



عدد خاص بعلم اللغة الاجتماعي

Special issue on sociolinguistics

مجلة كلية اللغات

Faculty of Languages Journal

مجلة علمية محكمة فصلية تصدر عن كلية اللغات جامعة طرابلس

**A Scientific Journal Issued by the Faculty of
Languages, University of Tripoli, Libya**

**Special issue
September 2023**

رقم الإيداع 167/ 2015 دار الكتب الوطنية بنغازي

ISSN : 2790-4016

Proverbs as a Socio-Linguistic Component of Language and Culture

Mohsen, Al-Hussein Saleem

English Language Department, Faculty of Arts, Al-Asmariya Islmaic University, Zliten

husseinmohsen@yahoo.co.uk

ABSTRACT

Proverbs are often metaphorical and belong to popular wisdom. They are used in situations that invite reflection and serve as rules of conduct or precepts. They are usually used in everyday spoken language and are related to such other forms of folkloric literature as riddles and fables that have originated in oral tradition. They are mostly expressed in simple grammar and vocabulary. Proverbs are as old as people and civilization, and that is why the study of proverbs is as old as history. Proverbs are short sentences expressing an experience or a truth based on common sense. They represent the public wisdom that is inherited from one generation to another. People short so that they can memorize them at different occasions. All cultures have their own proverbs. Actually, they reflect certain experience that they may contain vocabulary, which is special for a specific society. However, they may be shared and studied by specialists. The study recommends that proverbs be collected and studied academically for their importance. It also recommends including proverbs in school course-books.

الملخص

الأمثال غالبا ما تكون مجازية وهي تحمل خلاصة الحكمة الشعبية يتم استخدام الأمثال في مواقف تدعو إلى التفكير وهي تعمل كقواعد سلوك أو مبادئ. ومن المعتاد استخدام الأمثال في اللغة المحكية اليومية وترتبط بأشكال أخرى من الأدب الشعبي كالألغاز والحرفات التي نشأت في الموروث الشفوي. ويتم التعبير عنها في الغالب بمفردات بسيطة وضمن قواعد اللغة. الأمثال قديمة قدم الناس والحضارة، وهذا هو السبب في أن دراسة الأمثال قديمة قدم التاريخ. والأمثال هي جمل قصيرة تعبر عن تجربة أو حقيقة استنادا إلى الفطرة السليمة. والأمثال تمثل الحكمة العامة الموروثة بين الأجيال. ونظرا لقصرها يسهل حفظها على الناس في مناسبات مختلفة. جميع الثقافات لها أمثالها الخاصة. وهي، في الواقع، تعكس تجربة معينة قد تحتوي على مفردات خاصة بمجتمع معين. ومع ذلك، يمكن مشاركتها ودراستها من قبل المتخصصين. توصي الدراسة بجمع الأمثال ودراستها دراسة علمية رصينة، كما توصي بأن تشمل المقررات المدرسية الأمثال لتعريف الطلاب بها.

KEYWORDS: proverb, language, culture, literature, civilization, value

Introduction: What a Proverb is

A proverb seems to be difficult to be defined, but anyhow here is one of these definitions. However, Yusuf (as cited in Hoshan, 2021) defines proverb as "a term which refers to a short, repeated, witty statement of experience which is used to further social end." So, the term proverb describes any saying that any short saying that bears a wise saying and used frequently to send a message as a proverb.

The Britannica Dictionary (2023) defines proverb as: "a brief popular saying such as Too many cooks spoil the broth. that gives advice about how people should live or that expresses a belief that is generally thought to be true." Another definition of proverb provided by The Encyclopedia Britannica (2020) is that a proverb is a "succinct and pithy saying in general use, expressing commonly held ideas and beliefs." (Brittanica, 2020, Proverb).

Proverbs are short sentences expressing an experience or a truth based on common sense. They represent the public wisdom that is inherited from one generation to another. They are short so that they can memorized by people at different occasions. All cultures have their own proverbs. Actually, they reflect certain experience that they may contain vocabulary which is special for a specific society. In general, a proverb is a traditional saying. Examples for proverbs are: Beauty is only skin deep or You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink. (Literature and the Language Arts, Proverb, p. 951).

Proverbs are mostly considered as a part of every spoken part of language, as it is usually used in daily speeches to send some messages and to save both words and time. They are also related to different forms of literature as riddles and fables (The Encyclopedia Brittanica, 2020, Proverb.)

There is also another term for proverb which is aphorism. An aphorism is "a compact, condensed and epigrammatic style of writing that expresses an opinion or makes a statement of wisdom or truth." (Aphorism, 2023.) The study of aphorism provides "elegant confirmation of the aphorism that

cells that fire together, wire together.” (Cambridge Dictionary. Amorphism, 2023).

The Problem of the Study

This research studies why proverbs are paid attention in different cultures and what are their language and cultural features. Due to different reasons related to man and his long journeys or immigrations, proverbs are similar in meaning to each other. There are maybe some differences that relate to environment or any other factor, but human experiences are still similar.

Importance of Studying Proverbs

Linguistically, proverbs are often metaphorical and belong to popular wisdom. They are used in situations that invite reflection and serve as rules of conduct or precepts. Proverbs are usually used in everyday spoken language and are related to such other forms of folk literature as riddles and fables that have originated in oral tradition. They are mostly expressed in simple grammar and vocabulary. In English, the study of proverbs is called Paremiology which is originated in Greek as παροιμία (paroimía) i.e. proverb. Paremiology is a subfield of both philology and linguistics (Wikipedia, Paremiology, 2022).

Social Values of Proverbs

Proverbs are needed because they are ready block that express some idea. They are always are formed in a simple language and they are very rich in meaning. This is why they a great cultural part of language.

As proverbs are wise sayings and they reflect different experiences of life, which in fact provides a kind of advice top people, they reflect the values of the society; social, cultural and religious values. They make a kind of balance in daily life between the individual and his self, or between him and other people. Some of proverbs are extracted from religious maxims that people respect and believe in. proverbs can be a source of motivation for people to do things and to be inspired.

Many of them express advice for different contexts. In fact, their value for the listener or reader depends on the person who selects them and of course how he says them at the suitable time. One of the proverbs that can be used when facing a problem is “A stitch in time saves nine” which means that it is better to deal with a problem quickly before it gets worse, or “to say that it is better to fix a problem when it is small than to wait and let it become a bigger problem” (Webster, Proverb, 2023).

Proverbs are also used to encourage someone to get up early in the morning so that he can perform his tasks earlier; the expression that says: it is more blessed to get up early. البركة في البكور. as: The early bird catches/gets the worm. (Longman, Early bird, n.d.). Actually, proverbs are part of the oral tradition of many languages and cultures. As culture is generally either orally or through forms of literature like poetry, prose, etc., proverbs are often passed down from generation to generation through stories, songs, poems, and daily speeches.

In fact, a great part of proverbs reflects the morals and traditions of societies, they express several topics as friendship, money, etc.

Proverbs reflect Friendship

Social values cover many different types, such as familiar relations, friendship, loyalty, confidence, etc. The following proverbs are about friendship and how a friend must behave.

1. He's a good friend that speaks well of us behind our backs.
2. A good friend is my nearest relation.
3. Friends are the nearest relations

Proverbs Reflect Patience

Patience is a great value on different occasions, specially, when there is a case of loss or failure.

1. Patience is a plaster for all sores.

2. Everything comes to him who waits.

5. How old Proverbs are

Regarding the matter of how old proverbs are, it can be said that some of them have no known age, as they go back to the time of Greeks and Romans. However, in Arabic, many proverbs belong to the pre-Islamic period. Besides, the Glorious Quran itself contains a lot of proverbs which are called *amthal* أمثال in Arabic, which is similar to proverb or amorphism in English. One of the Quranic expression about proverbs is: **وَلِلَّهِ الْمَثَلُ الْأَعْلَىٰ** (Bees, Verse No. 60). In general, the Arabic word **مَثَلٌ** means to be similar. A good example of proverbs given by the Quran is the following: **مَثَلُ الَّذِينَ اتَّخَذُوا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ أَوْلِيَاءَ كَمَثَلِ الْعَنْكَبُوتِ اتَّخَذَتْ بَيْتًا وَإِنَّ أَوْهَنَ الْبُيُوتِ لَبَيْتُ الْعَنْكَبُوتِ لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ** (الْعَنْكَبُوتِ، الآية 41).

Proverbs and Some Phenomenon

Of course, as life is a string of events, proverbs may reflect these events. One of the great events that took place in the 19th century is the rise of mass printing. An example that pictures that interval is “Don’t judge a book by its cover”.

Significance of including Proverbs in Teaching Materials

For that proverbs represent a higher educational value, they have to be included in educational material for different levels of education. They can increase the vocabulary acquired by the learners and students as well. Of course, they increase the ability of communication for individuals.

At basic school, students learn the main skills; listening, speaking, reading and writing. Through the stories, they hear, they learn how to produce spoken responses; and through reading, they learn how to write and how to express themselves. These activities need to be taken with too much care in order to be developed. Proverbs present a good material for reading and listening. They enrich the mental store of vocabulary and their uses. As well as they can add ethical images (Ajoke; Hasan & Suleiman. 2015).

Vocabulary for Teaching and Education

There are many roles that proverbs play in different ways; in communication, learning and creativity. For language, proverbs can be useful for improving grammar, treasure of vocabulary and of course cultural knowledge. To know more proverbs, there are many publications in the form of books or online that present proverbs in the form of lists with their explanations and meanings and sometimes with a translation into another language.

Including Proverbs in Coursebooks

The other point about the significance of including this type of material in teaching is that they can develop the skills of writing and speaking; such as brevity in expression and making different images for the same proverb. Students can also learn about vocabulary, meanings, grammar, history of expressions, techniques of expressing the same idea in different ways (Methodological Importance, Proverbs, 2018).

Teaching this type of texts is very important for different levels of education mainly in basic schools both in Arabic and in English as a foreign language in Libya. In English, proverbs can be fed through stories, and they can English or Arabic source. Arabic proverbs can be translated into English so that cultural awareness about their language and culture is verified and increased (Alavinia and Enayati. 2023).

Comparisons of Proverbs

Comparison of proverbs in different languages, cultures and nations take place to show “that the same kernel of wisdom may be gleaned under different cultural conditions and languages” (Britannica, Proverb, 2020.)

Comparing proverbs from different cultures and nations may show the similarity and/or identity of proverbs. In general, people share a lot of matters and topics as human relations and natural phenomena. Actually, (proverbs have universal values as well as national values. The proverbs, especially about nature, have many common features with other proverbs in the world (Avşar, 2020).

Borrowing Proverbs between Cultures

Borrowing is a process that takes places between languages and cultures especially when there are common points and values to share. See the following two proverbs, which belong to two different religious cultures. The first; An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth belongs to Christian religion and it is thought to be extracted from the Bible, and the second; العين بالعين والسن بالسن belongs to Islamic religion, and it is thought to be extracted from the Quran.

Proverbs are often borrowed from similar languages and cultures, and sometimes come down to the present through more than one language. There are many expressions in The Holy Quran that have been in use. They have been used through Muslim countries, including the countries that Arabic is not their main language. Proverbs are also borrowed from famous authors or works, as the Shakesperean proverb: “To be or not to be, that is the question”, or that borrowed from Samuel Johnson: “The road to hell is paved with good intentions”.

Categories of Proverbs

Proverbs can be categorized in different way; historical, linguistics, content, etc. however, this needs to analyze proverbs in different ways, then they can be classified according to that analysis. This process needs a great effort to collect proverbs over centuries. They need to be classified to their grammatical structure and their themes, i.e. subject. Mostly, the subject in some cultures, reflects the nature of a proverbs, while other languages have different strategies for that process. Proverbs also can be classified how they look at certain issues in the society at a certain point of time (Lauhakangas, 2015).

Conclusions

Proverbs represent a great treasure of expressions and sayings that have accumulated over long periods. They represent the experiences of old generations. They also reflect various topics and themes of life. All nations

Special issue on sociolinguistics

feel proud of proverbs for they show their authenticity. Proverbs are also a part of literature, and they represent a great component of language.

From the point of language, Arabic proverbs can be classified into two classes; formal Arabic and local dialects. They can also be categorized according to their topics; religion, morality, patience, friendship, etc. Nations pay too much attention for their proverbs by collecting, and explaining them as well as translating them into different languages. For their great importance, proverbs have to be included in educational programs. Proverbs differ in their origins, some of them have their Biblical or Quranic roots as they reflect some religious values that relate to religious commandments.

Actually, proverbs are easy to remember for their simplicity, in their either vocabulary or grammatical structures.

Recommendations

Proverbs are short wise saying made over history by people who belong to different nations and cultures. They can be memorized. They express experiences of people and they seem to offer advice for matters that may rise at any time. They represent a precious treasure for nations and this motivates specialists to collect them, and analyze them, and to translate them into different languages. Many researches are conducted on proverbs to probe some facts about them.

Academics and students of languages and literature can perform their own researches on proverbs. Academies of Arabic language can conduct and finance long-term projects for the studying proverbs. Later, these proverbs will present a great achievement that can be honored for all who feel their significance. Today, in the time of Artificial Intelligence (AI), Arab proverbs can be collected from adults and different groups of people.

References

- Ajoke, A. Hasan, K & Suleiman, Y. (2015). Examining the Use of Proverbs in Teaching English as Second Language: An Implication for Secondary School Principals in Nigeria. *ELT VIBES: International E-Journal for Research in ELT.* 1(3), 14-28. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/282642590_Examining_the_Use_of_Proverbs_in_Teaching_English_as_Second_Language_An_Implication_for_Secondary_School_Principals_in_Nigeria [accessed Aug 14 2023].
- Alavinia, Parviz and Enayati, Bayez. (2023.) The study of the role of English proverbs in teaching social and cultural beliefs to the ESL students in Iranian high schools. https://www.academia.edu/14783366/The_study_of_the_role_of_English_proverbs_in_teaching_social_and_cultural_beliefs_to_the_ESL_students_in_Iranian_high_schools
- Avşar, Kamile Gülüm Zakir. (2020.) Comparison of Turkish and Native American Proverbs about Nature, *Milli Folklor.* pp. 175-183, <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/pub/millifolklor/issue/55811/574183>
- Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2020, March 26). proverb. *Encyclopedia Britannica.* <https://www.britannica.com/art/proverb>.
- Cambridge Dictionary. (2023.) Amorphism. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/aphorism>.
- English Literature.net. (2023.) Aphorism. <https://englishliterature.net/literary-devices/aphorism>.
- Hoshan, Ahmed Manea. (2021.) The Place of Proverbs in Linguistic Studies. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/350054883_The_Place_of_Proverbs_in_Linguistic_Studies.

Special issue on sociolinguistics

- Lauhakangas, Outi. (2015.) Introduction to Paremiology, Poland: De Gruyter Open. <https://doi.org/10.2478/9783110410167.3>)
- Literature and the Language Arts. Exploring Literature. (n.d.) Proverb. EMC Paradigm, p. 951.
- Longman. <https://www.ldoceonline.com/dictionary/the-early-bird-catches-the-worm>.
- Merriam-Webster. (2023.) <https://www.merriamwebster.com/dictionary/a%20stitch%20in%20time%20%28saves%20nine%29>.
- Methodological Importance of Proverbs To The Language Learners, <https://infourok.ru/metodological-importance-of-proverbs-to-te-language-learners-for-all-grades-1887976.html>.
- The Encyclopedia Britannica. (2020.) proverb. <https://www.britannica.com/art/proverb>.
- The Encyclopedia Britannica. (2023.) Proverb. <https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/proverb#:~:text=Britannica%20Dictionary%20definition%20of%20PROVERB,generally%20thought%20to%20be%20true>.
- The Independent, 2023. <https://theindependent.ca/commentary/analysis/archive-fever/dont-judge-a-book-by-its-cover/>
- Methodological Importance Of Proverbs To The Language Learners. (2018.) Proverbs. <https://infourok.ru/metodological-importance-of-proverbs-to-te-language-learners-for-all-grades-1887976.html>.
- Wikipedia. (2022.) Paremiology, 2022). [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paremiology#:~:text=Paremiology%20\(from%20Greek%20%CF%80%CE%B1%CF%81%CE%BF%CE%B9%CE%BC%CE%AF%CE%B1%20\(paroim%C3%ADa,study%20of%20par](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paremiology#:~:text=Paremiology%20(from%20Greek%20%CF%80%CE%B1%CF%81%CE%BF%CE%B9%CE%BC%CE%AF%CE%B1%20(paroim%C3%ADa,study%20of%20paroemias%20)oemias%20.

- المراجع العربية:

القرآن الكريم، العنكبوت، الآية 41.