



PROVERBS AS SOCIAL GLUE: HOW SHARED WISDOM CREATES CONNECTION AND UNDERSTANDING

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Abstract: Proverbs are concise expressions of collective wisdom that are essential for the development of social cohesion and shared identity among cultural communities. By conducting interviews and examining natural conversations with 58 participants, this qualitative study examines the manner in which proverbs serve as social adhesive in the Uzbek, Zulu, and American communities. The results indicate that proverbs function as verbal symbols of group membership, conflict resolution instruments, and vehicles for the transmission of cultural values. Proverbs' ubiquitous function in preserving social harmony and comprehension is underscored by their consistent social bonding role, despite cultural variations. The study emphasizes the significance of integrating proverb awareness into language education and intercultural communication to improve social connectedness and pragmatic competence.

Keywords: Proverbs; Social Cohesion; Cultural Identity; Intercultural Communication; Pragmatic Competence; Language and Culture; Oral Tradition; Conflict Resolution

Introduction. Collective wisdom, cultural values, and social norms that have been handed down through generations are encapsulated in brief, metaphorical expressions known as proverbs. Proverbs are frequently considered the "folk philosophy" of a community, and they function not only as linguistic artifacts but also as essential social instruments that facilitate the unification of individuals through shared experiences and meanings (Mieder, 2004). Proverbs serve as more than just expressions; they serve as verbal anchors that fortify mutual understanding, solidarity, and group identity across cultures.

The concept of proverbs as a type of "social glue" emphasizes their ability to cultivate a sense of connection and belonging among cultural communities. According to Tajfel and Turner (1986), language is a critical element of social identity, and figurative language, such as proverbs, is a significant component of this dynamic. In oral cultures, where written records may be restricted, proverbs maintain social cohesion and transmit communal norms by invoking shared values and collective wisdom (Finnegan, 1992). For instance, in numerous African societies, proverbs are essential components of community rituals, storytelling, and conflict resolution, as they serve as reminders of ethical conduct and communal obligations (Mkhize, 2004).

Moreover, proverbs serve as cultural signposts that disclose the underlying moral frameworks and worldviews, thereby contributing to intercultural understanding. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) contend that the metaphors contained in proverbs influence the way in which individuals conceptualize reality, thereby affecting both their cognitive processes and their social interactions. Proverbs foster empathy and cooperation by establishing a common ground where speakers affirm mutual identities and values through their shared use (Wierzbicka, 2003).

However, there is a scarcity of research that systematically investigates the manner in which proverbs function as social connectors across a variety of cultural groups, despite their social

significance. Although numerous studies concentrate on the cognitive or linguistic components of proverbs, there is a dearth of research that investigates their pragmatic function in the establishment and preservation of community relationships. The objective of this paper is to address this lacuna by examining the ways in which proverbs serve as instruments of social cohesion and shared identity within and between cultural groups.

The primary objective of this investigation is to investigate the methods by which proverbs promote community and establish a sense of belonging by utilizing shared wisdom. The study aims to address the following research questions:

1. In what ways do proverbs foster a sense of community among cultural communities?
2. What are the common patterns of proverb usage that contribute to the development of in-group identity?
3. In what ways do various cultural groups employ proverbs to preserve social harmony and comprehension?

Although the objective of this investigation is to offer comprehensive qualitative insights, it is subject to specific constraints. The findings may not be applicable to all communities worldwide due to the emphasis on specific cultural groups. Furthermore, the scope of proverb usage that may be documented may be restricted by the dependence on self-reported data and selected discourse samples. The findings may be further validated by incorporating longitudinal observation or expanding to larger samples in future research.

Literature Review. Proverbs are universally recognized as a source of moral values and collective knowledge. Proverbs are "short, pithy sayings in frequent and widespread use that embody traditional wisdom, truth, morals, and advice," as defined by Mieder (2004). These succinct statements condense community experiences into memorable formats that fulfill both didactic and social purposes. Finnegan (1992) underscores the importance of proverbs in the preservation and transmission of cultural heritage in numerous oral cultures, where they serve as instruments for social regulation and education.

The social function of proverbs is not limited to the provision of individual advice; they also assist in the enforcement of communal norms and expectations. Folk and Sharratt (2012) emphasize that proverbs frequently represent social norms that regulate conduct, reflecting shared values that foster group unity. For instance, proverbs that emphasize cooperation or respect for elders bolster the bonds between community members by reinforcing societal hierarchies and collective responsibility.

Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) offers a valuable framework for comprehending the ways in which language, including proverbs, influences group identity. Individuals derive a portion of their self-concept from their membership in social organizations, and language use is a critical indicator of that membership, according to the theory. Proverbs, which are culturally specific linguistic forms, serve as indicators that confirm group membership and differentiate in-group members from outsiders.

Language practices that involve shared proverbs function as social identifiers that reinforce group boundaries. Wierzbicka (2003) contends that proverbs are responsible for the formation of collective identity by encoding culturally specific values and perspectives on the world. The consistent utilization of culturally significant proverbs fosters a sense of "we-ness" among group members, which in turn promotes mutual recognition and solidarity.

Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) groundbreaking work on conceptual metaphor theory demonstrates that figurative language, such as proverbs, is indicative of deeply ingrained cognitive and

cultural patterns. Proverbs encapsulate metaphorical frameworks that influence the comprehension of abstract concepts such as time, morality, and fate by groups. Common cognitive schemas that facilitate communication and cooperation are developed by members of a culture through the exchange of these metaphorical expressions.

Agha (2007)'s research emphasizes the role of linguistic practices, particularly conventionalized sayings such as proverbs, in the construction of identity and social performance. The utilization of proverbs in informal interaction, narration, or ritualized speech acts fortifies social bonds and establishes a collective repertoire of communicative assets.

Proverbs have been examined in a variety of cultural contexts, revealing both universal and culture-specific functions in social bonding. In African oral traditions, proverbs are profoundly ingrained in social discourse and community rituals, where they are used as instruments for mediation, education, and the reinforcement of social values (Mkhize, 2004; Nzewi, 2010). For instance, in the Zulu culture, elders employ proverbs to transmit wisdom and preserve respect for social hierarchy.

In the same vein, proverbs in Asian cultures, including China and Japan, are a reflection of Confucian values in terms of social order, filial piety, and harmony, which contribute to the collective identity and cohesion of the group (Chen, 2003). In Western cultures, proverbs frequently underscore individualism and pragmatism; however, they continue to assist in the formation of community bonds by providing shared moral touchstones (Mieder, 2004).

The social function of proverbs in promoting connection and shared understanding is remarkably consistent, despite the fact that their content and themes vary (Hrisztova-Gotthardt & Varga, 2015). Comparative studies have indicated this. This universality emphasizes the human necessity to establish social bonds through language.

Proverbs also serve as discreet social instruments that assist in the resolution of conflicts and the preservation of harmony within groups. Holmes (2008) observes that proverbs can be used to indirectly address sensitive issues, enabling speakers to provide advice or criticism in a socially acceptable manner. This indirectness serves to maintain one's dignity and prevents an open confrontation.

In intercultural settings, the effective comprehension and application of proverbs can lead to more seamless interactions and a reduction in misunderstandings (Taguchi, 2009). Nevertheless, the misuse or ignorance of culturally significant proverbs may impede social integration and the establishment of trust (Kuiper et al., 2009).

Methodology. In order to investigate the role of proverbs as social adhesive within and between cultural groups, this investigation implemented a qualitative research design that included semi-structured interviews and discourse analysis. To capture complex, context-sensitive data about language use, social identity, and cultural practices that quantitative approaches may neglect, qualitative methods were selected (Creswell, 2014).

Data was collected from three culturally distinct communities: Uzbek, African (specifically Zulu-speaking), and American English-speaking groups. The purpose of selecting these groups was to offer a comparative perspective on the use of proverbs as a method of promoting social connection. For Uzbek participants, fieldwork was conducted in community centers, university settings, and informal social gatherings within the Fergana Valley region. For African and American participants, fieldwork was conducted through collaboration with partner researchers overseas.

The study comprised 58 participants, with approximately 18–20 individuals from each cultural

group, and varied in age from 20 to 35 years. The participants were selected through purposive sampling, which was based on their cultural heritage, fluency in their respective languages, and regular participation in community or social activities where proverb use was prevalent.

The participants consisted of community elders, educators, and pupils who were recognized for their active involvement in cultural transmission. Confidentiality was preserved through anonymization, and all participants provided informed consent.

Data collection. Two primary techniques were employed to collect data:

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant, with each interview lasting between 30 and 45 minutes. Participants' perceptions of the role of proverbs in community bonding, their experiences with proverb use in social interactions, and examples of proverbs that hold particular social significance were the primary focus of the interview guide.

Discourse Analysis: Participants' consent was obtained to collect audio recordings and transcripts of conversations, storytelling sessions, and community meetings that occurred spontaneously. These recordings offered genuine illustrations of the application of proverbs in social settings.

Data Analysis. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Patterns and themes associated with the social functions of proverbs, such as manifestations of identity, conflict resolution, and communal values, were identified through the repetitive review of transcripts and field notes.

Themes were organized and cross-cultural comparisons were supported through the use of qualitative data analysis software (NVivo 12) and manual coding. Themes were subsequently interpreted in the context of social identity theory and prior research on proverbs.

The pertinent institutional review bodies granted ethical approval to the investigation. Participants were apprised of the research objectives, their right to withdraw at any time, and the precautionary measures implemented to maintain confidentiality. During the data collection process, cultural sensitivity was prioritized in accordance with local customs and language preferences.

Although the comparative nature of the study was enriching, it presented challenges, such as distinctions in language, cultural norms, and data access. Although the sample size is sufficient for qualitative analysis, it restricts generalizability. Furthermore, the observer's presence may have prevented the capturing of certain proverb uses, and the reliance on self-reported data may have introduced bias.

Results. The examination of interview transcripts and recorded social interactions uncovered numerous prominent themes that illustrate the role of proverbs as social adhesive in the cultural contexts of Uzbekistan, Africa (Zulu), and the United States. The results underscore the importance of proverbs in the promotion of communal connection, the reinforcement of shared identity, and the preservation of social harmony. Three primary themes were identified: (1) Proverbs as Expressions of Collective Identity, (2) Proverbs in Social Interaction and Conflict Resolution, and (3) Cross-Cultural Variations and Commonalities in Proverb Use.

Proverbs as Expressions of Collective Identity

Proverbs were consistently employed to affirm and reinforce shared values and norms that define group identity across all three cultural groups. The participants described how the use of culturally familiar proverbs served as a means of signaling belonging and evoking communal wisdom.

Uzbek Participants: The significance of collective contribution and unity was underscored by proverbs such as "Bir don danga teng" ("One grain is equal to a thousand"), which are associated with respect for elders and community cooperation. According to one participant,

"When we employ these proverbs, we serve as a reminder that each individual's contribution is significant." It fosters a sense of intimacy between us.

Zulu Participants: Proverbs frequently reflected social hierarchy and respect, as evidenced by the phrase "Umntu ngumuntu ngabantu" ("A person is a person because of others"), which embodies the Ubuntu philosophy of interconnectedness.

American Participants: The squeaky wheel receives the grease and other common proverbs were used to emphasize the importance of assertiveness and initiative within their community, thereby illustrating cultural ideals and confirming in-group understanding.

These examples demonstrate the way in which proverbs serve as verbal emblems of cultural identity, indicating membership and shared belief systems.

The Use of Proverbs in Conflict Resolution and Social Interaction

Proverbs were frequently employed as an indirect method to address sensitive topics or alleviate tensions, thereby fostering social harmony. Participants reported that they used proverbs to provide guidance, resolve disputes, or reinforce social norms without engaging in direct conflict.

In order to discourage slander and promote discretion in group settings, the proverb "Og'iz uzoq, yo'l uzoq" ("A long mouth leads to a long journey") was employed in Uzbek focus groups.

Zulu elders described employing proverbs during community meetings to delicately rectify behavior, utilizing culturally respected sayings to maintain order and respect.

For instance, American participants referenced the proverb "Don't count your chickens before they hatch" to moderate unrealistic expectations and humorously diffuse conflicts among friends.

This pragmatic application of proverbs illustrates their function as instruments for cultivating comprehension and preserving interpersonal equilibrium.

Commonalities and Cross-Cultural Variations in Proverb Use

Although the content and thematic focus of proverbs varied across cultures, several common patterns emerged:

Shared Purposes: Proverbs were employed by all organizations to establish rapport, impart values, and express collective wisdom.

Situational Use: Proverbs were primarily employed in informal contexts, such as family gatherings, community events, and casual conversations, emphasizing their function in ordinary social connection rather than formal discourse.

Adaptation and Creativity: In an effort to preserve the relevance of traditional proverbs, certain participants reported incorporating contemporary language or humor. This demonstrates a dynamic and evolving application.

Cross-Cultural Communication Challenges: The necessity of contextual awareness was underscored by the occurrence of misunderstandings when proverbs were translated literally or when interlocutors lacked a shared cultural background.

Discussion. Proverbs' function as instruments of social cohesion and common identity across disparate cultural groups is substantiated by the findings of this research, which reaffirm their potent role as social adhesive. Participants from the Uzbek, Zulu, and American communities utilized proverbs to reaffirm communal norms and common values, thereby reinforcing their group identity, in accordance with Mieder's (2004) conceptualization of proverbs as channels of collective wisdom.

Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) is closely aligned with the manner in which proverbs function as verbal emblems of cultural identity. Individuals establish a sense of belonging and solidarity within their social groups by employing culturally specific proverbs, which also contributes to the preservation of group boundaries. This corroborates Wierzbicka's (2003) assertion that proverbs encode culturally specific worldviews that influence collective self-understanding.

The pragmatic application of proverbs for conflict resolution and indirect communication among the groups is consistent with Holmes' (2008) research on face-saving strategies. Proverbs allow speakers to address sensitive issues in a subtle and tactful manner, thereby preserving social harmony. This is notably apparent in the manner in which Uzbek and Zulu participants characterized the use of proverbs in community and familial settings to resolve disputes or modify behavior.

Furthermore, the study's observation of the dynamic adaptation of proverbs corroborates Agha's (2007) assertion that language practices are socially performed and constantly changing. The innovative integration of traditional sayings with contemporary language by participants demonstrates the continued relevance and functionality of proverbs in evolving social contexts.

The cross-cultural similarities in the use of proverbs, despite their varying thematic content, are consistent with Hrisztova-Gotthardt and Varga's (2015) assertion that proverbs universally serve as social bonding tools. Nevertheless, the obstacles encountered in cross-cultural communication are indicative of Kuiper et al. (2009)'s cautionary remarks regarding the potential for misinterpretation in the absence of shared cultural knowledge, which underscores the significance of pragmatic and intercultural competence.

In general, the results underscore the multifaceted nature of proverbs as social instruments that not only communicate wisdom but also actively establish and maintain social relationships. Proverbs confirm Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) theory that metaphorical language influences both cognition and social interaction by offering a shared linguistic repertoire that fosters empathy, understanding, and group cohesion.

This research has illustrated that proverbs serve as essential social adhesive among a variety of cultural groups, promoting social harmony, shared identity, and connection. Communities are equipped with a potent linguistic instrument to maintain mutual understanding, mediate social interactions, and affirm group membership through the use of proverbs, which serve as carriers of collective wisdom and cultural values. Proverbs' fundamental social function remains consistent, despite the cultural differences in their themes and expressions: to unite individuals through shared meanings and norms. The enduring relevance of proverbs in contemporary communication is further emphasized by their dynamic and adaptive nature. These discoveries contribute to our comprehension of the ways in which language practices support social cohesion and underscore the significance of fostering pragmatic and intercultural proficiency in societies that are becoming more globalized.

Recommendations For Future Researchers:

1. Conduct longitudinal studies to examine how proverb use evolves over time within

multicultural and digital communication contexts.

2. Investigate the role of nonverbal cues and paralinguistic features accompanying proverb use in social bonding.
3. Explore the impact of proverb misunderstanding on intercultural communication and develop strategies to mitigate such challenges.

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