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LINGUISTIC REPRESENTATION OF VALUES IN ENGLISH PROVERBS FROM A CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

This paper attempts to explore the social value implications of English proverbs, using cross-cultural methodology in comparison with Armenian proverbs. In this study, linguistic representations of basic cultural ideas, such as friendship, home, time, work, and hope, will be discussed. The primary aim of the paper is to see whether social ideologies are depicted in English proverbs and whether the social values expressed are universal or culture-specific.

The study employs a qualitative approach, combining elements of semantic, pragmatic, and discourse analysis to examine selected English proverbs alongside with their Armenian equivalents. As per the findings of this research, the English proverbs strongly stress issues of personal responsibility, proper time management, the importance of hard work, and the significance of trusting and being selective when making friends. At the same time, a number of these values such as the appreciation of home, the importance of hope, and the recognition of opportunity, are shown to be universal, as they are similarly reflected in Armenian proverbial traditions.

The findings suggest that proverbs function not only as linguistic units but also as carriers of cultural knowledge and social norms, shaping individuals' perceptions of reality and guiding behavior across generations.

Key words: proverbs; social values; linguistic representation;

semantic analysis; cross-cultural comparison; English proverbs; Armenian proverbs.

Introduction

Language is a dynamic means of conveying culture, history, and identity in addition to being a tool for communication. It is a well-known fact that language and culture are closely interconnected in many spheres, and from a linguistic point of view, one of the most expressive manifestations of this relationship is proverbs. Within the broad field of language, proverbs stand out as essential components with profound cultural, linguistic, and social value. These concise and structured expressions encapsulate collective experience, social norms, and cultural values, functioning as repositories of shared human wisdom. Frequently passed down through generations, they reflect a society's beliefs, experiences, and worldview, thereby serving as archives of collective memory and identity.

Proverbs originate from oral traditions rooted in everyday life and common human experiences. They contain the cumulative knowledge of generations, often conveying universal truths, moral guidance, and socially accepted patterns of behavior. Due to their brevity, figurative nature, and stylistic richness, including features such as metaphor, parallelism, and parataxis, proverbs are highly memorable and effective communicative tools. These linguistic characteristics allow them not only to preserve cultural knowledge but also to reinforce it across generations through everyday communication.

Proverbs are essential parts of the English language, shaping communication patterns, social norms, and cultural identity within English-speaking societies. They function not merely as linguistic units but also as cultural artifacts that represent a community's worldview. Beyond their literal or metaphorical meanings, proverbs serve as cultural identity markers that distinguish one language community from another, highlighting both shared human experiences and culture-specific interpretations of reality.

The study of proverbs has attracted considerable scholarly attention, with researchers examining their structural, semantic, and functional properties. Proverbs are often defined as fixed expressions with generalized meanings that reflect typical human situations and attitudes. At the same time, they provide valuable resources for cross-cultural analysis, as comparing proverbs across different languages allows researchers to identify both universal patterns and culture-specific differences in the conceptualization and expression of values.

Therefore, in the context of this study, proverbs are viewed not only as linguistic units but also as key carriers of cultural meaning. The analysis of their linguistic representation of values from a cross-cultural perspective enables a deeper understanding of how different societies encode, transmit, and preserve their cultural and moral systems through language.

Methods

The current research paper adopted a qualitative research methodological framework for analyzing social values embodied in English proverbs by taking into account the cross-cultural aspect of the phenomenon under analysis. The data included selected English proverbs on the following topics: friendship, home, time, work, and hope with Armenian equivalents.

Proverbs were classified by themes to define common value orientations. The semantic approach was utilized to explain the content and stylistic aspects of the proverbs. Besides, comparative analysis was employed in order to distinguish similarities and dissimilarities between English and Armenian proverbs. This approach made it possible to distinguish between universal values and culture-specific representations reflected in proverbial language.

The data sources were taken from lexicographical and academic works, including reputable dictionaries and anthologies of proverbs, such as the Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs. This ensured the authenticity and legitimacy of the linguistic data.

Results

The analysis of English proverbs demonstrates that they function as linguistic realizations of the specific ethnic group's cultural values, confirming the theoretical assumption that proverbs serve as repositories of social norms and collective experience. In line with the concept of proverbiality and the presence of semantic and pragmatic markers, the selected proverbs reveal how values are encoded through concise, structured, and often figurative expressions.

One of the most prominent values reflected in English proverbs is the concept of **friendship**. The analysis shows that English culture places strong emphasis on equality and the possibility of forming social bonds with a wide range of individuals. This is consistent with the pragmatic function of proverbs as **normative and evaluative tools**, guiding interpersonal behavior. However, the data also reveal a certain degree of selectivity in defining a “good friend.” This value is linguistically realized through proverbs such as “He is a good friend that speaks well of us behind our backs” and “False friends are worse than open enemies,” where **antithetical structures** and evaluative oppositions reinforce the moral distinction between true and false friendship. Furthermore, the proverb “A friend at hand is better than a relative at a distance” illustrates the use of **comparative parallelism**, highlighting the cultural prioritization of emotional proximity over biological ties. These findings confirm that proverbs not only reflect social values but also structure them through recognizable rhetorical and syntactic patterns discussed in the theoretical framework. The same can be found in the Armenian proverbial discourse for example «Հացդ տաշտիցդ վե կալ, ընկերը գեղիցդ» (Take your bread from your trough, but your friend from your village) which puts emphasis on the importance of choosing friends from one's close social environment,

reflecting the cultural value of trust, familiarity, and social proximity in interpersonal relations. These findings confirm that proverbs not only reflect social values but also structure them through recognizable rhetorical and syntactic patterns discussed in the theoretical framework.

Another significant value identified in the analysis is the concept of **home**, which is represented as a place of safety, comfort, and emotional security. The proverb “There is no place like home” exemplifies the use of **absolute and hyperbolic expression**, reinforcing the idea of the home as an irreplaceable space. From a cross-cultural perspective, this value appears to be universal, as evidenced by its direct equivalent in Armenian: «Տնից լավ տեղ չկա». The semantic equivalence between these proverbs supports the theoretical claim that certain values transcend cultural boundaries, even when expressed in different linguistic forms.

The analysis further reveals that **time** is conceptualized as one of the central values in English culture. Proverbs such as “Time is the soul of business” and “The early bird catches the worm” demonstrate the metaphorical and pragmatic framing of time as a valuable and limited resource. In accordance with Conceptual Metaphor Theory, these expressions reflect an underlying conceptual metaphor in which time is treated as something that can be used, managed, or lost. This is further reinforced by cross-cultural parallels such as «Ժամանակը ոսկի է» (Time is money) indicating that the conceptualization of time as a valuable commodity is not culture-specific but rather universal. Additionally, proverbs such as “Opportunities neglected can never be recovered” reveal a strong emphasis on individual responsibility and the importance of seizing opportunities, which aligns with the pragmatic function of proverbs as **behavior-regulating mechanisms**.

Closely related to this is the value of **hard work**, which occupies a central position in English proverbial discourse. The proverbs “No pain, no gain,” “No sweet without some sweat,” and “Diligence is the mother of good luck” demonstrate the use of **parataxis and cause-effect relationships**, as discussed in the theoretical section. These structures reinforce the idea that effort and reward are intrinsically linked. The recurrence of similar meanings in Armenian proverbs such as «Ով աշխատի՝ նա կուտի» and «Ով ալարի՝ ոչ դալարի» further confirms the universality of this value. From a pragmatic perspective, these proverbs function as **didactic tools**, encouraging individuals to internalize the principle that success is achieved through personal effort.

Finally, the analysis of proverbs related to **hope** reveals a more complex and even contradictory value system. On the one hand, proverbs such as “While there is life, there is hope” and “Hope is life” promote optimism and resilience, functioning as **encouraging and motivational statements**. On the other hand, proverbs like “Too much hope deceives” and “Hope is a good breakfast but a bad supper” introduce a critical perspective, warning against excessive reliance on hope without action. This duality reflects the pragmatic flexibility of proverbs, which can convey both encouragement and caution depending on the

communicative context. The presence of similar ideas in Armenian proverbs like «Լույսը կբացվի, բարին հետը» and «Գիշեր չի եղել, որ չի լուսացել» which further supports the claim that hope, as a cultural value, is widely shared across different linguistic communities.

Thus, the findings confirm that proverbs are not merely fixed expressions, but **structured linguistic units shaped by discourse, semantic, and pragmatic features**, as outlined in the theoretical framework. Their use of parallelism, metaphor, parataxis, and evaluative language enables them to effectively encode and transmit social values. Moreover, the cross-cultural comparison demonstrates that while certain values are universal, their linguistic realization may vary, reflecting both shared human experience and culture-specific perspectives.

Discussion

Proverbs are condensed phrases which embody the collective experiences, moral advice, and sanctioned behavioral practices of a society. The study of paremiology studies proverbs in terms of their semantic value and pragmatic role since they convey general wisdom or advice on one hand and act as evaluation tools in communication on the other (Paczolay, 1997). The meaning of proverbs can be expressed explicitly and implicitly and their long use in language communities highlights their significance in the preservation of culture (Mieder, 2004; Lee & Davidson, 2023, pp. 122–135). The theoretical approach adopted for the purpose of this research incorporates the semiotic, pragmatic and discourse analytic approaches. The semiotic theory sees proverbs as representations of culturally significant concepts such as friendship, home, time, work and hope. Semantic repetitions highlight both universals in cross-cultural terms as well as specific cultural perspectives in terms of the value system. There are some value systems which are seen as universal in nature like the idea of the home as a place of refuge, and time as a valuable commodity whereas others are dependent on social and historical context (Aijmer, 2002; Bronner, 2007). Pragmatics focuses on the proverb as a contextualized linguistic expression in which the act of speech is influenced by the intentions of the speaker as well as the situation (Norrick, 1985; Leech, 1983).

Another important concept underlying this research is proverbiality, which refers to all linguistic and stylistic features that make it possible for one to recognize a particular expression as a proverb. Taking into account Taylor's (1931) definition of proverbiality as the quality of being recognizable within communities due to a particular combination of characteristics, further theoretical considerations have resulted in operationalization of the phenomenon with regard to such parameters as fixedness, formulaicity, metaphoricality, and rhetorical compactness (Mieder, 2023, pp. 267–272).

The role of figurative language in the encoding and transfer of cultural values is very significant. Proverbs are frequently created through the use of metaphors, metonymies, paradoxes, and symbolism to enrich meanings at an allegorical level

and link social ideas with physical reality (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). Metaphors of concepts like TIME IS A RESOURCE and LIFE IS A JOURNEY provide a framework through which community-level concepts of abstract notions can be framed and proverbial statements formed (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). In other words stylistic devices explain how proverbs encode and transmit values effectively. Parallelism and antithesis heighten memorability and moral salience by creating balanced, oppositional structures that foreground evaluative judgments. Parataxis and cause-effect constructions reinforce normative claims about effort and reward. Together, these devices contribute to proverbiality making expressions compact, memorable, and pragmatically flexible as tools for advice, sanction, or encouragement (Norrick, 1985; Mieder, 2004).

Proverbial pragmatic functions include evaluative, instructional, advisory, motivational, and social-regulative roles. They operate as behavioral tools to influence social behavior and interactions by creating social and cultural norms; the effectiveness of such pragmatic use depends on situational variables like the status of the speaker, types of interlocutor relations, and communicative intentions (Leech, 1983; Norrick, 1985). From a discourse perspective, it is argued that proverb use should not be seen only from a linguistic angle but as part of a larger discourse practice reflective of ideologies (Fairclough, 2010).

From a cross-cultural perspective, proverbs serve as highly condensed linguistic vehicles for the transmission of social values across different speech communities. They function as culturally shared evaluative templates through which societies encode and negotiate fundamental concepts such as trust, responsibility, interpersonal relations, and moral conduct. The comparative analysis of English and Armenian proverbs demonstrates that, despite differences in linguistic form and imagery, many underlying value orientations show significant convergence, particularly in relation to universal domains such as home, hope, and the perception of time as a valuable resource. At the same time, culture-specific tendencies are also evident, especially in the conceptualization of social relationships, where English proverbs tend to emphasize individual judgment and evaluative distinction between “true” and “false” friendship, while Armenian proverbial discourse more strongly foregrounds proximity, familiarity, and communal belonging. This interaction between universality and cultural specificity highlights the role of proverbs as pragmatic tools of socialization that not only reflect but also actively shape culturally shared norms and expectations in cross-cultural communication.

Methodological consequences can be drawn from such theoretical synthesis. The comparative study of proverbs calls for consideration of (a) semiotic field concepts, (b) pragmatic context and communicative function, and (c) textual properties supporting the proverbial style (such as opposition and parallelism).

Therefore, proverbs represent complex socio-cultural constructs containing collective wisdom, cultural values, and facilitating cultural communication. A theory that incorporates semantic, pragmatic, and discourse approaches with

respect to proverbiality and conceptual metaphor will serve as an effective platform to understand the role of proverbs in representing and influencing social values.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research shows how English proverbs represent an invaluable linguistic resource, embodying the wisdom of society, its collective experience, and values. The use of semantic, pragmatic, and comparative approaches in analyzing English and Armenian proverbs reveals that the latter not only act as linguistic constructions but also shape behaviors.

The findings show that friendship, home, time, work, and hope constitute key thematic areas of English proverbs, with special attention to self-responsibility, hard work, time, and selectivity of interpersonal trust. Moreover, cross-cultural comparisons reveal high similarities in the cultural values between the two nations in the thematic areas of family, work, and hope. These stylistic features, such as metaphorical expressions, parallel structures, paratactic sentences, and evaluative opposites, strengthen the proverbial nature of proverbs, making them unforgettable and powerful tools for cultural communication, moral teaching, and social control. The research contributes to comparative linguistics by demonstrating the usefulness of proverbs in exploring the connections between language, culture, and values.

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*Եվրասիա միջազգային համալսարանի լեզուների, հաղորդակցության
և մանկավարժության ամբիոնի վարիչ,
քանասիրական գիտությունների թեկնածու
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ԱՐԺԵՔՆԵՐԻ ԼԵԶՎԱԿԱՆ ՆԵՐԿԱՅԱՅՈՒՄԸ ԱՆԳԼԵՐԵՆ ԱՍԱԳՎԱԾՔՆԵՐՈՒՄ ՄԻՋՄՇԱԿՈՒԹԱՅԻՆ ՏԵՍԱՆԿՑՈՒՆԻՑ

Սույն հոդվածն ուսումնասիրում է անգլերեն ասացվածքներում արտահայտված սոցիալական արժեքները՝ միջմշակութային համատեքստում և դրանք համեմատելով հայերեն ասացվածքների հետ: Հետազոտության ընթացքում դիտարկվել են հիմնական մշակութային գաղափարների լեզվական ներկայացումները, ինչպիսիք են՝ ընկերությունը, տունը, ժամանակը, աշխատանքը և հույսը: Աշխատանքի հիմնական նպատակն է պարզել, թե արդյոք սոցիալական գաղափարախոսությունները արտացոլվում են անգլերեն ասացվածքներում և արդյոք արտահայտված սոցիալական արժեքները համընդհանուր են, թե բնորոշ են կոնկրետ մշակույթին:

Հետազոտության մեջ կիրառվել է որակական մոտեցում՝ համադրելով իմաստաբանական, գործաբանական և խոսույթային վերլուծության տարրեր՝ կոնկրետ անգլերեն ասացվածքների ուսումնասիրության համար՝ դրանց հայերեն համարժեքների հետ միասին: Հետազոտության արդյունքների համաձայն՝ անգլերեն ասացվածքներն ընդգծում են անձնական պատասխանատվության, ժամանակի ճիշտ կառավարման, աշխատասիրության կարևորության, ինչպես նաև ընկերներ ընտրելիս վստահության և ընտրողականության նշանակությունը: Միևնույն ժամանակ, այս արժեքներից մի մասը, ինչպիսիք են տան (օջախի) արժեքը, հույսի կարևորությունը և հնարավորությունների ծանաչումը, համարվում են համընդհանուր, քանի որ դրանք նույն կերպ են արտահայտվում նաև հայ ժողովրդական առածներում:

Հետազոտության արդյունքները ցույց են տալիս, որ ասացվածքները գործում են ոչ միայն որպես լեզվական միավորներ, այլ նաև որպես մշակութային գիտելիքի և սոցիալական նորմերի կրողներ՝ ձևավորելով անհատների իրականության ընկալումը և ուղղորդելով վարքագիծը սերունդների ընթացքում:

Հիմնաբառեր. ասացվածքներ; սոցիալական արժեքներ; լեզվական ներկայացում; իմաստաբանական վերլուծություն; միջմշակութային համեմատություն; անգլերեն ասացվածքներ; հայերեն ասացվածքներ:

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ЯЗЫКОВОЕ ПРЕДСТАВЛЕНИЕ ЦЕННОСТЕЙ В АНГЛИЙСКИХ ПОСЛОВИЦАХ В МЕЖКУЛЬТУРНОЙ ПЕРСПЕКТИВЕ

В данной работе предпринята попытка исследовать социальные ценности английских пословиц, используя межкультурную методологию в сравнении с армянскими пословицами. В этом исследовании будут рассмотрены лингвистические представления основных культурных идей, таких как дружба, дом, время, работа и надежда. Основная цель работы — выяснить, отражаются ли социальные идеологии в английских пословицах и являются ли выраженные социальные ценности универсальными или специфичными для конкретной культуры.

В исследовании используется качественный подход, сочетающий элементы семантического, прагматического и дискурсивного анализа для изучения выбранных английских пословиц наряду с их армянскими эквивалентами. Согласно результатам исследования, английские пословицы сильно подчеркивают вопросы личной ответственности, правильного управления временем, важности усердной работы и значимости доверия и избирательности при выборе друзей. В то же время некоторые из этих ценностей, таких как ценность дома, важность надежды и признание возможностей, оказываются универсальными, поскольку они аналогичным образом отражены в армянских пословицах.

Результаты исследования показывают, что пословицы функционируют не только как языковые единицы, но и как носители культурных знаний и социальных норм, формируя восприятие реальности отдельными людьми и направляя поведение из поколения в поколение.

Ключевые слова: пословицы; социальные ценности; лингвистическое представление; семантический анализ; межкультурное сравнение; английские пословицы; армянские пословицы.

Հոդվածը խմբագրություն է ներկայացվել՝ 2026թ. ապրիլի 2-ին:

Հոդվածը հանձնվել է գրախոսման՝ 2026թ. ապրիլի 5-ին:

Հոդվածն ընդունվել է տպագրության՝ 2026թ. ապրիլի 29-ին: