren. There is the Polish saying ***Pan Bóg nie mógł być wszędzie, więc stworzył babcię i dziadka*** ('God could not be everywhere, so he created a grandmother and a grandfather'). The proverb has a very similar equivalent in Dutch, i.e. ***God cannot be everywhere, that's why he created grandmothers*** (Schipper 2010: 150). The maxim has its equivalent in English; however, a member of the younger generation, i.e. the mother, is featured: ***God could not be everywhere, therefore he decided to make mothers*** (ibid., 128).

In Chinese, this is confirmed by the proverb 姥姥疼外孙，自然的事 (lǎo lao téng wài sūn, zì rán de shì), which notes that it is normal for grandmas to love their

grandchildren, and it covers the meaning "Grandma loves dearly her grandsons, it's a natural thing" (Cuī & Sūn 2006: 182).

In the Western culture, grandparents are said to be permissive with their grandchildren and tend to spoil them. In Chinese culture the same is true as the proverb states *A grandmother always thinks that she cannot do enough to show her love for her grandchildren* (Schipper 2010: 149). However, grandchildren may not always be as attached to and fond of their grandparents, which is represented by the proverb (Chn) 姥姥家的狗，吃完了就走 – (lǎo lao jiā de gǒu, chī wán le jiù zǒu), meaning "Grandma's dog leaves as soon as it's finished eating" (Cuī & Sūn 2006: 182). As noted by the authors, this proverb is frequently used by grandparents when playfully talking about their grandkids' visits.

The elderly are reputed with wisdom and experience. (Eng) *Don't teach your grandmother to suck eggs* is "a caution against offering advice to someone wiser and more experienced than oneself" (ODP 2008: 491). As explained by Manser, the meaning is "do not presume to give advice or instruction to those who are older and more experienced than you" (2007: 78). In Polish, there is no exact equivalent; however, there is a saying, which employs the imagery of a father, conveying the same meaning, i.e. (Pl) *Nie ucz ojca dzieci robić* ('don't teach a father to make babies') (Kłosińska et al. 2018: 581).

(Pl) *Gdyby babcia miała wąsy, toby była dziadkiem* ('if a grandmother had a moustache, she would be a grandfather') (ibid., 602) is a saying meaning that something is impossible to happen, it is unreal and will never come true. Alternative, though less frequently used, kinship terms employed in the proverb are *ciocia* ('auntie') and *wujaszek* ('uncle').

4.3 Daughter in phrases

Daughter (Daughter (a), *s.a.*) is obviously "a girl or woman in relation to either or both of her parents; a person's female child" (OED, *s.a.*). In addition, the term refers to a female animal in a similar relation; but also to "a female descendant; a female member of a tribe, clan, or to other ethnic group; a woman or girl regarded in terms of her relation to her place of birth or residence". Another sense provided by the lexicographic source is "a woman viewed in relation to a person who, or thing which defines, shapes, or influences her; a woman regarded as the product of a particular event, circumstance, or influence" (ibid.).

In Chinese, according to an online source (Daughter (b), *s.a.*), the following meaning can be read from the characters representing 'daughter': 女儿 (nǚ ér), where (nǚ) stands for "woman", and (ér) denotes "child" (ibid.).

(Eng) **A daughter language** is "a language which has been derived from an older one" (Gulland & Hinds-Howell 1986: 133), such as Romance languages from Latin. In Polish or Chinese, no similar phrase can be identified.

(Pl) (*Nieodrodna*) **córka Ewy** (Kopaliński 2001: 266) ('Eve's daughter' in the colloquial sense of 'a chip off the old block') compared to the first woman, Eve of Eden, describes a person who is inquisitive, seductive, and tempts others. In English, the phrase is equivalent in meaning and form to the Polish phrase quoted above. As noted in OED (*s.a.*), (Eng) **daughter of Eve**, or (Eng) **Eve's daughter** mean "a girl or woman, esp. (with allusion to Eve's part in the biblical story of the Fall of Man) one who is weak-willed, lascivious, or susceptible to temptation". Euphemistically, (Eng) a **daughter of joy** stands for "a prostitute" (OED, *s.a.*); in Polish, the meaning is rendered by the phrase **Córa Koryntu** ('a daughter of Corinth') (WSJP 2018). No Chinese equivalents can be noted, as the expressions are of biblical and mythological origin attributed to the Western cultures.

In Polish, there is the expression *mieć córkę na wydaniu* (ibid.) ('to have a daughter [who is] ready to marry'), which refers to her prospects of getting married.

(Eng) *Devil's daughter* is an expression describing "a shrew" (Room 2002: 336), while (Eng) *the devil's daughter's portion* refers to "the scandalous impositions once practised in these ports [Dover and Harwich] on sailors and casual visitors" (ibid.). The phrase (Eng) *to kiss the gunner's daughter* means "to be flogged on board ship" (ibid., 659). As further explained by Room, "at one time sailors in the Royal Navy who were to be flogged were tied to the breech of a cannon" (ibid.). No equivalents can be noted in Polish for the above expressions, as the reference is clearly culturally-based and pertaining to naval tradition. It has to be noted, however, that, in Polish, there are expressions *diabelskie nasienie* (Kłosińska et al. 2018: 271) (literally: 'devil's seed') or *diabelski / czarci / szatański pomiot* (ibid., 376) (literally: 'devil's / Satan's litter') that could be considered similar in meaning to (Eng) *devil's daughter* mentioned above, neither of which however mentions 'a daughter' in particular. Both of them metaphorically evoke the imagery of descendants and refer to someone who is evil or something that is nasty, annoying, or unpleasant.

Two further expressions, as noted by Room, i.e. (Eng) *Duke of Exeter's daughter* (2002: 371) and (Eng) *scavenger's daughter* (ibid., 1048), are names given to instruments of torture in the Tower of London. Again, as they are specific to the English culture, no equivalents for them are found in the contrasted languages.

4.3.1 Daughter in proverbs

Daughter is a lexeme present in proverbs, but they are not very numerous in any of the languages under consideration in the present discussion.

(Eng) *My son is my son till he gets him a wife, but my daughter's my daughter all the days of her life* (ODP 2008: 460) or its variant (Eng) *A son is a son till he gets him a wife, a daughter's a daughter all of her life* mean that "men tend to neglect or lose

contact with their parents after marriage, whereas women maintain the bonds of filial affection and loyalty throughout their lives" (Manser 2007: 248). This is not confirmed in the Chinese proverb, which states that 女儿出嫁心向外 (nǚ ér chū jià xīn xiàng wài), i.e. "a daughter faced out of the family as soon as she was married off" (Chen 1991: 178-179).

Świerczyńska (2019: 243) notes a pair of synonymous Polish proverbs. The first one is *Ożeń syna kiedy zechcesz, a wydaj córkę kiedy możesz – Marry your son when you will, your daughter when you can*. In Chinese, a similar approach seems to be adopted, as reflected by the proverb 女大不中留 (nǚ dà bù zhòng liú) "a grown daughter can't be kept unmarried / a grown up daughter is hard to keep" (Chen 1991: 179).

The second, (Pl) *Kto nie ma córek, ten nie ma dzieci* ('who does not have daughters, does not have children') (Hermann & Syjud 2008: 110) is a Polish proverb praising the help received from female descendants. This proverb is specific to Polish culture. As noted above, in Chinese culture, sons are valued more and hold a privileged position in families.

As it has been presented earlier in the discussion on mothers, the English proverb *The daughter of a good mother will be the mother of a good daughter* (Schipper 2010: 135) praises appropriate upbringing. Also (Eng) *Like mother, like daughter* (ibid.) highlights the resemblance of appearance and similarity of character, and this saying has its equivalent in Polish: *Jaka matka, taka córka* ('like mother, like daughter'). Also, a proverb widespread in Europe advises a man intending to enter a relationship with a woman to consider what her mother is like before deciding: (Eng) *Have a [good] look at the mother before you take the daughter* (ibid., 136).

According to Schipper (2010: 27), a Chinese proverb reads: *If the father doesn't behave like a father, the daughter should still behave like a daughter*. This represents the respect for one's parents and the elderly.

In Chinese culture, unfortunately, giving birth to daughters is not wholeheartedly welcome in families. This is illustrated in the following proverbs: (Chn) 痴男胜过巧女 (chī nán sheng guò qiǎo nǚ) *A stupid son is better than a crafty daughter* (Scarborough 1875: 365) as well as (Chn) *It is a blessing to bear a son, a calamity to bear a daughter* (Schipper 2010: 88). This is confirmed by the following maxim as well: 望女成凤 (wàng nǚ chéng fèng) (Daughter (c), *s.a.*), which literally reads "to hope one's daughter becomes a phoenix" and expresses hope that "one's daughter is a success in life" (ibid.).

Rumour has it that women spend a lot of money on clothes, shoes, and other expensive accessories. An English proverb notes that daughters have their needs, and they can be costly: (Eng) *Two daughters and a back door are three arrant thieves* (Fergusson 1983: 264). Spending money appears to be a universal female trait, yet it is not represented in a comparable form in Polish or Chinese.

(Eng) *Admiration is the daughter of ignorance* is a proverb, which means that "people often admire others about whom they only have incomplete knowledge" (Manser 2007: 2).

4.4 Sisters

A sister is (Sister (a), *s.a.*), by definition, "a female sibling or other relative" (OED, *s.a.*). In Polish, the term 'sister' is used, by extension, to refer to nurses as well as nuns (WSPA 2004: 1021). Similarly, in English, as noted by OED (*s.a.*), 'sister' is used in nursing and religious senses to designate "a female member of a religious order, society, sisterhood, or guild, spec. a nun. Also, as a form of address".

In Chinese, there is no character for 'sister'; instead there are terms 姐姐 (jiě jie) "older sister" and 妹妹 (mèi mei) "younger sister" (Sister (b), *s.a.*).

Phrases, idioms and proverbs related to the lexeme under consideration are not very numerous, as evidenced by the instances presented and discussed below.

(Eng) *Sob sister* is now considered a "dated nickname for a female journalist who writes the answers to readers' personal problems, so called because of the tear-provoking sentimentality involved" (Room 2002: 1100).

Now obsolete in use, as annotated in OED (*s.a.*), (Eng) *sisters of the Bank*, as well as (Eng) *sister of the scabbard* referred to prostitutes. The phrases are of English origin and are not found in the other contrasted languages.

(Eng) *Sister in (at) arms* (*ibid.*) is a phrase used mainly figuratively to refer to "any woman considered in relation to another or others, as fighting on the same side or for the same cause".

(Eng) A *sister from another mister* originated in the USA and is mainly used in American slang to stand for "a very close female friend" (*ibid.*). There are no equivalents for the phrase in Polish or Chinese.

It has to be noted that when 'sister' is used in the adjectival position, it describes the objects, actions, etc. in question as closely related or situated in close vicinity, e.g., *sister island*, *sister kingdom*, *sister colony*, *sister state*, *sister dialect*, *sister language*, *sister line*, etc. (*ibid.*).

It is interesting to note that, in Chinese, a variety of written language referred to as 女书 (*nǚ shū*) can be identified. It is the script created and used solely by women and is considered the cultural heritage of women in the Jiangyong region in the Hunan province. It is a unique phenomenon unparalleled by any other such instance in the world. Its origin is related to the so-called 'sworn sister' (结拜 *jié bài*), i.e. relationships

created between women, especially at a young age (Liu 2015). Hence, the expression 天下妇女，姐妹一家 (tiān xià fù nǚ, jiě mèi yī jiā), which comes from 女书 (nǚ shū), refers to sisterhood and means "women in the world are like sisters in the family" (Liu 2004: 253). The words are an inscription on a coin, which is considered as the oldest known artefact with text in 女书 (nǚ shū), the coin (Figures 1 and 2 below) is known as an 'engraved mother coin' – 雕母钱 (diāo mǔ qián), which proves the script was in use in the 19th century.



Figure 1. The coin from the Taiping Rebellion / the Taiping Civil War. Available at: <https://www.easyatm.com.tw/wiki/女書>



Figure 2. The sketch of the coin from the Taiping Rebellion / the Taiping Civil War. Available at: <http://history.people.com.cn/BIG5/n1/2017/0904/c372329-29513805.html>

4.4.1 Proverbs on sisters

Proverbs on sisters are hard to find in English or Chinese; in Polish, however, the proverb *Siostra mężowa – głowa wężowa* ('the husband's sister is a snake head') (Kłosińska et al. 2018: 608), and alternatively *matka mężowa* ('mother-in-law') (Hermann & Syjud 2008: 112), is applied with reference to those women. They are usually considered unkind and treacherous, hence compared to a snake full of venom, i.e. ill will towards a sister(daughter)-in-law. A very similar view is held in the Chinese culture, as the following proverb seems to testify: *The elder sister of one's husband is as authoritative as one's mother-in-law, and the younger sister is as terrible as the King of Hell* (Schipper 2010: 312).

As noted by WSPA (2004: 1022), (Pl) *Cierpliwość jest bliźniaczą siostrą cierpienia* literally means 'patience is the twin sister of suffering'. Hence a relation in a family is figuratively used with reference to phenomena that often occur together.

It appears evident from the few instances above that 'sister' is not very frequently employed in phrases, idioms or proverbs in the contrasted languages.

5. Concluding remarks

The world all humans live in is just one. However, the ways to talk about its laws, phenomena, people, and their experiences are unlimited. All humans seem to be alike, yet the communities and societies they create are unique and diverse, just as diverse are the countless customs, beliefs, and patterns of behaviour adopted within the above mentioned groups of people. To differentiate between them even further, there exist the means of expression such communities use to communicate, whether verbal or non-verbal. Moreover, the structures of those social groups vary: some are hierarchical, while others are based on the notion of equality. Different members of such assemblies perform various, diverse roles. However, irrespective of the type of group, culture adopted and cultivated or the language spoken, in each community it is the mother who

is 'the giver of life', who brings the children to the world and takes care of them. Without a mother, there can be no children brought to life, there is no next generation.

As noted by ample exemplars analysed in the preceding discussion, this female kinship term is very productive. The number of phrases, idioms, and proverbs where the lexeme *mother* is featured is very extensive, and obviously only selected instances could be quoted in the present paper. It has to be pointed out as well that the other terms put together, i.e. *grandmother*, *daughter* as well as *sister*, in total do not come up to the number of examples found for *mother*.

Interestingly, in the history of language copious instances of derogatory terms for women can be identified. In many patriarchal societies the image of women is that of deceit or low life. Such a negative picture, however, is hardly ever evolved with reference to mothers or grandmothers. They are commonly associated with love and protection, care and devotion. Those are the key features highlighted in a substantial number of illustrative examples (phrases, idioms and proverbs alike).

The compared languages, i.e. English, Polish, and Chinese, unanimously mirror the care, attention, and love of mothers and grandmothers for their children and grandchildren. All mothers believe their children to be the best and the most beautiful. Any ill-will or misbehaviour towards their children is likely to end in trouble for the perpetrator. Mothers can be overprotective but the good of their children is always their top priority. This might entail punishing the misbehaved children, as well. A mother is the one who provides wide-ranging care of her children to such an extent that not having a mother is compared to a catastrophe.

Grandmothers dote upon their grandchildren and are compared to a God-sent emissary. Owing to their age, they are reputed for experience and wisdom. However, grandmothers are also famed for being too permissive with their grandchildren, thus contributing to spoiling them.

Universally, as can be noted from the many examples analysed, daughters are similar to their mothers in that the former copy the patterns of behaviour and conduct of the latter. However, it has to be stressed that, in Chinese, a strong tendency to favour sons over daughters can be identified, which is a clear evidence of a culture-specific context. Sons have a privileged position in their families, and this feature is reflected by the proverbs listed in the discussion. Interestingly, also in Chinese, where a specific type of sister-like relationships ('sworn sisters') can be identified in the Hunan province, sisterhood is presented as a strong bond among women in this exact community. Even those women who are not tied by blood have held a specific type of unity and developed a script used by females only. No similar phenomenon has been noted either in English or in Polish, which makes *nüshu* not only culture- but also area-specific.

From the considerations above it becomes apparent that those female figures who have a more significant role in the household are mentioned more frequently in the lexicon of a given language. This might explain a relatively low turnout for *sister* or *daughter* as compared to *mother* in the vocabularies of the respective compared languages. The mother has a predominant role in the raising and wellbeing of the family and also, indirectly, the society. Semantic differences, or lack of equivalents, can be observed for the semantics in the *sister*- or *daughter*-related expressions, but where *mother* is a key element, most meanings seem to be universally shared by English, Polish, and Chinese.

Notes

1. The underlining, in this and the following quotes, has been introduced by the authors to reflect the original italicised forms.
2. Cohabitation exerts a certain form of economic influence and/or independence, frequently on women. More on the issue case be found in Lundberg et al. (2016).
3. Patchwork families are "complex networks of differentially related individuals" (Gyuris et al. 2020: 993). A patchwork family is created when new families are formed of members who have been in other relationships before. Moreover, and most

importantly, in patchwork families "full siblings, maternal and paternal half-siblings, and non-related children are raised together, and sometimes, genetically-related children are separated" (ibid.).

4. Bartmiński notes that worldview is commonly understood as follows:

"The linguistic worldview conception is semantic, anthropological and cultural in nature. It is based on the assumption that language codes a certain socially established knowledge of the world and that this knowledge can be reconstructed and verbalised as a set of judgements about people, objects and events. The knowledge results from the subjective perception and conceptualisation of reality by the human mind; it is anthropocentric and relativised to languages and cultures. In contrast to the restrictive structuralist view, the knowledge of the world belongs to the realm of semantics, being entrenched in the very fabric of language, primarily in the meanings of words but also in grammar" (2009: 213)

Compare also Panasenکو (2014) or Underhill (2012). More discussion devoted to the concept is in Uberman (2020).

5. All the literal translations from Polish and Chinese in this article are made by the authors.

6. Spancel is "a rope tie used to hobble cattle during milking" (Schipper 2010: 311).

List of abbreviations

Chn – Chinese

DTTEW – Dictionary of ten thousand English words recited from memory

Eng – English

ISJP – Inny słownik języka polskiego (A different/other Polish language dictionary)

OED – Oxford English dictionary

ODP – The Oxford dictionary of proverbs

Pl – Polish

USJP – Uniwersalny słownik języka polskiego (A universal Polish language dictionary)

WSJP – Wielki słownik języka polskiego PWN ze słownikiem wyrazów bliskoznacznych (A comprehensive Polish language PWN dictionary with synonyms)

WSPA – Wielki słownik polsko-angielski (A comprehensive Polish-English dictionary)

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Contact data

Author #1

	<i>name:</i>	Agnieszka Uberman
	<i>academic title / rank:</i>	PhD in Linguistics Associate Professor
	<i>department:</i>	Institute of Modern Languages
	<i>institution:</i>	University of Rzeszów
	<i>e-mail:</i>	Al. mjr W. Kopisto 2B, 35-315 Rzeszów, Poland ag.uberman@wp.pl
	<i>fields of interest:</i>	Cognitive linguistics, frame semantics, applied linguistics, metaphorical language use, linguo-cultural differences, contrastive paremiology.

Author #2

	<i>name:</i>	Zuzanna Uberman
	<i>academic title / rank:</i>	Student
	<i>department:</i>	Faculty of Oriental Studies, The Chinese Language Department
	<i>institution:</i>	University of Warsaw
	<i>e-mail:</i>	ul. Krakowskie Przedmieście 1, 00-047 Warszawa, Poland zuzannauberman1c@gmail.com
	<i>fields of interest:</i>	Chinese language and culture, contrastive paremiology.

Résumé

Humans are not solitary by nature; therefore, people have always lived in certain social groups, of which a family seems to be the most basic. Members of families assume various roles and they depend on the cultural background in which a given community is raised and developed. However, irrespective of the fact whether the family is extended or nuclear, full or single-parent, traditional or same-sex, etc. when children are born, they are always brought into the world by a mother. The way individual concepts are reflected in language is conditioned by the cultural mindset and the worldview held by a particular language and culture community. Certain features of worldview can be considered universal, while others are culture-specific and thus mirrored in the language that community members use. As can be observed from the

analysis of the female kinship terms 'mother', 'grandmother', 'daughter', and 'sister' in English, Polish, and Chinese, numerous similarities are present in the contrasted languages. The lexeme *mother* is the most productive. The meanings embedded in the considered phrases, idioms, and proverbs highlight the love, care, and devotion that mothers abundantly show towards their children. Mothers are responsible for children's upbringing and wellbeing, which can sometimes take the form of giving punishment, too. However, a mother loves her children even if they misbehave and considers them the most beautiful. Grandmothers are known to be permissive and spoil the grandchildren, but they are also portrayed as experienced and full of the wisdom accumulated during their life. Daughters are shown as resembling their mothers, though there is a visible bias in the way male and female descendants are represented in Chinese. Sons in the latter culture enjoy a privileged position in their families, as evidenced by proverbs quoted in the discussion. This is a clearly culture-specific approach that is not shared universally, as such imagery is not illustrated by English or Polish lexicon.

Key words: kinship terms, female, lexicon, idioms, proverbs, contrastive semantics.

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