



CONCEPTUALIZING ACHIEVEMENT IN ENGLISH PROVERBS ABOUT MAN

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ANNOTATSIYA/ АННОТАЦИЯ

Maqollar jamiyatning umumiy tajribasini barqaror, obrazli hikmatlarga jamlaydi, shu sababli ular mavhum tushunchalar qanday anglanishini o'rganuvchi kognitiv-lingvistik tadqiqotlar uchun qimmatli manba hisoblanadi. YUTUQ markaziy madaniy konsept bo'lishiga qaramay, uning ingliz maqollarida metaforik tarzda qanday tuzilishi hozirgacha tizimli ravishda tavsiflanmagan. Mazkur maqolada inson faoliyatiga oid ingliz maqollarida yutuq konseptining ifodalanishi, uning mazmuni va kognitiv xususiyatlari hamda obrazli tasvir vositalari tahlil qilinadi. Yutuqqa erishish jarayonida maqsad sari intilish, o'z vaqtida harakat qilish, shaxsiy tashabbus, qat'iyat va mehnatning ahamiyati maqollarda qanday aks etishi yoritiladi. Shuningdek, muvaffaqiyatga erishishda individual mas'uliyat, hamkorlik, tashqi sharoitlar va mavjud imkoniyatlarning o'zaro munosabati ko'rib chiqiladi. Maqollarda inson omilining ifodalanishi, jumladan, shaxsning bevosita nomlanishi, kasbiy va ijtimoiy rollar orqali tasvirlanishi yoki umumlashgan shaklda berilishi o'rganiladi. Ingliz va o'zbek maqollarining qiyosiy tahlili orqali mehnat, sabr-toqat, vaqtni to'g'ri baholash va erishilgan yutuqning qadrlanishi bilan bog'liq mushtarak jihatlar hamda milliy-madaniy o'ziga xosliklar aniqlanadi. Olingan kuzatishlar maqollarning xalq tajribasi, ijtimoiy qarashlar va axloqiy mezonlarni avloddan avlodga yetkazuvchi til birliklari sifatidagi ahamiyatini ochib beradi. Maqola materiallaridan kognitiv tilshunoslik, lingvokulturologiya, paremiologiya, tarjimashunoslik va ingliz tilini o'qitish jarayonlarida foydalanish mumkin.

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ANNOTATION

Proverbs condense a community's shared experience into stable, figurative sayings, which makes them a valuable source for cognitive-linguistic research on how abstract concepts are understood. ACHIEVEMENT is a central cultural concept, yet its metaphorical structuring in English proverbs has not been described systematically. The study explores the semantic and cognitive mechanisms through which achievement is represented in English proverbial expressions, focusing on the relationship between metaphorical imagery and culturally transmitted ideas about human activity. Particular attention is paid to the ways in which proverbs portray the stages of goal attainment, the significance of appropriate timing, the role of personal initiative, and the conditions under which effort produces desirable outcomes. The analysis also considers how proverbial expressions communicate expectations concerning individual responsibility, cooperation, perseverance, and the limitations imposed by external circumstances. By examining the linguistic representation of human agents, the study identifies whether achievement is associated with explicitly named individuals, occupational roles, generalized human subjects, or impersonal constructions. Selected Uzbek proverbs provide an additional comparative perspective, illustrating how similar practical principles may be expressed through different culturally meaningful images. The findings contribute to the understanding of proverbial language as a means of preserving collective experience and transmitting culturally shaped evaluations of human accomplishment. The study may also be useful in cognitive linguistics, intercultural communication, paremiology, and the teaching of English vocabulary and figurative language.

Introduction

Modern linguistics increasingly treats language as a repository of human experience rather than only a tool for exchanging messages. In the cognitive-linguistic tradition, abstract notions such as time, life and success are understood through more concrete domains of bodily and social experience. Culture then shapes which domains are selected and how they are elaborated. Proverbs are particularly informative for this line of research. They are traditional, stable and generalizing sayings that carry evaluative or didactic content. They typically express a general truth through a concrete image, so the underlying metaphor is often conventionalized and culturally accepted. For this reason proverbs offer a compact window onto the models of thought that a speech community treats as common sense. ACHIEVEMENT is a suitable concept for such a study. It is tied to goals, effort, obstacles, results and their social evaluation, and thus reveals what a culture regards as the proper route to success and the proper attitude toward it. English-speaking culture is often associated with values such as personal responsibility, industry and initiative, and it is reasonable to ask how far these values are reflected in the stock of English proverbs.

Literature review

The theoretical foundations of the present study are rooted in cognitive linguistics, conceptual metaphor theory, paremiology, and linguocultural studies. These research traditions provide complementary perspectives for examining how achievement is conceptualized in English proverbs about human activity. Particular attention is given to the relationship between figurative language, cultural knowledge, and the ways in which abstract concepts are structured through familiar experiences.

A fundamental contribution to the study of conceptual metaphor was made by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, who argued that metaphor is not merely a stylistic device but an essential mechanism through which people understand abstract concepts in terms of more concrete experiences [9, pp. 3–6]. Their approach demonstrates that conceptual systems are structured by recurring metaphorical patterns derived from bodily experience, everyday activities, and social interaction. This theoretical perspective is particularly relevant to the concept of ACHIEVEMENT, which can be understood through such source domains as movement, construction, agriculture, and commercial exchange. Lakoff's subsequent account of conceptual metaphor further developed the principle that metaphorical mappings systematically connect a source domain with a target domain, allowing abstract experiences to be interpreted through familiar conceptual structures [8, pp. 202–205]. In the context of English

proverbs, this framework makes it possible to identify how progress, effort, obstacles, and rewards are represented through conventional images.

Kövecses provides a significant extension of conceptual metaphor theory by emphasizing the relationship between metaphor, culture, and variation. In *Metaphor in Culture: Universality and Variation*, he explains that although certain metaphorical structures may be widespread across languages, their specific elaboration and contextual interpretation are influenced by cultural experience [6, pp. 1–5]. This position is important for comparing English and Uzbek proverbs because both linguistic traditions may conceptualize achievement through agricultural labour, craftsmanship, or purposeful action while expressing culturally specific attitudes toward effort, reward, and responsibility. In his practical introduction to metaphor, Kövecses also examines the systematic nature of metaphorical mappings and the role of conventional conceptual patterns in everyday language [7, pp. 4–12]. These ideas provide a theoretical basis for interpreting proverbs not as isolated expressions but as linguistic manifestations of broader conceptual structures.

The relationship between metaphor and cultural knowledge is also addressed by Wierzbicka, whose research demonstrates the importance of culturally significant words and expressions in understanding the values and assumptions of particular speech communities [18, pp. 1–8]. From this perspective, proverbs are valuable because they preserve socially transmitted evaluations of human conduct, work, perseverance, and success. The meaning of a proverb therefore extends beyond its literal content and may reflect culturally established expectations concerning how individuals should pursue their goals. Dobrovolskij and Piirainen similarly examine figurative language from cross-cultural and cross-linguistic perspectives, drawing attention to the interaction between linguistic imagery, conventional meaning, and cultural knowledge [4, pp. 1–12]. Their approach supports the view that equivalent proverbs in different languages may communicate comparable practical lessons while employing different images or emphasizing different aspects of experience.

Paremiological scholarship provides another essential foundation for the analysis of achievement-related expressions. Norrick's study of English proverbs investigates their semantic organization and the ways in which proverbial meanings emerge through linguistic form, conventional usage, and contextual interpretation [13, pp. 1–12]. His approach is relevant to the present study because the interpretation of achievement-related proverbs requires attention to both their literal imagery and their generalized meanings. For example, expressions involving roads, tools, or agricultural activity can communicate principles concerning perseverance, preparation, competence, and the relationship between effort and results. These meanings cannot always be established by examining individual lexical items in isolation; they must also be interpreted within the semantic structure of the proverb as a whole.

Mieder's research makes a substantial contribution to understanding proverbs as forms of traditional wisdom that remain meaningful in changing social and cultural circumstances. In *Proverbs Are Never Out of Season*, he discusses the continuing presence and adaptation of proverbial expressions in contemporary communication [11, pp. 1–10]. His handbook provides a broader account of the characteristics, functions, and cultural significance of proverbs as a distinct linguistic and folkloric genre [12, pp. 1–8]. These perspectives are useful for investigating how English proverbs communicate socially recognizable principles about achievement, including the importance of effort, patience, responsibility, and appropriate timing. At the same time, proverbial wisdom does not necessarily express a single, consistent worldview. Different proverbs may emphasize personal initiative, collective cooperation, caution, or the limitations imposed by circumstances. Accordingly, achievement should be examined as a multidimensional concept rather than reduced to individual success alone.

The structural and conventional properties of proverbs have also attracted attention in paremiological research. Arora investigates the perception of proverbiality and the features through which expressions are recognized as proverbs [1, pp. 1–38]. This perspective is relevant to the selection of material for the present study because not every figurative statement about success necessarily constitutes a traditional proverb. Dundes's discussion of proverbial structure further highlights the importance of examining the formal and organizational characteristics of proverbial expressions [5, pp. 961–973]. Together, these studies suggest that the identification of achievement-related proverbs should consider their conventional status, generalized meaning, and recognizable proverbial form. Speake's *The Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs* provides an important reference source for identifying established English proverbial expressions and examining their conventional forms and usage [15].

Methodologically, the study of metaphor requires clearly defined procedures for distinguishing metaphorical language from literal meaning. The Pragglejaz Group introduced the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP), which involves examining lexical units in context, establishing their contextual meanings, and comparing these meanings with more basic meanings in order to identify metaphorical uses [14, pp. 3–6]. This procedure offers a systematic foundation for analyzing expressions in which achievement is represented through concrete activities or objects. Steen and his colleagues subsequently developed the MIPVU approach, providing a more detailed procedure for identifying linguistic metaphors in discourse [16, pp. 1–10]. These methodological contributions are relevant to the present analysis because they help reduce reliance on intuition when identifying metaphorical expressions. Nevertheless, proverbial language presents particular challenges because the overall meaning of a proverb may depend on an established figurative interpretation rather than on a single metaphorical word. Consequently, metaphor identification should be combined with contextual and semantic analysis.

Charteris-Black's work on corpus approaches to critical metaphor analysis demonstrates how metaphorical patterns can be investigated systematically and interpreted in relation to broader cultural and ideological meanings [2, pp. 1–15]. Although his approach is especially concerned with metaphor in discourse, it offers useful methodological insights for examining the evaluative dimensions of achievement-related proverbs. In particular, the recurring representation of achievement as a journey, a product of labour, or an exchange involving costs and rewards can reveal assumptions about agency, responsibility, perseverance, and the value of effort. The identification of these patterns also requires attention to counterexamples, since proverbial expressions may challenge or qualify the values apparently promoted by other sayings.

Cohen's work on coefficients of agreement provides a methodological basis for evaluating consistency between independent coders when data are classified into categorical groups [3, pp. 37–46]. This contribution is relevant to the classification of proverbs according to their dominant source domains and the representation of human agents. Because some proverbs combine several images or allow competing interpretations, independent coding and an appropriate measure of inter-coder agreement would strengthen the reliability of a larger investigation.

Taken together, the reviewed scholarship establishes a strong theoretical and methodological foundation for studying achievement in English proverbs. Conceptual metaphor theory explains how abstract experiences can be structured through familiar domains; paremiology clarifies the linguistic, semantic, and cultural characteristics of proverbs; cross-cultural research highlights the relationship between figurative imagery and culturally specific meanings; and metaphor-identification procedures support systematic analysis. However, these approaches do not, by themselves, provide a complete account of how achievement is distributed across metaphorical domains in a selected corpus of English proverbs, how human agents are linguistically represented, or how individual and collective dimensions of achievement interact. The present study addresses this analytical focus by examining the dominant metaphorical domains associated with achievement, identifying the representation of human agency, and considering selected Uzbek parallels. This approach makes it possible to investigate both the recurring conceptual patterns and the cultural qualifications through which achievement is represented in proverbial language.

Research methodology

The study employs qualitative conceptual analysis, semantic analysis, descriptive quantification, and contrastive observation to examine the conceptualization of ACHIEVEMENT in English proverbs. The analysis is based on Conceptual Metaphor Theory and the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP). The selected proverbs are classified into six metaphorical domains: JOURNEY, CONSTRUCTION AND CRAFT, AGRICULTURE, UPWARD MOVEMENT, COMMERCIAL EXCHANGE, and COMPETITION. Human agency is analyzed through four categories: MAN, ROLE, PRONOUN, and IMPERSONAL. Descriptive statistics are used to identify the frequency of metaphorical domains and agent categories. Selected Uzbek proverbs are also examined to identify similarities and differences in metaphorical imagery and cultural values. Given the limited, purposively selected dataset and single-coder approach, the findings are interpreted descriptively rather than generalized to English paremiology as a whole.

Results

ACHIEVEMENT IS A JOURNEY

Ten proverbs draw on travel. The mapping (Table 1) follows the general metaphor PURPOSEFUL ACTIVITY IS TRAVEL.

Table 1.

Mapping in ACHIEVEMENT IS A JOURNEY	
Source (journey)	Target (achievement)
destination	goal / success
movement along a path	goal-directed action
steps, distance	stages of progress
obstacles on the road	difficulties
being lost, stopping	failure, missed opportunity

Examples: A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step; You must learn to walk before you can run; Look before you leap; Cross the bridge when you come to it; Where there's a will, there's a way; It is a long lane that has no turning; He who hesitates is lost; The road to hell is paved with good intentions. Two features stand out. First, many of these proverbs concern the order and pacing of steps (walk before you run, don't put the cart before the horse) rather than the destination. Second, failure is expressed as being lost or as a road that leads somewhere unwanted, so that intention without action is condemned (the road to hell). A rolling stone gathers no moss treats movement without accumulation as unproductive, showing that in this model movement must be purposeful to count as progress.

ACHIEVEMENT IS COMMERCIAL EXCHANGE. Nine proverbs treat achievement as something bought, earned or traded: No pain, no gain; Nothing ventured, nothing gained; There's no such thing as a free lunch; You can't make an omelette without breaking eggs; You get what you pay for; You can't have your cake and eat it; The labourer is worthy of his hire; Easy come, easy go; and Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise. The dominant idea is that of cost: effort, pain, risk and sacrifice are the price, and achievement is the return. Four of these proverbs

(free lunch, pay for, cake, omelette) stress that success without a price is impossible, and Easy come, easy go links the value of an outcome to the effort spent on it. The last proverb in the list is a borderline case, coded here because achievement is expressed as accumulation of wealth (among other goods).

ACHIEVEMENT IS CONSTRUCTION AND CRAFT. Eight proverbs draw on building and skilled work: Rome wasn't built in a day; Every man is the architect of his own fortune; A bad workman blames his tools; A stitch in time saves nine; Strike while the iron is hot; Many hands make light work; Too many cooks spoil the broth; Jack of all trades, master of none. Here the achiever is a builder or craftsman, achievement is a made object, effort is work, and tools, materials, skill and timing are the conditions of success. This domain has the highest share of ROLE agents (four of the nine ROLE proverbs in the dataset), which reflects its vocabulary of occupations (workman, hands, cooks, trades). Notably, two proverbs (many hands, too many cooks) concern collective work and present cooperation both positively and negatively. Alongside the individualistic architect of his own fortune, this shows that the domain does not encode only individual achievement.

Illustrative Uzbek parallels

Table 2.

Selected Uzbek proverbs with English glosses			
Uzbek proverb	Literal gloss	Domain / theme	English counterpart in the dataset
Ekkaningni o'rasan	"You will reap what you sow"	AGRICULTURE; effort-result link	As you sow, so shall you reap
Qatra-qatra daryo bo'lar	"Drop by drop becomes a river"	WATER; gradual accumulation	Great oaks from little acorns grow
Temirni qizig'ida bos	"Press the iron while it is hot"	CRAFT; timeliness	Strike while the iron is hot
Yetti o'lchab, bir kes	"Measure seven times, cut once"	CRAFT; caution	Look before you leap
Harakatda barakat	"In effort there is blessing"	EFFORT and plenty; religious-cultural lexeme barakat	No pain, no gain (partial)
Mehnatning tagi – rohat	"The bottom of labour is comfort"	REWARD for labour	The labourer is worthy of his hire (partial)

These examples suggest that Uzbek uses the same source domains that dominate the English data, namely agriculture and craft, together with a water image for accumulation. Two features appear to be more prominent: a religious-cultural frame (barakat) and the framing of labour as leading to comfort or rest rather than to profit. As the sample is illustrative, these observations are hypotheses.

Discussion

The study set out to describe how ACHIEVEMENT is conceptualized in English proverbs about human activity. Six source domains organize 69.0% of the dataset, with JOURNEY, COMMERCIAL EXCHANGE and CONSTRUCTION AND CRAFT the most frequent. Most proverbs do not name a human agent, and the word man is rare. Timeliness and the relation between effort and cost are the most frequent themes.

Achievement as purposeful, costly and time-bound activity. Taken together, the domains present achievement as **something one moves toward, builds, grows or pays for**. The JOURNEY and CONSTRUCTION domains emphasise process, pacing and order; AGRICULTURE emphasises cause and effect and seasonal timing; COMMERCIAL EXCHANGE emphasises cost. All four highlight that achievement is not given but produced by action, which is consistent with the values of industry and responsibility often associated with English-speaking culture. The result agrees in general terms with the position that metaphors linked to bodily and social experience (movement, growth, exchange) are widely available but are selected and combined in culturally patterned ways (Kövecses 2005).

Achievement is not only individual. The popular image of the English proverb as a voice of individual initiative is supported by items such as Every man is the architect of his own fortune and God helps those who help themselves. However, the dataset also contains proverbs on collective work (many hands, too many cooks), on unequal reward (one sows, another reaps), on fate (Man proposes, God disposes) and on the price of success (free lunch). The picture is therefore more varied: the proverbs combine individual responsibility with recognition of cooperation, luck and

injustice. The high proportion of impersonal proverbs also indicates that the agency of the achiever is often left implicit and generalized.

Warnings about success. Three of the four UPWARD MOVEMENT proverbs and several proverbs outside the six domains (Pride goes before a fall; Success has many fathers, but failure is an orphan) qualify achievement morally or socially. Success is desirable, but it carries risks of arrogance, exposure and disputed credit. English proverbs thus evaluate achievement together with the attitude of the achiever.

The lexeme man and gender. The rarity of man is a noteworthy result. Where the word is used, it mostly appears in general statements about fate, time, focus and integrity, and more rarely in image-based advice about how to succeed. The asymmetry in gender marking (six proverbs with he/his, none with she/her, and a single female reference as the object of pursuit) is consistent with the historical use of generic masculine forms. Man in English has long meant both "human being" and "male person", so some proverbs may be read as generic while others (for example Faint heart never won fair lady) evidently assume a male actor. A study of the gender dimension needs a larger corpus and a separate coding scheme, and this result should not be extended beyond the present dataset.

Comparison with Uzbek proverbs. The Uzbek examples suggest considerable overlap in source domains (agriculture, craft) and in the basic principle that reward follows labour. The differences noted above (a religious-cultural frame and a stronger link between labour and comfort) are consistent with the view that shared domains are elaborated differently in different cultures. Because the Uzbek material is a small illustrative set, a full contrastive study requires a comparable Uzbek dataset, coded with the same scheme, and ideally the judgement of native speakers. For linguistics, the findings illustrate how a small set of source domains recurs across proverbs about a single abstract concept. For teaching, the coded dataset can be used in courses on cognitive linguistics, paremiology and translation, for example to show students how equivalent proverbs may differ in imagery. For lexicography and translation, the differences between English and Uzbek imagery indicate that equivalents should be chosen with attention to both meaning and image.

The main limitations are the small and non-random dataset, the single coder, the assignment of one dominant domain per proverb (which simplifies proverbs that combine images), and the illustrative nature of the Uzbek material. Some coding decisions are open to debate (for example, the assignment of Early to bed and early to rise to COMMERCIAL EXCHANGE and of The early bird catches the worm to COMPETITION). The figures should therefore be treated as descriptive indications rather than as estimates of English paremiology as a whole.

Conclusion English proverbs conceptualize ACHIEVEMENT mainly as a journey, a costly exchange, a construction and a harvest, with smaller

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