

**PROVERBS IN ACTION: ANALYZING REAL-LIFE EXAMPLES OF HOW WISE SAYINGS SHAPE OUR INTERACTIONS***Axmedov Ikboljon**English language teacher, Kokand University,**[ikboljonahmedov88@gmail.com](mailto:ikboljonahmedov88@gmail.com)*

**Abstract.** Proverbs, which are frequently considered traditional expressions of folk wisdom, continue to have a significant impact on modern spoken discourse. This study examines the strategic application of proverbs in authentic communicative situations, including political speeches, business negotiations, and family conversations. The research utilizes a qualitative multiple case study design and includes 45 participants, as well as speech transcripts, recorded meetings, and natural family interactions. Thematic discourse analysis demonstrated that proverbs fulfill critical pragmatic functions, including the simplification of intricate concepts, the mitigation of conflict, the assertion of authority, and the reinforcement of shared cultural values. Proverbs were employed by politicians to legitimize their messages and unite audiences, by business leaders to mitigate disagreement and frame uncertainty, and by family elders to manage conflict and maintain harmony. The results corroborate prior research on the pragmatic and symbolic influence of proverbs (e.g., Wierzbicka, 2003; Mieder, 2004) while also providing novel insights into their function as culturally embedded instruments of social navigation, alignment, and persuasion. This study underscores the enduring relevance of proverbs in contemporary discourse and suggests that they have the potential to be a fertile area for further investigation in applied linguistics and intercultural communication.

**Keywords:** Proverbs; Pragmatic Strategies; Political Discourse; Business Communication; Family Interaction; Cultural Values; Case Study; Sociolinguistics; Figurative Language; Discourse Analysis

**Introduction.** Language is not merely a means of exchanging information; it is profoundly ingrained in social interaction, identity, and culture. Proverbs are a particularly complex, multifunctional, and enduring form of linguistic expression that bridges language and culture. Proverbs are succinct, metaphorical expressions that are handed down through generations and contain traditional wisdom and collective experience. Although they are frequently perceived as poetic or folkloric expressions, their real-time role in everyday communication has been relatively understudied in research. This study fills that void by investigating the manner in which proverbs are employed in live social interactions, including political speeches, business negotiations, and family disputes, to accomplish a variety of communicative objectives, including consensus building, conflict resolution, and persuasion.

Proverbs are ubiquitous in human discourse, transcending cultural and linguistic barriers. Their role in the socialization of individuals and the preservation of communal values is crucial, ranging from African storytelling traditions and Middle Eastern oral histories to Western aphorisms and Asian moral teachings (Mieder, 2004; Finnegan, 1992). They are culturally significant and highly practicable for use in nuanced social situations due to the moral codes, social expectations, and historical knowledge that are embedded within them.

While the symbolic and literary functions of proverbs have been extensively discussed, there is a dearth of research on their pragmatic and strategic use, which refers to the intentional deployment of proverbs to manage delicate interactions or influence others. The significance of contextualizing language analysis, particularly when scrutinizing culturally charged expressions such as proverbs, has been underscored by Wierzbicka (2003), Holmes (2008), and Lakoff and Johnson (1980). This study builds upon their work.

Public and private communication has become increasingly strategic, persuasive, and performance-oriented in the current globalized and media-saturated world. Political leaders frequently employ national proverbs to appeal to heritage and unity; business leaders employ wise proverbs to direct decision-making or mitigate criticism; and family elders frequently rely on culturally rich proverbs to discipline, advise, or mediate. These are not arbitrary applications; they are indicative of a profound comprehension of the capacity of culturally transmitted speech to establish credibility, avoid confrontation, or coordinate with an audience.

The examination of such usage enables us to perceive proverbs as instruments for action, rather than merely passive carriers of tradition. In situations where tone, force, and subtlety are critical, they are mobilized. Consequently, comprehending their application in real-world scenarios provides practical insights into the fields of applied linguistics, intercultural communication, leadership studies, and even conflict resolution.

Proverbs are frequently disregarded in research on real-world communication, particularly in contexts beyond the classroom or folklore collections, despite their widespread use. The majority of the existing research regards them as static cultural texts, with less emphasis on their strategic and dynamic use in natural speech. Additionally, the majority of research does not provide comparative insights into the ways in which proverbs operate in various social domains, such as politics, business, and family life, where the communicative objectives and power dynamics are highly variable.

The objective of this study is to examine the manner in which proverbs are employed in specific real-world interactions to attain communicative objectives. The research will present case studies that are derived from political discourse, professional contexts, and familial interactions. It will concentrate on the manner in which presenters select, structure, and deliver proverbs to persuade, guide, align, or rectify within their immediate social context.

The following are the specific objectives:

To provide real-world examples of the use of proverbs in speech and discourse

Analyze the functions of proverbs in relation to the speaker's objectives and the audience's interpretation

To evaluate the strategic application of proverbs in various contexts, including politics, business, and family life

To investigate the impact and meaning of proverbs in relation to their cultural, relational, and affective contexts

The subsequent inquiries serve as direction for the investigation:

1. In which real-world situations are proverbs employed most frequently and strategically?
2. What are the communicative functions of proverbs in family, business, and political contexts?
3. In what ways does the context—social, cultural, and relational—influence the interpretation and reception of a proverb?
4. Across various domains, what trends are observed in the application of proverbs as rhetorical or interpersonal instruments?

This qualitative investigation concentrates on a limited number of purposively chosen case studies that pertain to English-language proverbs that are employed in three distinct domains. The primary constraint is its lack of generalizability; these case studies provide depth rather than scope. Furthermore, although the primary emphasis is on English, certain examples may incorporate translated or culturally specific proverbs from Uzbek or other traditions to enhance the analysis. The primary sources of data are audio/video recordings, transcripts, and interviews. Subjective bias may be introduced by participant recall or interpretation.

However, the study's real-world foundation is its greatest asset. By emphasizing concrete speech events rather than abstract definitions, it provides a more detailed examination of the functional aspect of proverbial language—the manner in which individuals employ these expressions to accomplish tasks during discourse.

Literature Review. Historically, proverbs have been investigated as succinct expressions of collective wisdom. A proverb is defined by Mieder (2004) as "a short, generally known sentence of the folk that contains wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed, and easily memorable form." According to this perspective, proverbs are cultural artifacts that remain static. Nevertheless, more recent scholarship has underscored their pragmatic, context-sensitive, and dynamic functions (Holmes, 2008; Wierzbicka, 2003).

Wierzbicka (2003) contends that proverbs are culturally charged and reflect "ways of speaking" that are consistent with the underlying norms, values, and communication patterns of a society. Proverbs are not solely "what is said," but rather "how something is said" to accomplish specific effects, such as persuasion, correction, solidarity, or mitigating criticism, in pragmatic terms. Holmes (2008) characterizes proverbs as indirect strategies that enable speakers to communicate sensitive messages or social expectations while maintaining decorum and appearance.

Proverbs have been employed in political communication for a long time to establish an ethos, establish a connection with the public, and substantiate decisions. Political discourse is a natural context for the use of proverbs, as it is extremely strategic and symbolic, as per Chilton and Schäffner (2002). Proverbs are employed by leaders to convey moral authority, cultural connectedness, and wisdom.

For instance, African leaders frequently cite traditional proverbs in their public speeches to establish legitimacy and align their messages with communal values (Obeng, 1997). In American politics, individuals such as Barack Obama and Ronald Reagan have employed

proverbs such as "If it ain't broke, don't fix it" or "A house divided against itself cannot stand" to establish arguments in a familiar, resonant language.

Kalmár (2016) conducted research that revealed that political leaders from various cultures adopt proverbs to convey a profound comprehension of national identity, experience, and solidarity. The selection of a proverb, as well as the timing and manner in which it is employed, can serve to structure a narrative, deflect criticism, or invoke a shared emotional heritage.

Proverbs serve a more tactical and diplomatic function in professional and business contexts. Holmes and Stubbe (2003) and Gumperz (1982) stress that professional discourse is influenced by negotiation, power dynamics, and face concerns. In these contexts, proverbs are frequently employed to foster collaboration, formulate a proposal, or mitigate disagreement.

For example, proverbs such as "The customer is always right" or "Don't put all your eggs in one basket" are employed to subtly reinforce company values or strategic thinking. Culturally specific proverbs have the potential to both bridge and create gaps in communication during intercultural negotiations. Effective intercultural communicators frequently employ shared metaphors and idioms to establish trust, as per Gudykunst and Kim (2003). Proverbs may be perceived as patronizing or excessively moralistic when they are misused, resulting in confusion (Taguchi, 2009).

Proverbs were employed in Finnish business meetings as both rhetorical reinforcement of caution, forbearance, and long-term thinking and as a form of humor, according to a study conducted by Poutiainen (2009) about the subject. These functions frequently enabled managers to communicate challenging information in a manner that was perceived as less severe.

Proverbs are employed in family and intergenerational communication to impart values, advise, and discipline. In numerous cultures, elders employ proverbs as a method of communicating with authority without engaging in direct confrontation, thereby influencing their younger family members in emotionally charged situations (Finnegan, 1992).

Research conducted in African and Asian households indicates that proverbs are frequently employed in family disputes to restore tradition or to mitigate conflict (Mkhize, 2004; Wierzbicka, 2003). For instance, the employ of phrases such as "Spare the rod and spoil the child" or "What you sow is what you reap" is not solely for the purpose of moral instruction; it also serves to appeal to societal notions of justice and discipline.

The affective resonance of proverbs in family contexts is often accompanied by the voices of community elders, grandparents, or parents. This increases their authority and renders them persuasive in the face of tension or rebellion (Tannen, 1989).

Proverbs are utilized as strategic discourse devices in these domains: politics, business, and family. The effectiveness of proverbs is elucidated by Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory, which posits that they organize experience through metaphor, enabling speakers to articulate ideas in a manner that is intuitive and memorable. Proverbs reduce complexity and enhance the rhetorical impact of the speaker by appealing to shared schemas.

Agha (2007) further posits that the use of proverbs is a form of "social performance," in which speakers not only reference tradition to inform but also to establish a social position. Selecting the appropriate proverb at the appropriate moment indicates a profound comprehension of the interactional context, authority, and social competence.

**Methodology.** In order to investigate the strategic application of proverbs in authentic communicative contexts, this investigation implemented a qualitative multiple case study methodology. Case studies are particularly well-suited for the examination of language in use, as they enable the in-depth examination of real-life events within their social and cultural contexts (Yin, 2018). This design allowed the researcher to investigate the practical application of proverbs in domestic, professional, and political discourse, rather than merely in theory.

The analysis was interpretive, with an emphasis on the pragmatic objectives, social responsibilities, and cultural connotations associated with the use of proverbs in each instance. This method is consistent with the ethnographic traditions and discourse analysis of sociolinguistics (Gumperz, 1982; Holmes, 2008).

The research examined three contexts in which the use of proverbs is strategically and socially significant:

**Political discourse:** Televised debates and recorded speeches from national and local political figures, primarily in Uzbekistan and English-speaking countries (e.g., the United States and the United Kingdom).

**Audio-recorded or transcribed internal business meetings and negotiations from Fergana Valley corporations, as well as global corporate training materials, are examples of business communication.**

**Family interaction:** Semi-structured interviews and observed conversations within multigenerational Uzbek households, with subsequent clarification of the intent and interpretation of proverbs.

The study included a total of 45 participants, who were selected through purposive sampling to ensure that the data was relevant and context-rich. The group comprised the following:

10 political figures or speechwriters (through public domain recordings and transcripts)

Fifteen business professionals from a variety of sectors, ranging from mid-level to senior-level

20 family members (aged 19–70) from four extended Uzbek families, including elders who are recognized for their frequent use of proverbs

Three principal sources of data were utilized:

**Speech Transcripts and Recordings:** Public speeches, debates, and press briefings in which proverbs were employed (or misapplied) were transcribed and annotated for context.

Audio Recordings of Business Meetings: Short segments of meetings (20–30 minutes) were recorded with permission. Participants were advised to participate in a relaxed manner and were provided with a post-recording debriefing to provide an explanation of their proverbial usage, if applicable.

Natural Conversations and Semi-Structured Interviews: Family interactions were recorded in informal contexts, such as storytelling sessions or meals. Interview queries investigated the reasons and timing of family members' use of proverbs, their interpretations, and the typical responses of others.

Thematic discourse analysis was implemented to analyze the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The transcripts were coded for the following purposes:

Type and provenance of the proverb (local versus global, religious versus secular)

Speaker intention (e.g., assert authority, mitigate conflict, advise, persuade)

Audience response (agreement, resistance, hilarity, stillness, compliance)

Interactional consequence (Did the proverb assist in the resolution of a problem, the alteration of tone, or the modification of a decision?)

The categorization and cross-comparison of motifs across the three domains were facilitated by the NVivo software.

The capacity to generalize the results of this study is restricted by its emphasis on a limited, non-random sample of high-context interactions. Furthermore, the interpretation of proverbs may differ, particularly across cultural boundaries, due to the fact that their meaning is frequently context-dependent and subjective. During recall-based interviews, certain participants may have embellished or adapted their accounts. Lastly, the investigation exclusively examined the use of spoken proverbs, disregarding written discourse or social media, which may exhibit substantial variations.

**Results.** Proverbs are not only conventional expressions of wisdom, but also strategically deployed discourse tools, as evidenced by the analysis of real-life interactions. In the three case domains—political speeches, business negotiations, and family discussions—proverbs were employed to reinforce values, mitigate conflict, develop rapport, and persuade. This section provides thematic insights and illustrative examples from each setting.

#### Proverbs in Political Discourse: Uniting Audiences and Legitimizing Authority

Proverbs were most frequently employed in political contexts to simplify complex policies, appeal to shared cultural identity, and establish moral authority.

Example 1: During a campaign speech, a local Uzbek politician declared, "Ko'p so'z – ko'p xatolik." ("An excessive number of words results in numerous mistakes.")

He employed this proverb to critique his opponent's lengthy discourse while simultaneously portraying himself as succinct and reliable. Audience members responded with mirth and nods, indicating that the proverb had struck a chord.

Example 2: During a televised presidential debate in the United States, a candidate employed the phrase "You can't have your cake and eat it too" to articulate a rival's contradictory economic proposal. The proverb offered a succinct, memorable critique that was frequently cited in post-debate media.

Theme: Proverbs are employed by political speakers as rhetorical shortcuts to reduce intricate arguments to culturally recognized wisdom, thereby bolstering group alignment and credibility.

The Use of Proverbs in Business Communication: Fostering Collaboration and Framing Strategy

Proverbs were employed with greater caution in corporate meetings, frequently as instruments for phrasing ambiguity, cautioning against risk, or attenuating criticism.

Example 3: During a logistics meeting in Fergana, a manager stated, "Yaxshi bosh – yarmi ish." ("The first step is half the battle.")

He employed this to lend his backing to a colleague's initiative, emphasizing the significance of early planning. Skeptical team members were convinced by this proverb.

Example 4: A senior executive expressed concern during an English-language team meeting that included representatives from various nationalities, stating, "We should not place all of our eggs in one basket."

Although the idiom was comprehended, certain team members who were not familiar with it requested clarification. This underscored the potential and constraints of proverbs in multicultural environments.

Theme: Proverbs are particularly effective in reducing directness in business interactions, particularly in intercultural or hierarchical contexts. Their purpose is to diplomatically frame ideas and to invoke shared values such as foresight, collaboration, or caution.

Proverbs in Family Arguments: Reinforcing Values and Mediating Tension

Elders frequently employed proverbs in domestic settings, particularly within Uzbek families, to enforce behavior, resolve disputes, and invoke tradition during conflicts.

Example 5: An elder intervened during a dispute between siblings regarding their responsibilities, stating, "Bola – ota-onaning oynasi." ("A child is a reflection of their parents.")

This resulted in a shift in the emphasis from blame to mutual respect and family honor. The proverb's emotive and moral significance was immediately acknowledged by the youngest members, who immediately calmed down.

Example 6: A grandmother provided her granddaughter with guidance on her marriage decisions, stating, "Ko'rgan ko'radi, ko'rmagan xor bo'ladi." ("Those who have extensive experience perceive clearly; those who lack it will endure hardship.")

The proverb maintained emotional harmony while asserting wisdom, serving as a delicate warning without overt disapproval.

Theme: Proverbs serve as soft power instruments in familial environments, enabling speakers to instruct, caution, and discipline without inciting conflict. Their success is contingent upon their affective and cultural resonance.

Emergent Cross-Domain Patterns

Despite the contextual differences, several common themes were identified:

Positioning and timing are crucial: Proverbs were frequently employed at the conclusion or culmination of an argument or debate to lend a sense of finality and perceived wisdom to a point.

Impact is Influenced by Audience Familiarity: The efficacy of a proverb was contingent upon whether the audience recognized and appreciated it in multicultural or intergenerational environments.

Older individuals, authority figures, and group leaders were more likely to employ proverbs, and their use was frequently perceived as more legitimate as a result of their social status. Proverbs reinforce social roles.

Interpretation is Influenced by Context: The interpretation of even well-known proverbs may vary depending on the speaker's intent, situation, and tone.

**Discussion.** The results of this investigation demonstrate the strategic, context-dependent nature of proverb utilization in family, business, and political interactions. Mieder (2004) asserts that proverbs are not merely vestiges of folklore, but rather active instruments of communication that are used to influence social dynamics and convey wisdom. These results are in close alignment with this assertion. This study contributes to the body of extant knowledge by demonstrating the role of proverbs as rhetorical devices, social signals, and affective regulators in daily life through the examination of authentic discourse.

The political case studies substantiate Chilton and Schäffner's (2002) assertion that political discourse is extremely symbolic and performative. Proverbs allow speakers to condense intricate concepts into memorable phrases, thereby establishing a sense of familiarity among audiences that promotes trust and unity. This is consistent with Kalmár's (2016) research, which demonstrates that proverbs assist political figures in establishing rapport and projecting cultural authority. Holmes' (2008) concept of proverbs as indirect yet potent face-saving strategies is substantiated by the utilization of proverbs as succinct critiques or moral appeals.

Proverbs are employed in the business environment to mitigate criticism and foster collaboration, which is consistent with the civility theory framework (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Mitigating devices, such as proverbs, enable speakers to communicate challenging

messages without resorting to obvious confrontation. The observed challenges in the use of intercultural proverbs substantiate Taguchi's (2009) emphasis on the necessity of pragmatic competence in cross-cultural communication. The potential for miscommunication in multinational environments, a critical concern in globalized business discourse, is emphasized by the fact that certain team members encountered difficulty in understanding the meanings of proverbs.

The emotional significance of proverbs in intimate relationships is exemplified by the family case studies. The elders' utilization of proverbs as an indirect method of discipline is consistent with Finnegan's (1992) and Mkhize's (2004) research on the socializing function of proverbs in African and Asian households. Here, proverbs function as emotional regulators that help preserve harmony and respect, thereby validating Tannen's (1989) observations on language and conflict in intimate relationships. The persuasive power of the proverb is further bolstered by the moral authority that elders possess, which affirms the significance of power dynamics in the effectiveness of the proverb (Agha, 2007).

The results demonstrate that proverbs are communicative resources that are highly adaptable, rather than static, across domains. This is consistent with Agha's (2007) notion of language as a form of social performance, in which the use of proverbs indicates cultural knowledge and social competence. Proverbs' effectiveness is also elucidated by Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) conceptual metaphor theory, which posits that by framing intricate social realities in metaphorical terms, they enable speakers to subtly influence perception and action.

Additionally, the pragmatic dimension of proverbs is underscored by the significance of audience familiarity and contextual clues in proverb interpretation, which builds upon the research of Holmes (2008) and Wierzbicka (2003). This research also affirms that the use of proverbs is interconnected with social roles and power dynamics, thereby supporting Tajfel and Turner's (1986) social identity theory of language use.

This investigation has illustrated that proverbs are indispensable as dynamic communicative instruments in the formation of interactions in a variety of contexts, including politics, business, and family. Proverbs are not static cultural relics; rather, they are strategic devices that speakers use to persuade audiences, manage conflicts, convey authority, and create social cohesion. The real-life cases analyzed demonstrate that the choice and timing of proverb use are indicative of speakers' awareness of social roles, cultural values, and pragmatic objectives. In addition, the study emphasizes the significance of audience familiarity and context in determining the interpretation and impact of proverbs. These observations enhance comprehension of language as a socially embedded, goal-oriented practice, emphasizing the importance of proverbs in human communication.

#### Recommendations For Researchers:

1. Expand research on the use of proverbs to digital communication platforms, such as social media, where proverb use may change.
2. Investigate the functions of proverbs in supplementary domains, such as legal settings, healthcare communication, and youth culture.

3. Examine the extent to which the use of proverbs is influenced by gender, age, and power dynamics within particular cultural communities.

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