

METAPHORICAL REPRESENTATION OF KNOWLEDGE STRUCTURES

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in proverbs and sayings

Abstract: This article examines the metaphorical representation of knowledge structures in proverbs and sayings through a cognitive-linguistic perspective. Drawing on Conceptual Metaphor Theory, it explores how metaphors shape the understanding of learning and wisdom across cultures. Proverbs are shown to encode collective cognition and cultural values, functioning as tools for moral instruction and intergenerational knowledge transmission. By mapping concrete experiences onto abstract ideas, they make complex concepts more accessible and memorable. The study highlights the enduring role of proverbs as cognitive and cultural frameworks that reflect how societies perceive, structure, and value knowledge.

Keywords: proverb, saying, metaphor, cognition, culture, concept, common theme, conceptual blending, generic space, input space, blended space.

The proverb is a sophisticated, fascinating, and significant piece of language. Consequently, it has been the focus of numerous viewpoints, investigations, and evaluations. Seven interpretations of the proverb - personal, formal, religious, literary, practical, cultural, and cognitive - have been outlined in order to account for this outpouring. To address this emphasis, it has been necessary to draw on much of what cognitive science has to offer regarding minds.¹ The cognitive view, in particular, provides the leitmotif for this volume. The essence of this view is that proverb cognition is based on universal principles, regardless of the individuals who use proverbs or the specific situations and cultures in which they are used. The general idea is that an interdisciplinary perspective will ultimately offer the best chance of understanding all aspects of proverb functioning. Treating proverbs separately from other linguistic forms and from mental ability and activity in general is unsatisfactory. Specifically, proverbs have been interpreted as a metaphor for improving intelligence, and intelligence itself as being even more indirect. The ability to create, expand upon, and integrate various levels of information would seem to be necessary for someone to comprehend indirection. Importantly, this kind of activity may be seen in all facets of human information processing, including perception, memory, and cognition. With respect to proverbs in general, the DARTS model and the cognitive ideals hypothesis have expanded the conceptual foundation theory of proverb cognition. The latter is a theoretical framework regarding the roles played by the cerebral hemisphere in proverb understanding. According to the former, proverbs are derived from, understood, and applied in part to prevent the yearning for an idealistic, perfectionistic perspective of the world that is shared by all people. It goes on to say that these principles are comparatively universal among people. This premise and the cognitive science thesis both imply that proverb processing is governed by highly general principles. Cognitive science attempts to explain how individuals use and understand proverbs. Proverbs reflect shared cognitive structures, using metaphor to simplify and transmit knowledge. They express folk theories of knowledge - how cultures define, acquire, and value knowledge. Different societies structure knowledge based on experience, hierarchy, and utility. Proverbs function as cultural tools that facilitate intergenerational knowledge transmission. They encode social norms about intelligence, education, and wisdom.²

¹ Turner.M. The Literary Mind: The Origins of Thought and Language. London: Oxford University Press, 1996. - 192 p.

² Mick.Sh, Leech.G. Style in Fiction: A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose. New York: Longman, 1981. - 402 p.

For example: KNOWLEDGE IS LIGHT (Illumination and Awareness). Knowledge is conceptualized as light, enabling vision and understanding.

Proverbs: "Knowledge is light, ignorance is darkness".

"The lamp of wisdom lights the path of life".

"A candle loses nothing by lighting another candle".

Meaning: Learning dispels confusion; ignorance blinds individuals.

KNOWLEDGE IS A TREASURE (Value and Accumulation)

Wisdom is framed as precious and worth preserving.

Proverbs:

"A wise man's wealth is in his head, not his pocket".

"Knowledge is better than riches".

"A book is a treasure that follows its owner everywhere".

Meaning: Education is a long-term investment, more valuable than material wealth.

These proverbs teach how knowledge should be pursued and valued. They encode cultural norms about intelligence, discipline, and education. They shape how individuals perceive learning, wisdom, and ignorance.

One of the remarkable features of proverbs is their use of metaphor, which allows for the representation of knowledge structures that shape our understanding of the world. This overview explores the metaphorical representation of knowledge in proverbs, emphasizing their cognitive, cultural, and social implications.³ Furthermore, metaphors play a crucial role in human language, serving as cognitive tools that enable individuals to understand abstract concepts through tangible experiences. Conceptual metaphor theory, as proposed by Lakoff and Johnson, suggests that our thoughts and actions are shaped by metaphorical structures. In this context, proverbs utilize metaphors to encode knowledge, making complex ideas more accessible and relatable. As for knowledge structures in proverbs, they refer to the cognitive frameworks that organize our understanding of the world. In proverbs, these structures are often represented through metaphors, highlighting underlying beliefs and social norms. By examining the metaphorical representations in proverbs, we gain insight into how different cultures understand various aspects of life.⁴

Common Metaphorical Themes in proverbs:

Journey. The journey metaphor is prevalent in proverbs, representing life as a path filled with experiences, challenges, and growth. This metaphor embodies the idea that life is a progression toward a destination, with various routes and obstacles.

Example: "Not all who wander are lost." This proverb suggests that exploration and deviation from the expected path can lead to valuable insights and ultimately contribute to personal growth.

Implications: The journey metaphor encourages resilience and adaptability, emphasizing that challenges are integral to development. It promotes the idea that learning is a continuous process and that experiences shape individual identity.

Construction and Building. Many proverbs utilize the construction metaphor to illustrate the process of acquiring knowledge and skills. This metaphor signifies that knowledge is built over time and must have a solid foundation to be effective.

Example: "Rome wasn't built in a day". This saying emphasizes the importance of patience and consistent effort in achieving significant goals.

Implications: The construction metaphor suggests that knowledge and skills require dedication and a step-by-step approach. It reflects the cultural belief in hard work and persistence as essential components of success.

³ Crystal.D. The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. - 488 p.

⁴ Minsky.M. The Society of Mind. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988. - 336 p.

Planting and Harvesting. The planting and harvesting metaphor underscores the relationship between effort and outcome. This metaphor depicts knowledge as something that can be cultivated, reinforcing the notion that intentional actions yield results.

Example: “You reap what you sow”. This well-known proverb emphasizes accountability and the consequences of one’s actions.

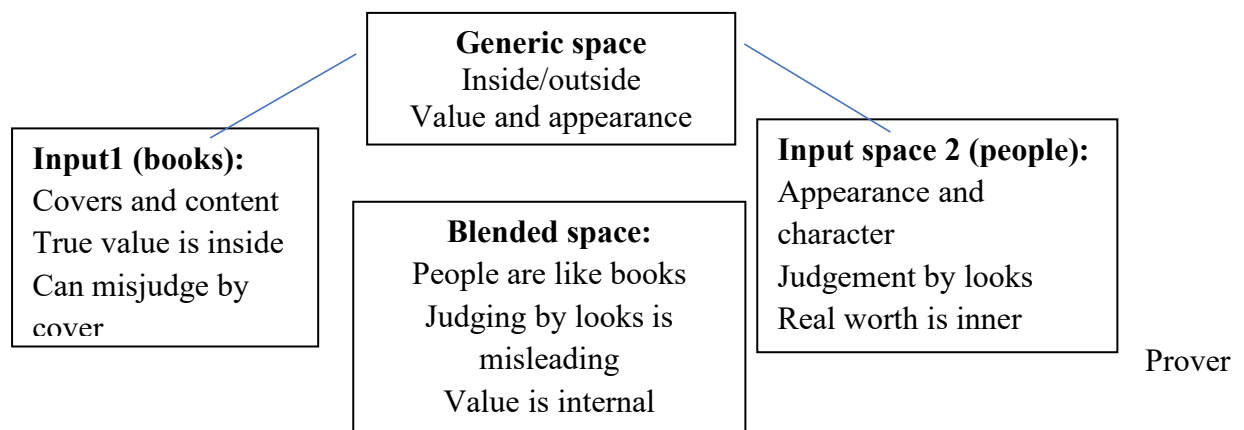
Implications: The planting metaphor conveys the importance of forethought and responsibility in decision-making. It suggests that the pursuit of knowledge requires nurturing and care, paralleling agricultural practices.

Light and Darkness. Knowledge is frequently associated with light, while ignorance is tied to darkness. This metaphor reflects the human desire for enlightenment and understanding.

Example: “Ignorance is bliss”. This saying suggests that not knowing certain truths may bring temporary happiness, but it also invites reflection on the value of knowledge.

Implications: The light and darkness metaphor foster a sense of urgency regarding the pursuit of knowledge. It reinforces the idea that enlightenment is a desirable state, promoting social awareness and critical thinking.

“You can’t judge a book by its cover”.



bs are deeply rooted in cultural contexts, and their metaphorical representations can vary across different societies. Cultural beliefs, social structures, and historical experiences shape the way knowledge is metaphorically encoded. For example: In cultures where agriculture is central, proverbs often use farming metaphors to convey knowledge about life and growth. Conversely, in urbanized societies, metaphors related to technology and modern life may be more prevalent. The use of metaphor in proverbs significantly impacts cognitive development and learning. Metaphors create connections between new and familiar concepts, facilitating understanding and retention.

Educational Implications: Incorporating proverbs with rich metaphors in educational settings can enhance students’ comprehension and critical thinking skills. By engaging with metaphorical language, learners can discover deeper meanings and develop their cognitive abilities.⁵Besides, proverbs serve as tools for socialization, transmitting cultural knowledge and values across generations. The metaphorical representations within proverbs encapsulate collective wisdom and societal expectations. Shared proverbs can foster a sense of belonging and community identity. When members of a culture use common proverbs, they reinforce shared values and norms, contributing to social cohesion.

⁵ Deborah.T. Talking Voices: Repetition, Dialogue and Imagery in Conversational Discourse. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. - 240 p.

Despite the modern world's rapid changes and advancements, proverbs continue to hold significance. They serve as touchstones for wisdom and can be found in various forms of media, literature, and everyday conversations. In contemporary communication, the rich metaphorical content of proverbs enhances discourse.⁶ Whether used in informal conversations, speeches, or writing, proverbs provide a succinct way to convey complex ideas. Moreover, with the rise of social media, proverbs have found new life as quotes and inspirational messages. Their metaphorical essence allows individuals to share profound insights quickly and effectively, reaching a broader audience.⁷

While proverbs offer valuable insights, interpreting their metaphorical meanings can be challenging, especially when crossing cultural boundaries. A proverb that holds deep significance in one culture may be misunderstood or misinterpreted in another. For example: the proverb "When in Rome, do as the Romans do" reflects the importance of adaptation and cultural sensitivity. However, its metaphorical implications may not resonate with individuals from cultures that prioritize individualism over conformity.

In addition to being linguistic strategies, metaphors are cognitive tools that aid in the organization and comprehension of human knowledge. Proverbs link real-life experiences (source domain) onto abstract ideas (target domain) through the use of metaphors.⁸ Because of their strong cultural roots, proverbs offer a wealth of metaphorical knowledge that captures societal norms, beliefs, and worldviews.

Proverbs usually express abstract ideas (like morality, relationships, and success) using well-known, concrete activities (like farming, the weather, and animals). For instance, "A rolling stone gathers no moss" conveys the abstract idea that continual movement avoids responsibility or stagnation by using the concrete picture of a stone.

To convey more general truths, proverbs frequently employ universal symbols (such as light and dark, routes and journeys). For instance, the phrase "The early bird catches the worm" employs an image of the "early bird" to represent initiative and readiness.

Sayings are a vital part of oral tradition in many cultures, passing down knowledge and values from one generation to the next. This helps to maintain and strengthen cultural knowledge structures. Sayings frequently offer advice on appropriate behavior, reinforcing social norms.⁹ For instance, "Honesty is the best policy" reinforces the value placed on honesty in many cultures. Sayings can also be used as a form of social control, discouraging deviant behavior; the saying "Curiosity killed the cat" cautions against excessive curiosity, as this could lead to problems.

Metaphorical sayings aid in the creation and reinforcement of mental frameworks, or schemas, that influence how people view and understand the world.

The difference between proverbs and sayings lies in their structure, meaning, and use.

Proverb- a short, well-known sentence expressing a general truth, piece of advice, or traditional wisdom.

Saying- a short, commonly known expression that may state a general idea, but not always deep or moral.

Proverbs reflects cultural values, folk wisdom, and morals. Sayings often just reflects everyday language use.

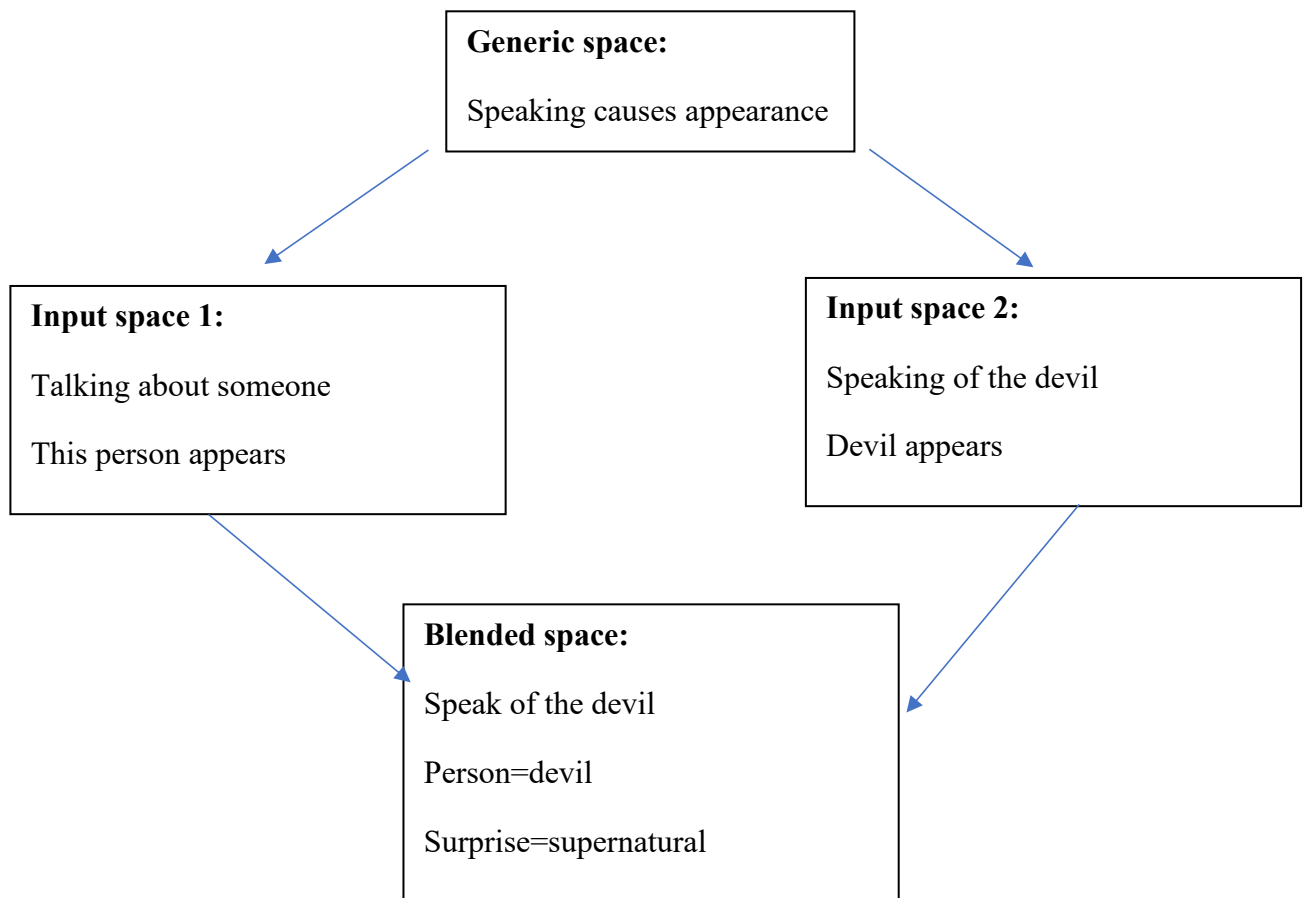
"Speak of the devil"

⁶ Tannen.D. *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*. New York: William Morrow, 1990. - 352 p.

⁷ Paul.G.J. *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method*. London: Routledge, 2014. - 248 p.

⁸ Lakoff.G, and Johnson.M. *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980. - 242 p.

⁹ Gibbs.W.R. *The Poetics of Mind: Figurative Thought, Language, and Understanding*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. - 368 p.



When someone appears just after being spoken about, it is like the devil appearing after his name is said. The blend adds humor, irony, and drama to a mundane event.

In conclusion, by examining how metaphorical proverbs and sayings reflect and shape cultural knowledge structures; we can gain deep insights into the cognitive and social mechanisms that underpin cultural continuity and change.

Resources:

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