

The Role of Teaching Proverbs and Sayings in Enhancing Students' Speaking Skills

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Keywords	Abstract
Proverbs Sayings Folklore in Education Communicative Competence Intercultural Awareness Language Teaching Strategies	Proverbs and sayings serve as dynamic tools in language education, fostering linguistic, cultural, and moral development. This study explores the role of proverbs in enhancing students' speaking skills during English language teaching, with a particular focus on Azerbaijani and English linguistic materials. Through comparative analysis, the research highlights the structural and cultural nuances of proverbs in both languages, revealing their shared themes and unique differences. Practical applications such as vocabulary building, interactive activities, and cultural discussions are discussed, demonstrating how proverbs can improve communicative competence, critical thinking, and intercultural awareness. By integrating proverbs into classroom practices, educators can create a holistic learning environment that combines language mastery with cultural enrichment and personal growth.

Introduction

Proverbs and sayings hold a unique position in language education as linguistic tools that bridge culture, communication, and meaning. These succinct expressions, laden with cultural and moral values, transcend time and geography, offering language learners an authentic means to understand and use a foreign language in a meaningful way. In the context of teaching English as a second or foreign language, proverbs are not only instruments of linguistic enrichment but also catalysts for cultural awareness and deeper cognitive engagement (Nabi, 2024). By integrating proverbs into language lessons, educators can provide students with opportunities to develop communicative competence and expand their intercultural understanding (Gözpınar, 2014).

The communicative language teaching (CLT) approach underscores the importance of language as a tool for meaningful interaction. Within this framework, proverbs serve as a gateway to improving language skills by encouraging learners to interpret, analyze, and use these expressions in context (Shokirovna, 2022). Furthermore, as highlighted by Can (2011), learning proverbs allows students to immerse themselves in the linguistic and cultural nuances of the target language, fostering both linguistic accuracy and cultural empathy.

Proverbs also have a profound impact on learners' motivation and cognitive development. Mpumuje, Bazimaziki, and Muragijimana (2024) argue that oral literature, including proverbs, enhances



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students' language proficiency by engaging them in meaningful and culturally rich activities. Additionally, the visual and metaphorical nature of proverbs stimulates creativity and critical thinking, as learners are encouraged to decipher the deeper meanings embedded in these expressions (Hibbing & Rankin-Erickson, 2003). This dual function of proverbs—as both linguistic and cognitive tools—renders them invaluable in language pedagogy.

In Azerbaijan, the integration of proverbs into English language education offers unique opportunities to combine cultural preservation with linguistic innovation. By comparing Azerbaijani and English proverbs, educators can help students draw parallels between the two cultures, thereby strengthening their intercultural competence and communicative abilities (Abdulhasanli, Rzayeva, Amirova, & Huseynova, 2023). Moreover, as Vos, Van Der Meijden, and Denessen (2011) emphasize, engaging students in constructing meaning from proverbs fosters intrinsic motivation and deep learning strategies, essential for mastering a foreign language.

This paper explores the role of proverbs and sayings in enhancing students' speaking skills during English language education, with a particular focus on Azerbaijani and English linguistic materials. Drawing on theoretical perspectives and practical applications, it seeks to demonstrate how proverbs can enrich students' vocabulary, develop their critical thinking, and foster a deeper appreciation of both the target and native cultures.

The Role of Foreign Language Education

In today's interconnected world, foreign language education is no longer a mere academic pursuit; it is a vital tool for global integration and cultural exchange. As nations strive to foster international cooperation and mutual understanding, the role of language as a bridge between diverse cultures becomes increasingly prominent. In Azerbaijan, a country rich in cultural heritage and undergoing rapid globalization, foreign language education is recognized as a cornerstone for personal and societal development. The integration of proverbs and sayings into language instruction aligns with the broader objectives of modern education systems, which aim to prepare students for active participation in a globalized world (Abdulhasanli, Rzayeva, Amirova, & Huseynova, 2023).

One of the central aims of foreign language education is to develop communicative competence—an ability to use the language effectively and appropriately in various contexts. The communicative language teaching (CLT) approach, widely regarded as one of the most effective methodologies, emphasizes meaningful interaction and the practical use of language. Within this framework, cultural expressions such as proverbs and sayings play a pivotal role in fostering linguistic fluency and cultural understanding (Shokirovna, 2022). They offer learners insights into the social norms, values, and traditions of the target language community, thereby enriching their linguistic and intercultural repertoire.

Moreover, foreign language education extends beyond linguistic proficiency to include the development of cognitive and social skills. Learning a foreign language encourages critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity, particularly when students engage with metaphorical and idiomatic expressions like proverbs. As highlighted by Nabi (2024), proverbs serve as linguistic artifacts that encapsulate centuries of cultural wisdom, enabling learners to explore the rich historical and philosophical dimensions of a language. This approach not only enhances their linguistic abilities but also deepens their appreciation for the cultural contexts in which the language is used.



Incorporating foreign language education into national curricula also aligns with international educational reforms aimed at fostering intercultural dialogue and global citizenship. As Gözpınar (2014) notes, language serves as a powerful medium for developing intercultural awareness, enabling students to understand and respect cultural diversity. By integrating proverbs into the learning process, educators can create opportunities for students to compare and contrast cultural values, thereby cultivating empathy and mutual respect among learners.

In the Azerbaijani context, the strategic focus on foreign language education reflects the country's aspiration to strengthen its global presence. The use of authentic materials, such as proverbs and sayings, bridges the gap between language learning and cultural understanding. As Nabiev (2023) points out, teaching linguistic nuances, including idiomatic expressions, is crucial for developing advanced language skills among learners. By embedding such elements into language instruction, educators can ensure that students not only acquire linguistic competence but also become culturally informed global citizens.

In conclusion, foreign language education plays a transformative role in equipping learners with the skills and knowledge necessary to navigate an increasingly interconnected world. By integrating culturally rich elements such as proverbs and sayings, educators can foster a holistic learning experience that combines linguistic proficiency with cultural awareness, critical thinking, and social engagement.

Teaching Through Folklore and Proverbs

Folklore, as a repository of cultural heritage, plays a significant role in language education by offering authentic, meaningful, and engaging content for learners. Among the various elements of folklore, proverbs stand out as concise, memorable expressions that convey moral values, societal norms, and linguistic richness. Integrating proverbs into language teaching provides educators with a powerful tool to foster both communicative competence and cultural awareness (Nabi, 2024). These succinct expressions not only teach language mechanics but also serve as gateways to understanding the values and traditions of the target culture (Gözpınar, 2014).

Proverbs possess a universal appeal, making them adaptable across diverse linguistic and cultural contexts. By exploring the proverbs of different languages, learners are encouraged to identify common human experiences and appreciate cultural diversity. For instance, comparing proverbs in English and Azerbaijani reveals shared values such as hard work, honesty, and respect for traditions, as well as unique cultural perspectives. This comparative approach not only enhances language skills but also develops intercultural sensitivity among learners (Mpumuje, Bazimaziki, & Muragijimana, 2024).

The integration of proverbs into language lessons can be achieved through various strategies. For example, educators can use proverbs to teach vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structure. English proverbs such as "Don't put all your eggs in one basket" or "An apple a day keeps the doctor away" can illustrate grammatical patterns like imperative sentences or subject-verb-object structures. Additionally, metaphorical expressions like "Still waters run deep" introduce learners to the rich figurative language of English, fostering creativity and deeper comprehension (Shokirovna, 2022).

Interactive activities, such as matching halves of proverbs or discussing their meanings, can further enhance learners' engagement and critical thinking. These activities not only encourage active participation but also help students internalize the linguistic and cultural nuances of the proverbs. As noted by Can (2011), such practices enable learners to better retain vocabulary and idiomatic expressions while simultaneously improving their communicative abilities.



Another effective method is using proverbs to introduce storytelling or role-playing exercises. For instance, learners can create narratives based on the meanings of proverbs, thereby practicing their speaking and writing skills. This approach aligns with the communicative language teaching (CLT) methodology, which emphasizes the practical use of language in meaningful contexts (Vos, Van Der Meijden, & Denessen, 2011).

Moreover, proverbs can serve as tools for moral education, promoting values such as integrity, diligence, and empathy. As Abdulhasanli, Rzayeva, Amirova, and Huseynova (2023) observe, using culturally embedded materials in language lessons fosters a deeper connection between learners and the language they are studying. By understanding the moral and ethical lessons conveyed through proverbs, students can gain insights into the worldview of the target language community.

Teaching through folklore and proverbs offers a multifaceted approach to language education that integrates linguistic, cultural, and moral dimensions. By leveraging the universal appeal and practical applications of proverbs, educators can create enriching and meaningful learning experiences that extend beyond language proficiency to foster intercultural understanding and personal growth.

Comparison of Azerbaijani and English Proverbs

Proverbs serve as cultural mirrors, reflecting the shared values and unique traditions of different societies. Comparing Azerbaijani and English proverbs offers valuable insights into their linguistic structure, grammatical patterns, and cultural meanings. Such comparisons not only highlight the commonalities that unite humanity but also reveal the distinctive characteristics that define each culture. As Nabi (2024) notes, proverbs encapsulate centuries of wisdom and offer a means to understand the cultural context in which they are used.

Structurally, Azerbaijani and English proverbs often share similarities in brevity and metaphorical richness. Both languages use proverbs to convey deep meanings through concise phrases. For example, the Azerbaijani proverb "*Toydan sonra nağara*" (literally, "Drumming after the wedding") parallels the English saying "After dinner, mustard," both of which convey the idea of something being too late or untimely. However, the grammatical construction in Azerbaijani may vary, often relying on implied subjects and verbs, while English proverbs frequently employ complete clauses.

Grammatically, English proverbs are more likely to adhere to standard sentence structures, such as imperative or declarative forms. Examples include "Don't put all your eggs in one basket" (imperative) and "An apple a day keeps the doctor away" (declarative). In contrast, Azerbaijani proverbs may omit elements such as subjects or auxiliary verbs for brevity and impact, as in "*Təzə süpürgə, təmiz süpürər*" ("A new broom sweeps clean"), where the structure is intentionally simplified for clarity and rhythm.

Culturally, Azerbaijani and English proverbs reflect their respective societies' values and worldviews. Azerbaijani proverbs often emphasize collective values, such as community, family, and tradition. For instance, "*Birlikdən qüvvət doğar*" ("Unity brings strength") highlights the importance of solidarity. English proverbs, while also valuing cooperation, frequently underscore individual responsibility and practicality, as seen in "God helps those who help themselves."

Despite these differences, there are notable thematic overlaps. Both cultures value hard work, honesty, and perseverance. The Azerbaijani proverb "*Zəhmətsiz bal yeməzlər*" ("No bees, no honey") mirrors the English saying "No pain, no gain," emphasizing the necessity of effort to achieve success.



Similarly, "*Hər elin öz adəti var*" ("Every land has its customs") corresponds to "So many countries, so many customs," showcasing a shared recognition of cultural diversity.

Translation of proverbs between these languages often involves not just linguistic adaptation but also cultural interpretation. Some proverbs can be directly translated while retaining their meaning, such as "*Yavaş get, uzaq get*" ("Go slowly, go far"), which is equivalent to "Slow and steady wins the race." However, others require contextual adaptation to convey their essence, as in "*Dəvəcən boyun olunca, düyməcə ağlın olsun*" ("Better to have wisdom than height"), which lacks a direct English equivalent but aligns conceptually with "The bigger they are, the harder they fall."

The nuanced differences in translation underscore the richness of each culture's linguistic heritage. As Gözpinar (2014) points out, understanding such nuances fosters intercultural awareness and deepens learners' appreciation for the target language. These comparative studies of proverbs offer not only linguistic benefits but also insights into the philosophical and moral priorities of each society.

Azerbaijani and English proverbs, while differing in structure and cultural focus, share universal themes that transcend linguistic boundaries. Exploring these similarities and differences helps language learners develop a broader perspective on communication and culture, enriching their linguistic competence and intercultural understanding. As Mpumuje, Bazimaziki, and Muragijimana (2024) emphasize, such comparative approaches in language education foster meaningful connections between learners and the cultures they study.

Practical Applications in Teaching

Incorporating proverbs and sayings into language teaching offers numerous opportunities to enhance students' linguistic and cultural competence. As compact and meaningful expressions, proverbs serve as effective tools for teaching vocabulary, grammar, and communication skills while simultaneously fostering cultural awareness. Their integration into lessons aligns with the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach, which emphasizes meaningful interaction and practical language use (Shokirovna, 2022). Here are some practical applications for using proverbs in the classroom:

1. Teaching Vocabulary and Grammar

Proverbs are an excellent resource for introducing and reinforcing vocabulary and grammatical structures. For instance, English proverbs like "Don't count your chickens before they are hatched" and "Don't put all your eggs in one basket" can be used to teach imperative sentences and negation. Similarly, proverbs such as "An apple a day keeps the doctor away" highlight subject-verb-object structures in declarative sentences.

To enhance understanding, educators can provide translations of proverbs into the students' native language. For example, the Azerbaijani proverb "*Zəhmətsiz bal yeməzlər*" ("No bees, no honey") can be compared to the English equivalent "No pain, no gain." Such comparisons help learners grasp both linguistic and cultural nuances (Nabi, 2024).

2. Encouraging Critical Thinking

Proverbs encourage learners to think critically about language and meaning. Teachers can ask students to interpret the metaphorical or symbolic significance of proverbs and relate them to real-life situations. For example, discussing the proverb "Still waters run deep" can lead to conversations about personality traits



and first impressions, fostering deeper cognitive engagement (Mpumuje, Bazimaziki, & Muragijimana, 2024).

3. *Developing Speaking and Writing Skills*

Proverbs can serve as prompts for creative speaking and writing activities. Students can be tasked with creating stories or dialogues based on a selected proverb, encouraging them to use their imagination and linguistic knowledge. For instance, the proverb "Slow and steady wins the race" could inspire students to write a short narrative or role-play a conversation about perseverance. This practice aligns with Vos, Van Der Meijden, and Denessen's (2011) findings that interactive activities promote intrinsic motivation and language acquisition.

4. *Building Intercultural Awareness*

Proverbs offer an opportunity for students to explore cultural values and traditions. By comparing proverbs from different languages, learners can identify similarities and differences in cultural perspectives. For example, the English proverb "So many countries, so many customs" and the Azerbaijani equivalent "*Hər elin öz adəti var*" highlight a shared recognition of cultural diversity. Such exercises not only improve language skills but also cultivate empathy and intercultural competence (Gözpınar, 2014).

5. *Interactive Games and Activities*

Interactive activities can make learning proverbs engaging and memorable. For instance:

- **Matching Game:** Students match halves of proverbs, such as pairing "Don't put all your eggs" with "in one basket."
- **Proverb Completion:** One team begins a proverb, and the other completes it (e.g., "Easy come, easy..." → "...easy go").
- **Proverb Charades:** Students act out a proverb while others guess its meaning.

These activities encourage collaboration, reinforce vocabulary, and improve students' ability to use proverbs contextually (Can, 2011).

6. *Enhancing Listening and Comprehension*

Teachers can use proverbs in listening activities by incorporating them into songs, speeches, or storytelling exercises. For instance, playing a recording of a story featuring proverbs allows students to identify and analyze their usage. Hibbing and Rankin-Erickson (2003) emphasize that combining visual and auditory elements enhances comprehension and retention, making proverbs particularly effective for struggling learners.

7. *Promoting Moral and Ethical Values*

Proverbs often convey moral lessons, making them valuable tools for character education. Discussing proverbs like "Honesty is the best policy" or "*Birlikdən qüvvət doğar*" ("Unity brings strength") helps students reflect on ethical values while practicing the target language. This dual focus on language and character development enriches the overall learning experience (Abdulhasanli, Rzayeva, Amirova, & Huseynova, 2023).



The practical applications of proverbs in language teaching are diverse and far-reaching. By integrating proverbs into classroom activities, educators can enhance students' vocabulary, grammar, critical thinking, and intercultural competence. These activities not only improve language proficiency but also foster a deeper connection to the cultural and moral dimensions of the target language. Such an approach ensures a holistic and engaging learning experience for students.

Conclusion

Proverbs and sayings are invaluable resources in language education, offering a unique blend of linguistic enrichment, cultural insight, and moral guidance. Their integration into teaching practices enhances vocabulary acquisition, grammatical understanding, and communicative competence, while also fostering critical thinking and intercultural awareness. As Nabi (2024) and Shokirovna (2022) emphasize, the use of culturally rich materials such as proverbs aligns with communicative language teaching, ensuring that students engage with the target language in meaningful and practical ways. In comparing proverbs from Azerbaijani and English, educators can highlight both universal themes and culturally specific nuances, promoting a deeper appreciation of the shared and distinct values reflected in language. By exploring proverbs, learners not only develop their linguistic abilities but also gain insight into the philosophies and traditions of the cultures they study (Gözpinar, 2014). Moreover, the moral and ethical lessons embedded in proverbs encourage students to connect language learning with personal growth and character development (Abdulhasanli, Rzayeva, Amirova, & Huseynova, 2023).

The practical applications of proverbs in teaching, from interactive games to creative writing exercises, make language learning engaging and memorable. By using these activities, educators can motivate students to actively participate in their language education while simultaneously fostering their ability to think critically and communicate effectively. Ultimately, the integration of proverbs into language instruction creates a holistic learning experience, bridging the gap between linguistic competence and cultural understanding. As a powerful pedagogical tool, proverbs enable students to connect with the target language on a deeper level, preparing them not only to use the language fluently but also to navigate the complexities of cultural exchange in a globalized world.

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