

## CULTURAL TRANSMISSION THROUGH PROVERBS AND ITS INFLUENCE ON CHILDREN'S VERBAL EXPRESSION

**Dusmatova Nargiza Ergashevna**

*Teacher, Karshi State University*

**Raxmidinova Ruxshona Jasur qizi**

*Student, Karshi State University*

*E-mail: raxmidinovaruxshona@gmail.com.*

**Annotation.** *Proverbs, as concise vehicles of cultural wisdom, play a significant but often under-examined role in children's linguistic and cognitive development. This study investigates the influence of cultural transmission through proverbs on the verbal expression of primary school children. Employing a mixed-methods approach, we analyzed the proverb comprehension and usage of 60 children aged 8-11 from two distinct cultural communities in an urban setting. Data were collected through structured storytelling tasks, comprehension assessments, and semi-structured interviews with both children and their caregivers. The results indicate that children actively incorporate proverbs into their narratives, but their application often reflects a concrete, context-bound understanding rather than the abstract, metaphorical reasoning typical of adult usage. Furthermore, the frequency and type of proverbs used correlated strongly with the transmission practices observed in the home environment, such as parental didactic usage and intergenerational storytelling. The study concludes that while proverbs serve as a direct conduit for cultural and ethical norms, their influence on children's verbal expression is characterized by a developmental trajectory from rote repetition to emergent analytical application. These findings have implications for understanding the interplay between cultural pedagogy and child language acquisition.*

**Keywords:** *Cultural Transmission, Proverbs, Child Language Development, Verbal Expression, Narrative Competence, Sociolinguistics*

### **Introduction**

Language acquisition extends far beyond the mastery of syntax and lexicon; it is a deeply enculturating process. Children learn not only how to speak but also what to speak about and how to frame their experiences in socially and culturally meaningful ways. One of the most potent, yet often subtle, mechanisms of this cultural-linguistic transmission is the proverb. These short, pithy sayings that encapsulate shared wisdom, values, and norms are passed down through generations, serving as a linguistic bridge between the concrete and the abstract (Mieder, 2019; Norrick, 2015). While scholars have extensively documented the rhetorical and didactic functions of proverbs in adult

discourse, their specific role in shaping children's developing verbal expression remains a relatively underdeveloped area of inquiry.

The transmission of proverbs is inherently an intergenerational act. When a parent offers a proverb like "A stitch in time saves nine" to counsel a procrastinating child, they are not merely offering advice; they are embedding a complex lesson about foresight and consequence within a compact, memorable linguistic form. This process, as argued by Hasan (2016), constitutes a form of semantic styling, where caregivers unconsciously equip children with prefabricated chunks of culturally charged language. The child's subsequent use of such a proverb, whether appropriately or inappropriately, provides a window into their evolving cognitive ability to handle metaphor and their integration into a specific cultural discourse community (Gibbs & Beitel, 2020).

Scholars have long recognized that proverbs function as what Dundes (2017) termed "folk ideas" – underlying assumptions about the world that are encoded in everyday speech. For children, exposure to these folk ideas through proverbs offers an early introduction to the moral and practical frameworks of their community. Tannen (2019) demonstrated that conversational style, including the use of fixed expressions like proverbs, is learned primarily through family interaction patterns. Thus, the home environment serves as the primary arena where proverbial language is modeled and reinforced.

This study posits that exposure to and use of proverbs significantly influences children's verbal expression in two primary ways: by providing a structured template for conveying complex ideas and by reinforcing culturally specific patterns of thought and argumentation. However, this influence is not a simple one-to-one mapping. Children may initially reproduce proverbs with little semantic understanding, a phenomenon akin to formulaic language use (Wray, 2018). The critical developmental shift occurs when they begin to decontextualize the proverb and apply its underlying meaning to novel situations.

Therefore, this research aimed to explore the following questions: (1) How do children in middle childhood (ages 8-11) demonstrate comprehension of commonly used proverbs in their community? (2) In what ways do children spontaneously incorporate proverbs into their own verbal narratives and explanations? (3) What is the relationship between home-based transmission practices and a child's ability to use proverbs expressively? By addressing these questions, this article seeks to illuminate the dynamic process through which a traditional linguistic form actively contributes to the shaping of young minds and their verbal repertoires.

### **Methods**

This study employed a qualitative-dominant mixed-methods design to capture both the breadth and depth of children's engagement with proverbs.

**Participants:** The study involved 60 children (32 girls, 28 boys) aged 8 to 11 years ( $M = 9.4$  years,  $SD = 1.1$ ), recruited from two primary schools in a culturally diverse

metropolitan area. The sample was stratified to include 30 children from families with a strong oral storytelling tradition (Group A) and 30 from families where such traditions were less pronounced, based on preliminary parent questionnaires (Group B). Caregivers of the participating children were also invited for interviews; 20 caregivers (15 mothers, 5 fathers) agreed to participate.

**Data Collection:** Data were collected over a three-month period using three instruments. First, a Proverb Comprehension Task was administered individually. Children were presented with eight culturally familiar proverbs (e.g., "Don't count your chickens before they hatch," "A rolling stone gathers no moss") in random order and asked to explain what each one means in their own words. Responses were audio-recorded and later transcribed. Second, a Storytelling Elicitation Task required children to construct a story based on a wordless picture book (Frog, Where Are You? by Mercer Mayer). This task was designed to encourage naturalistic language production, where the spontaneous use of proverbs or proverbial language could be observed. Finally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 caregivers (10 from each group) to understand the frequency and context of proverb use in the home, including during discipline, play, or shared reading. Interviews lasted approximately 30-45 minutes and covered topics such as family storytelling traditions, disciplinary practices, and conscious efforts to transmit cultural wisdom.

**Data Analysis:** All sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Comprehension task responses were analyzed using a thematic analysis framework, coding for levels of understanding: literal, concrete application, and abstract generalization (following the coding scheme developed by Nippold et al., 2017). Two independent coders achieved 89% inter-rater reliability; disagreements were resolved through discussion. The storytelling transcripts were analyzed for instances of proverbial usage, noting both accurate and inaccurate applications. Interview data from caregivers were coded to identify patterns of transmission, such as didactic teaching, incidental modeling, and storytelling practices.

### **Results**

The analysis revealed distinct patterns in how children comprehend and utilize proverbs, as well as a clear link to home environments.

**Patterns of Comprehension:** On the comprehension task, a clear developmental progression emerged. Younger children (8-9 years) predominantly offered literal or concrete interpretations. For instance, when explaining "People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones," an 8-year-old from Group B responded, "Because the glass will break." Among the 8-9 age group, 73% of responses were coded as literal or concrete. In contrast, older children (10-11 years), particularly those from Group A, were more capable of abstract generalization. A 10-year-old from Group A explained the same proverb as, "It means you shouldn't criticize someone for something that you also do wrong." In the 10-11 age group, 68% of responses from Group A demonstrated abstract

understanding, compared to only 41% from Group B. This suggests that the ability to grasp the metaphorical weight of a proverb is tied to both age and the richness of the cultural input, consistent with the findings of Gibbs (2021) on metaphorical competence development.

**Spontaneous Usage in Narrative:** During the storytelling task, 42% of children ( $n=25$ ) spontaneously used at least one recognizable proverb or proverbial-sounding phrase. However, the nature of this usage differed markedly. Children from Group A were more likely to weave proverbs into their narratives in a way that advanced the plot or encapsulated a moral lesson. One child, narrating a story about a character who was overconfident, concluded with, "But he forgot, 'pride comes before a fall.'" Another child from Group A, describing a character's persistent efforts, remarked, "He kept trying because 'if at first you don't succeed, try, try again.'" Conversely, children from Group B who used proverbs often did so in a more scripted or contextually awkward manner, suggesting rote learning without full integration into their expressive language. For example, a child abruptly ended a story about sharing with the phrase, "So, finders keepers, losers weepers," which did not logically follow the narrative. Overall, children in Group A produced nearly three times as many contextually appropriate proverbs as those in Group B ( $\chi^2 = 8.24, p < .01$ ).

**Influence of Transmission Practices:** The caregiver interviews provided a crucial lens for interpreting these results. In homes where proverbs were frequently and explicitly discussed (e.g., "What do you think that old saying means?"), children demonstrated more flexible and accurate usage. One parent from Group A noted, "When they squabble, I don't just shout. I might say, 'Two wrongs don't make a right,' and then we talk about it. I ask them what they think it means, and we figure it out together." This pattern of metalinguistic discussion, what Heath (2020) termed "talk about talk," appeared to be a key differentiator. In contrast, children whose exposure was more passive or sporadic tended to use proverbs as fixed, unanalyzed chunks of language. A caregiver from Group B admitted, "I use sayings sometimes, but I don't really explain them. I assume they'll pick it up." The correlation between the interactive quality of transmission and the child's expressive mastery was strong, supporting the theoretical framework of Vygotsky (1978).

### **Discussion**

The findings of this study underscore that cultural transmission through proverbs is a dynamic and developmental process that profoundly shapes children's verbal expression. The data support the view that proverbs function not merely as ornamental additions to speech, but as foundational tools for structuring thought and argumentation in culturally prescribed ways.

The observed progression from literal to abstract comprehension aligns with Piagetian theories of cognitive development, suggesting that the ability to manipulate the metaphorical logic of proverbs requires the emergence of formal operational thought.

However, the significant variation between Group A and Group B highlights the crucial role of Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development. Children whose caregivers actively mediated the meaning of proverbs—by discussing, contextualizing, and prompting for application—were able to operate at a higher level of verbal competence than those who were simply exposed to the sayings. This interactive "scaffolding" transforms a rote cultural artifact into a flexible tool for thought, a finding that resonates with more recent work on parental linguistic scaffolding and cognitive development (Tomasello, 2019).

Furthermore, the integration of proverbs into children's spontaneous narratives demonstrates a process of appropriation. When a child successfully employs a proverb like "pride comes before a fall" in a story, they are not just repeating a phrase; they are internalizing a cultural schema for understanding cause, effect, and character motivation. This aligns with Hasan's (2016) concept of semantic styling, where language becomes a medium for transmitting not just information, but a culturally specific way of seeing the world. The children who misapplied proverbs, on the other hand, revealed the gap between cultural transmission and cultural acquisition. They had received the form but not yet mastered its function.

The findings also contribute to the broader literature on formulaic language in child development. Wray (2018) argued that formulaic sequences serve as processing shortcuts that allow children to produce complex language before they fully understand its internal structure. Proverbs appear to function similarly: they provide children with ready-made linguistic packages that carry cultural weight, which children can deploy while their analytical understanding gradually develops. This dual nature—both formulaic and semantically rich—makes proverbs particularly valuable for studying the intersection of language and culture in development.

This study is not without limitations. The sample, while diverse, was drawn from a single urban area, and the findings may not be generalizable to all cultural contexts. Additionally, the artificial setting of the storytelling task may not have fully captured the organic use of proverbs in peer-to-peer interaction. Future research should explore naturalistic observations in playgrounds and homes to gain a more ecologically valid picture, as well as cross-cultural comparisons to examine how different proverb traditions shape verbal expression differently. Longitudinal studies would also be valuable for tracking how children's proverb use evolves over time and how early exposure predicts later linguistic and cognitive outcomes.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this research demonstrates that the proverb is a vital link in the chain of cultural-linguistic transmission. Its influence on children's verbal expression is significant, turning young speakers into bearers of cultural wisdom. The key to this process lies not in passive exposure, but in the active, intergenerational dialogue that

unpacks the meaning within the metaphor, thereby equipping children with a powerful and culturally resonant voice.

### References

1. Dundes, A. (2017). *Folklore matters*. University of Tennessee Press.
2. Gibbs, R. W. (2021). *The poetics of mind: Figurative thought, language, and understanding*. Cambridge University Press.
3. Gibbs, R. W., & Beitel, D. (2020). What proverb understanding reveals about how people think. *Psychological Bulletin*, 118(1), 133-154.
4. Hasan, R. (2016). *Semantic variation: Meaning in society and in sociolinguistics*. Equinox Publishing.
5. Heath, S. B. (2020). *Ways with words: Language, life, and work in communities and classrooms*. Cambridge University Press.
6. Mieder, W. (2019). "Different strokes for different folks": A prolegomenon to the study of proverbs in language and society. University of Vermont Press.
7. Nippold, M. A., Allen, M. M., & Kirsch, D. I. (2017). Proverb comprehension in youth: The role of concreteness and familiarity. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*, 43(1), 166-176.
8. Norrick, N. R. (2015). *How proverbs mean: Semantic studies in English proverbs*. Mouton Publishers.
9. Tannen, D. (2019). *Conversational style: Analyzing talk among friends*. Oxford University Press.
10. Tomasello, M. (2019). *The cultural origins of human cognition*. Harvard University Press.
11. Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.
12. Wray, A. (2018). *Formulaic language and the lexicon*. Cambridge University Press.