

## **Proverbs Denoting National Cultural Life of English People**

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**Abstract:** *The article discusses proverbs that reflect the national and cultural life of English people. Proverbs are an important part of the linguistic heritage of every nation, as they convey collective wisdom, traditions, beliefs, and social values. The theoretical part of the work analyzes the studies of scholars who investigated the role of proverbs in language and culture. Special attention is paid to the semantic and cultural features of English proverbs that illustrate everyday life, moral principles, customs, and worldview of the English people. Proverbs serve not only as linguistic units but also as cultural markers that preserve national identity and historical experience.*

**Keywords:** *proverbs, national culture, English people, linguistic units, cultural values, folk wisdom, national identity, traditions, worldview, phraseology.*

### **Introduction**

The Language is closely connected with the culture, traditions, and worldview of a nation. Among the various linguistic units that preserve cultural knowledge, proverbs occupy a particularly important place. Proverbs represent the collective wisdom of people accumulated through centuries and expressed in short, memorable statements. They reflect people's observations about life, social relations, morality, work, and human behavior. Because of their brevity and figurative nature, proverbs are easily remembered and transmitted from generation to generation. In every culture, proverbs function not only as linguistic expressions but also as carriers of historical experience and cultural values. Therefore, the study of proverbs is important both in linguistics and in cultural studies[1,2].

A proverb can be defined as a short, widely known saying that expresses a general truth, practical advice, or moral lesson. Proverbs usually contain figurative meaning and are characterized by stability of form and meaning. They belong to the sphere of phraseology and folklore and often reflect the worldview and mentality of the people who created them. The modern scholar Wolfgang Mieder defines a proverb as a short, generally known sentence of the folk that expresses wisdom, truth, morality, and traditional views in a metaphorical and memorable form. Because of these features, proverbs are considered an important means through which a society expresses its values and experience[3,4].

### **Methodology.**

The scientific study of proverbs is known as paremiology, a branch of linguistics that investigates proverbs, sayings, and other types of folk expressions. Many scholars have made important contributions to the study of proverbs. One of the most influential researchers was the American scholar Archer Taylor, whose work *The Proverb* examined the origin, structure, and historical development of proverbs. Wolfgang Mieder is another prominent paremiologist who studied the cultural and social functions of proverbs in modern communication. In England, John Ray played a significant role in collecting and analyzing proverbs; his famous work *English Proverbs*, published in 1678, became one of the earliest systematic collections of English proverbial expressions[5]. Other scholars such as Friedrich Seiler and Grigorii Permyakov also contributed to the classification and

semantic analysis of proverbs. These researchers emphasized that proverbs are not simply linguistic units but important cultural documents that reflect the historical experience and social values of a nation.

### **Results and discussion.**

Proverbs can be classified in different ways according to their structure, meaning, or thematic content. One of the most common classifications is thematic classification, which groups proverbs according to the topics they describe. Many proverbs deal with work and diligence, others focus on wisdom and careful decision-making, while some express ideas about friendship, morality, health, or opportunity. Such thematic categories help scholars understand how proverbs reflect the everyday life and worldview of a particular society. For example, proverbs about work emphasize diligence and perseverance; proverbs about caution teach people to think carefully before acting; and proverbs about social relations highlight loyalty, honesty, and cooperation[6,7]. Through these themes, proverbs reveal the cultural priorities and moral principles of a nation.

English proverbs are especially interesting from the cultural point of view because they reflect many aspects of the historical and social life of the English people. Many of them originated in everyday occupations such as agriculture, craftsmanship, trade, and domestic life. Because these activities were essential parts of English society for centuries, they became the basis for numerous proverbial expressions. Through these proverbs, it is possible to observe the values that shaped English cultural identity, such as discipline, practical thinking, responsibility, loyalty, and the ability to take advantage of opportunities.

One of the proverbs that clearly reflects the English attitude toward discipline and a healthy lifestyle is “Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise.” This proverb emphasizes the importance of regular habits, hard work, and time management. Historical records show that the idea expressed in this proverb has existed for many centuries. A similar expression appeared as early as 1496 in the work *Treatise of Fishing with an Angle*, where it was stated that a person who rises early will be holy, healthy, and fortunate. In 1523, a verse in *Husbandry* stated that early rising makes a man whole in body, holier in soul, and richer in goods. Later, the proverb appeared in its modern form in 1639 in *Parœmiologia Anglo-Latina*. The long historical existence of this proverb demonstrates how strongly English culture values discipline, productivity, and responsible habits. In traditional English society, especially during agricultural periods, waking early was essential for completing daily tasks, which explains why the proverb became a symbol of a successful and well-organized life[8,9].

Another proverb that reflects an important aspect of English mentality is “Look before you leap.” This expression advises people to think carefully before making decisions or taking action. The earliest known version of this proverb appeared around 1350 in Douce Manuscript 52 with the phrase “First look and afterward leap.” In 1528, William Tyndale explained the literal meaning of the proverb as advice not to do anything suddenly or without careful consideration. Later writers continued to use this proverb in literary works, which helped to preserve it in everyday speech. The popularity of this expression demonstrates the pragmatic and cautious attitude traditionally associated with English culture. The proverb teaches that thoughtful planning and rational evaluation are necessary before undertaking any important action[10].

Proverbs also reflect the importance of social relationships and moral values in English society. One well-known example is the proverb “A friend in need is a friend indeed.” This proverb emphasizes that true friendship is proven during times of difficulty. The idea behind this expression can be traced back to ancient literature. Similar thoughts appeared in the works of the Greek playwright Euripides and the Roman writer Ennius, who both suggested that genuine friends are recognized during adversity. In English tradition, a comparable expression appeared around 1035 in the *Durham Proverbs*, which stated that friends should be tested in times of need[11,12]. The modern form of the proverb was later recorded in John Ray’s collection *English Proverbs* in 1678. The long history of this proverb demonstrates the importance of loyalty, trust, and mutual support in English social life.

Agricultural experience also influenced the development of many English proverbs. A clear example is the proverb “Make hay while the sun shines.” This expression first appeared in 1546 in

John Heywood's *Dialogue of Proverbs* with the phrase "When the sun shines make hay." In its literal sense, the proverb refers to the practical necessity of making hay during sunny weather, since rain could spoil the harvested grass. Over time, the expression acquired a metaphorical meaning and came to advise people to take advantage of favorable circumstances while they last. This proverb reflects the historical importance of agriculture in English life and shows how everyday experiences were transformed into general life lessons[13].

Another proverb that originated from traditional occupations is "Strike while the iron is hot." This expression comes from the work of blacksmiths, who had to shape heated metal while it was still soft. The earliest English record of the proverb appears in Geoffrey Chaucer's *Tale of Melibee* around 1386 with the phrase "While the iron is hot, men should smite." Later the proverb appeared again in John Heywood's *Dialogue of Proverbs* in 1546. Like the previous example, this proverb eventually acquired a figurative meaning, encouraging people to act quickly when a suitable opportunity appears. It reflects the practical, action-oriented attitude that has long been associated with English culture[14].

These proverbs are considered descriptors of English national life because they originate from everyday experiences and express values that were important in English society. Discipline, careful decision-making, loyalty, and the ability to recognize opportunities are all qualities reflected in the historical development of English culture. Through proverbs, these values were communicated in a simple and memorable form, making them accessible to all members of society. As a result, proverbs became an effective means of transmitting cultural knowledge and social norms from one generation to another.

Several other English sayings reflect the wisdom, values, and practical worldview of the English people. "Every cloud has a silver lining" expresses the idea that even the gloomiest situation contains some hope or consolation. Its literary origin can be traced back to 1634 in Milton's *Comus*, and it became widely cited in 19th- and 20th-century literature, demonstrating the English tendency to seek optimism even in adversity. "Actions speak louder than words" emphasizes that deeds carry more weight than promises or statements. While its modern form was first recorded in the United States, its roots in English thought appear in the 1628 Hansard Parliamentary speech, reflecting the importance of integrity and responsibility. "The early bird catches the worm" underscores diligence, punctuality, and initiative. The earliest known usage in English appears in 1636 in *Remains concerning Britain*, and it was later cited in literary works throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, illustrating the English cultural emphasis on proactivity and hard work.

The proverb "The rotten apple injures its neighbour" reflects a practical and moral observation rooted in everyday life, particularly in English culture. It originates from agricultural experience: if one apple in a barrel is rotten, it can quickly cause the surrounding apples to spoil as well. This literal truth became a metaphor for social behavior, highlighting how a single person with bad habits, immoral actions, or a negative influence can harm those around them. The purpose of this proverb is both cautionary and instructive. It warns people to be careful about whom they associate with and underscores the importance of surrounding oneself with virtuous, positive, and diligent companions. It also serves as a social guideline, promoting moral responsibility and awareness of the effects of one's actions on the wider community. In the context of English life, this proverb reflects the cultural emphasis on community, social order, and moral conduct, where the well-being of the group was often as important as individual behavior. Just as in farming, where careful attention prevents the spread of rot, in social life, vigilance and good judgment were valued to maintain harmony and integrity[15].

The proverb "You can't teach an old dog new tricks" is closely related to English life and culture because it reflects practical observations about human behavior and social attitudes toward learning, adaptability, and experience. Historically, English society valued hard work, skill, and experience, especially in agricultural, craft, and domestic settings. People noticed that habits, skills, and ways of thinking formed early in life tended to be resistant to change later on. Just like an old dog struggles to learn new behaviors, older individuals were often seen as less flexible in adopting new methods, technologies, or ideas. This proverb encapsulates that practical reality in a simple, memorable way. The purpose of this proverb is both cautionary and explanatory: it serves to remind people that learning and adaptation are easier when done early in life and explains why older people may resist change. It also encourages patience and pragmatism when dealing with others, acknowledging that some habits and behaviors are deeply ingrained and difficult to alter. In essence, this proverb preserves a cultural

observation about life and human nature, showing how English people historically valued adaptability, practical skills, and the wisdom of experience while recognizing the limits of change with age.

“A woman’s place is in the home” arose during a period when society strictly defined gender roles. Women were largely confined to domestic spaces and expected to manage households, care for children, and maintain family life, while men were responsible for public work, trade, or agriculture. The proverb reflects these societal expectations, reinforcing the belief that a woman’s primary duty was domestic. It became widespread because such roles were seen as natural, essential, and morally proper in the eyes of society, serving as both advice and a social norm.

“A woman’s work is never done” emerged from the lived reality of women’s continuous domestic labor. Households in the past required constant maintenance—cooking, cleaning, childcare, and other tasks—without modern appliances or conveniences. This proverb highlights the endless, often invisible nature of women’s work and became a way to acknowledge the persistent effort and responsibility they bore daily. It also served as a cautionary reflection on the demanding expectations placed on women, often without relief or recognition.

“Where there’s a will, there’s a way” highlights determination and perseverance, first recorded in 1640 in *Outlandish Proverbs*, promoting the belief that human effort can overcome obstacles. “A stitch in time saves nine” advises timely action to prevent larger problems, originating in 17th-century English proverbial collections, emphasizing foresight and prudence. “Don’t count your chickens before they hatch” warns against premature expectations, appearing in English literature by the 16th century, reflecting the value placed on realism and caution. “Too many cooks spoil the broth” conveys that excessive involvement can ruin results; it was recorded in English collections as early as the 16th century, illustrating the importance of efficiency and organized collaboration. “Beggars can’t be choosers” expresses that those in need must accept what is offered, appearing in early English texts, reflecting pragmatic acceptance of social realities. Finally, “Still waters run deep” suggests that quiet or reserved people often possess great depth, while “The pen is mightier than the sword” emphasizes the power of ideas and communication over physical force, originating in 17th-century English literature, reflecting the cultural appreciation for wisdom, intellect, and subtle influence.

## Conclusion.

In conclusion, proverbs in any language reflect the life, traditions, values, and cultural experience of a nation. English proverbs illustrate important aspects of the social and historical life of English people, including their attitudes toward work, discipline, friendship, and practical wisdom. These expressions originate from everyday experiences and traditional occupations such as agriculture and craftsmanship. Therefore, proverbs serve not only as linguistic units but also as cultural indicators that preserve and transmit national values from generation to generation.

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