



ANALYSIS OF PROVERBS RELATED TO THE CATEGORY OF MORAL EVALUATION IN ENGLISH FOLKLORE

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ANNOTATION

This article explores English proverbs that serve as vessels of moral assessments, thus shedding light on the ethical values, societal standards, and cultural ideals found in traditional English folklore. By categorizing and analyzing selected proverbs, the study illustrates how moral evaluations are embedded in language and culturally passed down through generations. Utilizing the theoretical perspectives of cultural linguistics and axiological linguistics, the research underscores how proverbs serve as markers of values, promoting virtues such as honesty and hard work while denouncing vices like greed and laziness. The article also examines the linguistic and stylistic features that make moral proverbs memorable and persuasive in communication. Particular attention is given to rhetorical devices such as metaphor, parallelism, contrast, rhyme, and alliteration, which enhance the expressive power of proverbs and facilitate their transmission through oral tradition. The study highlights the educational and regulatory functions of proverbs in both traditional and modern contexts, showing how they influence moral consciousness and social behavior. Furthermore, the research emphasizes the relationship between language, culture, and ethical norms, demonstrating that proverbs serve as cultural codes that preserve collective wisdom and moral experience. The findings confirm that English proverbs reflect not only individual ethical values but also broader cultural principles such as responsibility, reciprocity, diligence, and social harmony. As a result, proverbs remain an important linguistic resource for understanding the moral worldview embedded in English folklore and cultural communication.

Introduction. Proverbs are succinct, symbolic statements that capture the knowledge and experience of the masses. They are useful markers of a community's worldview in the field of linguistic and cultural studies. Moral judgments—convictions about what is good or bad, virtuous or shameful, or right or wrong—are reflected in a large number of English proverbs. Examining these proverbs provides information about the moral code and standards of conduct that are maintained in English-speaking cultures. With a focus on the category of moral judgment, this work utilizes the ideas of both cultural linguistics and axiological linguistics. Axiological categories aid in determining the ways in which language encodes values and anti-values. By endorsing some actions (like honesty and diligence) and denouncing others (like greed and laziness), proverbs function as axiological markers.

Literature review. The study of proverbs has attracted the attention of many scholars in linguistics, folklore studies, and cultural anthropology. Researchers emphasize that proverbs function not only as linguistic units but also as important carriers of cultural knowledge and moral values. They represent condensed expressions of collective experience and serve as a means of transmitting ethical norms from one generation to another.

N. D. Arutyunova highlights the close relationship between language and human perception of the world, arguing that linguistic units often reflect value judgments and cultural meanings embedded in communication [1, p. 112]. From this perspective, proverbs can be viewed as a linguistic mechanism through which societies encode moral and ethical evaluations.

The folklorist Alan Dundes also stresses the educational and social role of folklore, including proverbs, in shaping moral consciousness. According to Dundes, proverbial expressions often function as tools of informal education, guiding behavior and reinforcing social norms within a community [2, p. 7]. Through repeated use in everyday discourse, proverbs gradually influence the moral outlook of individuals.

Cultural differences in moral perception are also discussed in the works of Geert Hofstede. His research on cultural dimensions demonstrates that values reflected in language and folklore are closely connected with broader cultural patterns such as individualism, collectivism, and attitudes toward authority [3, p. 45]. English proverbs, for example, often emphasize personal responsibility and individual effort, which corresponds to the cultural traits of many English-speaking societies.

Another important theoretical contribution is provided by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, who analyze the role of metaphor in structuring human thought and language. They argue that metaphorical expressions are fundamental to the way people conceptualize abstract ideas, including moral values [4, p. 3]. Many proverbs rely on metaphorical imagery to convey ethical lessons in a vivid and memorable way.

Wolfgang Mieder, one of the leading scholars in paremiology, extensively studied the functions and meanings of proverbs. He notes that proverbs serve as cultural texts that preserve collective wisdom and moral experience, often promoting socially approved behavior such as honesty, diligence, and moderation [5, p. 18]. Mieder also emphasizes their didactic function, particularly in educational and family contexts.

Norrick's semantic analysis of English proverbs further demonstrates how moral meanings are encoded within proverbial expressions. According to Norrick, proverbs often rely on contrast, metaphor, and figurative language to communicate complex ethical judgments in a concise form [6, p. 27]. These features enhance their rhetorical impact and make them effective instruments of moral instruction.

Earlier foundational research by Archer Taylor also contributed significantly to proverb studies. Taylor examined the historical development, structure, and cultural significance of proverbs, emphasizing their role as traditional expressions of collective wisdom [7, p. 4]. His work laid the groundwork for later linguistic and folkloristic analyses.

The moral principles reflected in many English proverbs correspond with the ideas discussed by Max Weber in his theory of the Protestant work ethic. Weber argued that values such as diligence, discipline, and responsibility became central elements of Western moral culture and were reflected in everyday discourse and traditional sayings [8, p. 53].

Methodology. This study employs a qualitative linguistic and cultural analysis to examine English proverbs that express moral evaluation. The research is based on a selection of commonly used English proverbs collected from scholarly sources on paremiology and folklore studies. The selected proverbs were analyzed according to their semantic content and axiological meaning in order to identify the moral values and anti-values embedded in them.

The methodological framework combines approaches from cultural linguistics and axiological linguistics, which allow the researcher to explore how ethical judgments are encoded in language. Proverbs were categorized according to the moral concepts they convey, such as honesty, diligence, justice, humility, and responsibility. In addition, stylistic and linguistic features—such as metaphor, parallelism, contrast, and rhyme—were examined to understand how these elements enhance the persuasive and didactic function of proverbs.

The analysis also considers the cultural context in which the proverbs function, emphasizing their role in transmitting moral norms and social values within English-speaking communities. Through this approach, the study reveals how proverbs operate as linguistic markers of moral evaluation in English folklore.

Results. Linguistic Features and Cultural Functions: Moral proverbs

usually encode essential ethical ideals and can be classed based on which qualities they stress. For example, proverbs like "Honesty is the best policy" and "Truth will out" emphasize the importance of candor, meaning that honesty eventually leads to positive consequences. Similarly, statements like "No pain, no gain" and "Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise," which equate virtue with hard work, convey the significance of effort and personal responsibility. Proverbs that teach humility include "Pride comes before a fall" and "Empty vessels make the most noise," which warn against hubris and encourage modest behavior. Furthermore, the concepts of justice and fairness are expressed in sayings like "What goes around comes around" and "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," which emphasize reciprocity and moral equity. Such proverbs are culturally imprinted statements of ethical standards and collective wisdom (Mieder, 2004; Norrick, 1985).

English moral proverbs' long-lasting effect stems from their succinct linguistic structure and rhetorical flair. These manifestations do more than just entertain or enlighten; they also have an educational and corrective role in society, actively creating and reinforcing ethical ideals. A variety of stylistic and structural qualities increase their effectiveness, making them memorable and convincing. Parallelism is an important aspect of moral proverbs that contributes to their memorability. Balanced constructs like "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" promote moral reciprocity while simultaneously facilitating oral transmission via rhythm and symmetry. Similarly, antithesis and contrast are commonly used to illustrate moral argument.

Expressions such as "Better late than never" and "Easy come, easy go" convey competing behaviors or consequences, subtly guiding the audience toward the morally acceptable alternative (Norrick, 1985). These juxtapositions increase cognitive engagement while emphasizing ethical dichotomies like diligence against idleness or honesty versus deception. Another distinguishing feature of moral proverbs is their use of metaphor and symbolism, which allow abstract values to be imagined using familiar images. For example, "You reap what you sow" use an agricultural metaphor to describe the moral principle of consequence, but "Don't put all your eggs in one basket" expresses the values of caution and forethought using a tangible, everyday image (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). These metaphors anchor abstract principles in familiar contexts, emphasizing their ethical importance. In addition to these techniques, numerous proverbs incorporate rhyme and alliteration to enhance their auditory charm. Expressions such as "Waste not, want not," "Forgive and forget," and "Practice makes perfect" display rhythmic consistency and sonic attractiveness, aiding in their easy memorization and transmission through generations (Mieder, 2004). The musical quality of these proverbs ensures they endure and circulate within oral traditions.

Discussion. Apart from their linguistic grace, moral proverbs serve as educational tools in everyday life. They are often utilized in informal learning environments, especially within families, where older generations impart wisdom via succinct phrases like "Cleanliness is next to godliness" or "If you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all." In classrooms, teachers may reference sayings like "Hard work pays off" or "Cheaters never prosper" to promote discipline and ethical behavior. Proverbs also fulfill a regulatory role by reinforcing socially acceptable behavior. They promote adherence to shared values—for instance, "Well begun is half done" endorses the principle of initiative, while "The early bird catches the worm" celebrates punctuality and ambition. At the same time, they deter social deviance; expressions such as "He who lies down with dogs shall rise with fleas" or "Idle hands are the devil's workshop" warn against immoral company and laziness, associating them with personal and moral decline (Taylor, 1931). In this regard, proverbs act as a kind of "folk law," providing moral guidance without formal enforcement. The **oral tradition** is central to the cultural power of proverbs. Especially in traditional or pre-literate communities, proverbs function as key vehicles for transmitting moral knowledge across generations. They are embedded in fables and stories—such as Aesop's Fables—where the moral is often encapsulated in a proverbial form. Even in modern contexts, children encounter moral proverbs in nursery rhymes and everyday conversations with elders, preserving these expressions as part of a shared moral heritage.

In modern society, moral proverbs are still quite significant and continue to manifest in different modes of communication. Politicians utilize them to foster unity and strength, as exemplified by the phrase "United we stand, divided we fall." Self-help publications adapt these sayings to encourage resilience and self-confidence, offering variations such

as "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger." Popular culture, through movies, music, and advertisements, frequently appropriates proverbial wisdom, even if sometimes modified, to resonate with the audience. Phrases like "Actions speak louder than words" are widely recognized today, underscoring values like accountability and integrity.

Thus, moral proverbs exist at the crossroads of language, culture, and ethics. Their artistic form enhances their educational role, enabling them to influence moral awareness while maintaining cultural identity.

A notable number of English proverbs also embody ideals linked to the Protestant work ethic, a concept thoroughly explored by Max Weber in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905/2002). According to Weber, the Protestant focus on discipline, labor, and thriftiness significantly influenced the moral outlook in Anglo-American society. Sayings like "Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise," and "God helps those who help themselves" encapsulate this philosophy, highlighting self-discipline, responsibility, and the moral duty to contribute constructively to society, thereby reinforcing the notion that ethical virtue and worldly success are interconnected.

Additionally, the emphasis on justice and equity in English moral proverbs—illustrated by phrases such as "What goes around comes around" and "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you"—indicates an underlying cultural value placed on reciprocity and moral balance. These sayings suggest that ethical conduct is governed by inherent or divine principles of equilibrium and retribution. As scholars like Norrick (1985) and Taylor (1931) have pointed out, these proverbs often function as informal tools for social regulation, reinforcing accepted standards of behavior without relying on formal institutional enforcement. An additional significant feature of English moral proverbs is their focus on individual morality, placing a higher value on personal responsibility than on communal duty. This perspective is evident in sayings such as "You made your bed, now lie in it" and "Every man for himself," which highlight the importance of individual accountability and the repercussions of personal decisions. While these expressions uphold the value of moral independence, they also endorse an ethical framework based on personal agency rather than communal reliance. This is consistent with wider Western philosophical traditions that emphasize individual rights and moral reasoning, contrasting with the more collectivist ethical systems found in other cultures (Hofstede, 2001).

Nevertheless, even with their emphasis on individualism, English proverbs do not completely overlook the social aspect of morality. They frequently stress the importance of treating others with fairness and respect, as illustrated by the Golden Rule or the caution that "He who lies down with dogs shall rise with fleas." These proverbs acknowledge that one's moral decisions affect others and that social harmony relies on mutual ethical behavior. Therefore, proverbs serve both as moral guides and cultural symbols, conveying values that reconcile personal integrity with civic duty (Dundes, 1981; Mieder, 2004).

Conclusion. The collection of English proverbs provides insightful perspectives on the moral fabric of English-speaking communities. These proverbs are not merely linguistic oddities; they are influential instruments for encoding and passing down ethical guidelines and cultural ideals through the ages. Acting as indicators of values, they categorize actions and behaviors into desirable and undesirable, promoting virtues such as honesty, hard work, and fairness while discouraging faults like greed, laziness, and deceit. The potency of these moral proverbs is heightened by their unique linguistic attributes. Features such as parallel structure, contrasting ideas, metaphor, and rhyme enhance their memorability and persuasive influence, ensuring their ongoing significance in both spoken and written forms. Beyond their aesthetic charm, these proverbs are vital in shaping social behavior, serving dual roles as educational tools and social control mechanisms. While numerous English proverbs highlight the significance of personal ethics and responsibilities, indicating a cultural focus on individualism, they also acknowledge the social aspect of morality. Proverbs often emphasize the importance of treating others justly and respectfully, recognizing that individual behaviors impact the community, and social harmony relies on shared ethical conduct. Ultimately, English moral proverbs function both as practical resources for navigating daily life and as lasting cultural symbols. They encapsulate the delicate equilibrium between personal integrity values and civic responsibility requirements, presenting a rich array of ethical insights that continue to resonate in English-speaking societies.

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