

# Symbolic Language and Imagery in Formatting, Preserving, and Transmitting Cultural Values through Vietnamese Proverbs

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## Abstract

*This study explores the significance of symbolic language and imagery in Vietnamese folk songs and proverbs for the purpose of safeguarding and transferring cultural values. This study is based on the theoretical frameworks of cultural semantics and pragmatics (Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2014) and cultural ecolinguistics (Stibbe, 2015). The study scrutinizes the expression of cultural meanings through language and explores the reciprocal influence of language on a community's conceptual system, values, and beliefs. The study utilized a qualitative research methodology to gather and examine 160 Vietnamese proverbs as valuable sources of data containing symbolic language and imagery. The findings demonstrate that these linguistic artifacts successfully capture the knowledge, experiences, beliefs, and perspectives of the Vietnamese people, showcasing their balanced connection with nature, social morality, and ethical ideals. The study employs meticulous qualitative analysis to reveal the complex network of cultural meanings embedded in symbolic language and imagery. It emphasizes the crucial role of these meanings in preserving and transmitting cultural values over generations, as well as fostering a sense of cultural identity and continuity within the Vietnamese community. In conclusion, the research highlights the significance of folk songs and proverbs in preserving and spreading Vietnam's abundant cultural heritage.*

**Keywords:** Cultural Values, Symbolic Language, Folk Songs, Proverbs, Vietnamese Cultural Heritage

## INTRODUCTION

Language serves as a potent tool for conveying and sharing cultural values, beliefs, and perspectives. It functions as a storage facility for the combined information, experiences, and wisdom that contribute to the distinct identity of a community. Within this particular framework, the examination of linguistic artifacts, such as proverbs and folk sayings, provides an essential understanding of the complex connection between language and culture. These succinct yet deep phrases capture the fundamental nature of a society's cultural legacy, offering insight into its customs, viewpoints, and lifestyles. We uncover the intricate network of cultural meanings, conceptualizations, and worldviews woven into proverbs through the exploration of symbolic language and imagery. Through an examination of the figurative language, metaphors, and symbolic representations used in these linguistic artifacts, scholars can gain a more profound understanding of how societies perceive and comprehend their surroundings, as well as the ethical and moral values that influence their conduct and social relationships.

Numerous researchers have extensively explored the complex connection between language and culture, utilizing diverse theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches. Boas (1911) was a pioneer in studying language as a crucial element of culture. He emphasized the impact of linguistic structures on cognitive processes and worldviews. Sapir (1921) and Whorf (1956) proposed the notion of linguistic relativity, which suggests that language influences how humans experience and understand reality. In addition, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) examined the widespread utilization of metaphors in ordinary speech, emphasizing their function in organizing theoretical ideas and communicating cultural significance. Geertz (1973) stressed the significance of interpreting cultural manifestations within their particular contexts, proposing a method of comprehending cultural phenomena that involves providing detailed and comprehensive descriptions.

Although these studies have yielded useful insights, they frequently concentrate on particular linguistic or cultural contexts, restricting the applicability of their conclusions. Furthermore, numerous investigations have primarily relied

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on textual analysis or ethnographic observations, possibly disregarding the subtleties and intricacies of cultural depictions found in linguistic artifacts like proverbs.

In order to overcome these restrictions, it is necessary to conduct a thorough and inclusive analysis of the symbolic language and imagery used in proverbs across different cultures. Researchers can develop a comprehensive knowledge of the complex relationship between language, culture, and thought processes by using a multi-disciplinary strategy that combines linguistic analysis, cultural anthropology, and cognitive sciences.

This research proposal seeks to enhance current knowledge by undertaking a comparative analysis of proverbs from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The study aims to decode the cultural values, ideas, and worldviews encoded in these linguistic artifacts by evaluating their symbolic representations, metaphysical imagery, and figurative language. In addition, the research will investigate the function of proverbs in safeguarding and conveying cultural heritage, cultivating a sense of identity, and influencing societal norms and ethical principles.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Language and Culture

Scholars from a wide range of disciplines have shown a great deal of interest and investigation into the complex relationship between language and culture. Two well-known viewpoints have surfaced, providing insightful information about the complex interactions between these two essential facets of human existence. The first viewpoint emphasizes how language plays a crucial role in expressing and disseminating cultural values, viewpoints, and ideas. Proponents of this viewpoint, such as Sapir (1921) and Whorf (1956), put forth linguistic relativity, which postulates that our language influences our perception and understanding of the world around us. Whorf posits that we dissect nature according to lines laid down by our native languages. This viewpoint emphasizes the notion that innate patterns and categories of language mold speakers' mental models and cognitive processes. This point of view is supported by the well-known linguist Wierzbicka, who claims that language is a storehouse of cultural values and contains a multitude of cultural information. She says that every language encodes a unique cultural reality, reflecting the specific way of life, cultural traditions, and values of its speakers (Wierzbicka, 1992).

The second viewpoint asserts that culture significantly shapes language. Linguists and anthropologists like Hall and Agar have highlighted the impact of cultural contexts on language use, meaning-making, and communication styles. Hall (1976), asserting that culture is communication and communication is culture, emphasized the complex interdependence that exists between the two. Agar (1994) highlights the role of language in understanding and communicating across cultures, seeing it as a means of gaining access to a culture's set of values and beliefs. To support this perspective, ecolinguist Stibbe contends that language creates and maintains cultural worldviews and ideologies. Stibbe (2015) says that language not only reflects cultural patterns but also plays a role in their creation and upkeep. This viewpoint highlights the reciprocal aspect of the language-culture relationship, where language both influences and reflects cultural realities.

In terms of methodology, researchers frequently use qualitative techniques to investigate the relationship between language and culture, including discourse analysis, ethnographic observations, and in-depth interviews. Using these techniques, one can gain a sophisticated understanding of the cultural connotations inherent in language and the ways in which cultural settings shape language use (Jam et al., 2013). Moreover, examining linguistic artifacts like folktales, proverbs, and oral traditions has proven to be highly beneficial in uncovering the ingrained worldviews and cultural values in language. According to Goddard and Wierzbicka (2014), these linguistic artifacts provide a window into the cultural conceptualizations and experiences of communities. One of the first linguists to draw attention to the close relationship between language and culture, Edward Sapir, maintained that language structures have a significant impact on how individuals see and comprehend the outside world (Sapir, 1921).

To sum up, the interplay between language and culture is intricate and diverse. Culture simultaneously changes linguistic structures, meaning-making processes, and communication patterns, while language both reflects and transmits cultural values and worldviews. By examining this relationship using a variety of methodological techniques, one can gain important insights into the diversity and depth of human cultures.

### **Cultural Semantics and Pragmatics (Goddard and Wierzbicka, 2014)**

Goddard, Wierzbicka, and other academics created a theoretical framework known as cultural semantics and pragmatics. Its foundation is the natural semantic metalanguage (NSM) theory, which aims to analyze how language carries cultural meanings and shapes and reflects a community's conceptualizations, values, and beliefs. According to this concept, language is both a rich source of cultural knowledge and a storehouse of cultural values. According to Wierzbicka (1992), every language embodies a distinct cultural reality that reflects the speakers' particular way of life, cultural customs, and values. Folktales, proverbs, and oral traditions are examples of linguistic artifacts that, according to Goddard and Wierzbicka (2014), offer a window into the cultural conceptions and experiences of communities. Qualitative methodology of cultural semantics and pragmatics employs qualitative methods such as discourse analysis, ethnographic observations, and in-depth interviews. This technique enable scholars to gain a deeper understanding of the cultural meanings embedded in language and how cultural contexts shape language use.

Enfield (2002: 3) adds that the study of cultural semantics and pragmatics is crucial for understanding the diversity of human cultures and the complex relationships between language, thought, and social reality. This method is important and should be considered. A distinguished researcher in this domain, Levinson (2003: 24), asserts the importance of cultural pragmatics by observing that cultural systems of beliefs, values, and norms entangle linguistic practices, and cultural contexts deeply influence the meanings of linguistic expressions.

Finally, in order to better understand the complex relationship between language and culture, cultural semantics and pragmatics provide a useful framework for investigating the ways in which language both transmits and reflects cultural values and worldviews.

### **Cultural Ecolinguistics (Stibbe, 2015)**

A theoretical framework called cultural ecolinguistics examines the complex interaction between language and cultural contexts. Scholars like Stibbe, Feng, and Vu Ngoc Khanh have developed this method, which examines how language influences and reflects cultural values, ideas, and worldviews. Studying how language preserves and transmits traditional cultural values through linguistic artifacts like proverbs and folk songs is especially pertinent to this topic.

Language is essential to the formation and upkeep of cultural worldviews and ideologies, according to a fundamental principle of cultural ecolinguistics. Stibbe (2015) says language actively develops and reinforces cultural patterns rather than just reflecting them. This perspective underscores the reciprocal influence between language and culture, where language both shapes and shapes cultural reality. As a result, studying language can reveal important insights into the fundamental concepts, values, and beliefs of a given cultural group. Cultural ecolinguistics frequently uses qualitative analysis to examine language artifacts, including proverbs, oral traditions, and folktales. Researchers can discover the underlying worldviews, values, and ideas ingrained in the language by looking closely at these cultural texts (Feng & O'Halloran, 2013). This method seeks to comprehend the interactions and influences among language, culture, and environment, acknowledging their interdependence.

Vu Ngoc Khanh (2018) highlights the significance of cultural ecolinguistics in comprehending the complex interplay between language and the physical and cultural environment. He argues that language plays a critical role in creating a sense of cultural identity and belonging, as well as in the preservation and transmission of cultural values. The following are two noteworthy conclusions drawn from cultural ecolinguistics: Cultural ecolinguistics recognizes the interconnectedness of language, culture, and the environment and seeks to understand how these elements interact and influence one another (Feng & O'Halloran, 2013: 2). Language not only reflects cultural patterns but also plays a role in their creation and maintenance (Stibbe, 2015: 7).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Vietnamese proverbs use symbolic language and imagery to convey cultural values, conceptualizations, and worldviews, as analyzed by the cultural semantico-ecolinguistic framework, a theoretical methodology that integrates cultural semantics, pragmatics, and ecolinguistics. This framework acknowledges language as an extensive repository of cultural knowledge and values that mirror the distinct realities, traditions, and ways of life of its users. Proverbs, as linguistic artifacts, provide valuable insights into how societies perceive and understand their culture. They play a crucial role in influencing cultural identity, promoting a sense of belonging, and passing on cultural values.

The study employs a qualitative research methodology, specifically discourse analysis, to examine 160 Vietnamese proverbs and uncover the cultural meanings, conceptualizations, and worldviews they convey. The qualitative technique enables a versatile exploration, revealing recurrent themes, patterns, and symbols that provide insight into Vietnam's cultural past, values, and perspectives. This method facilitates comprehension of how language elements not only preserve cultural information but also exert a durable influence on cultural perceptions. The cultural semantico-ecolinguistic framework offers a thorough approach to analyzing the intricate connection between language, culture, and environment in Vietnamese proverbs. It allows for a detailed exploration of how these expressions store, communicate, and impact cultural values, perspectives, and identities.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Methods

The study used a qualitative methodology to thoroughly investigate the symbolic language and imagery found in Vietnamese proverbs.

Qualitative technique is a deductive, interpretative approach that seeks to obtain a comprehensive grasp of the underlying meanings and concepts present in textual data.

This research entails a meticulous examination of 160 proverbs, which are regarded as significant cultural texts that embodies Vietnamese knowledge, beliefs, values, and worldviews through symbolic representations and metaphors.

The study meticulously deciphers the symbolic language, figurative expressions, and cultural metaphors to reveal the intricate network of cultural significances, conceptualizations, and viewpoints hidden within.

The qualitative technique enables a versatile and unrestricted inquiry, uncovering repeating themes, patterns, and symbols that provide light on Vietnamese cultural history and worldviews.

Based on the principles of cultural semantics/pragmatics and ecolinguistics, this methodology allows for a detailed comprehension of how these linguistic elements not only conserve cultural information but also influence and sustain cultural perspectives across time.

### Data Collection

This study examines the intricate collection of Vietnamese proverbs, investigating the symbolic language and imagery that are deeply ingrained in these cultural treasures. The research reveals the complex network of cultural meanings, values, and worldviews preserved in 160 carefully selected proverbs, through a thorough qualitative examination. These proverbs provide deep insights into the Vietnamese cultural legacy, covering eight different themes: nature, family, ethics, society, education, love, labor, and life experiences.

**Step 1:** Compile an extensive assortment of Vietnamese proverbs from several sources, including books, online databases, and local communities.

**Step 2:** Classify the proverbs into eight specific categories: Nature (**PN**), Family (**PF**), Ethics (**PE**), Society (**PS**), Education (**PED**), Love (**PLO**), Labor (**PL**), and Life Experience (**PLE**), according to their main themes and cultural importance.

**Step 3:** Allocate a distinct code to every proverb, employing the topic abbreviation and a consecutive number, as exemplified in Table 1. As an illustration, the initial proverb in the Nature category would be encoded as **PN01**.

**Step 4:** Thoroughly examine and confirm the correctness of the proverbs, their English translations, and their assigned codes to maintain the accuracy of the data.

**Step 5:** Assemble the ultimate dataset, which includes 160 Vietnamese proverbs, with 20 proverbs for each of the eight categories. This dataset should also include the matching English translations and codes, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Topics and codes of Vietnamese proverbs

Proverbs Code	Nature	Family	Ethics	Society	Education	Love	Labor	Experience
	PN	PF	PE	PS	PED	PLO	PL	PLE

Quantity	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20
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### Data Analysis

The researcher delved into the properties of the proverbs by categorizing and coding the collected data, using the theoretical frameworks of cultural semantics/pragmatics and ecolinguistics. Extensive qualitative research was performed to reveal the intricate network of cultural meanings, conceptualizations, and worldviews that are ingrained into the symbolic language and imagery of the proverbs. The investigation sought to uncover how these language artifacts effectively capture and convey the Vietnamese people's knowledge, experiences, views, and perspectives on nature, social morality, ethical values, and their harmonious relationship with the environment. This process is schematized in the diagram below:

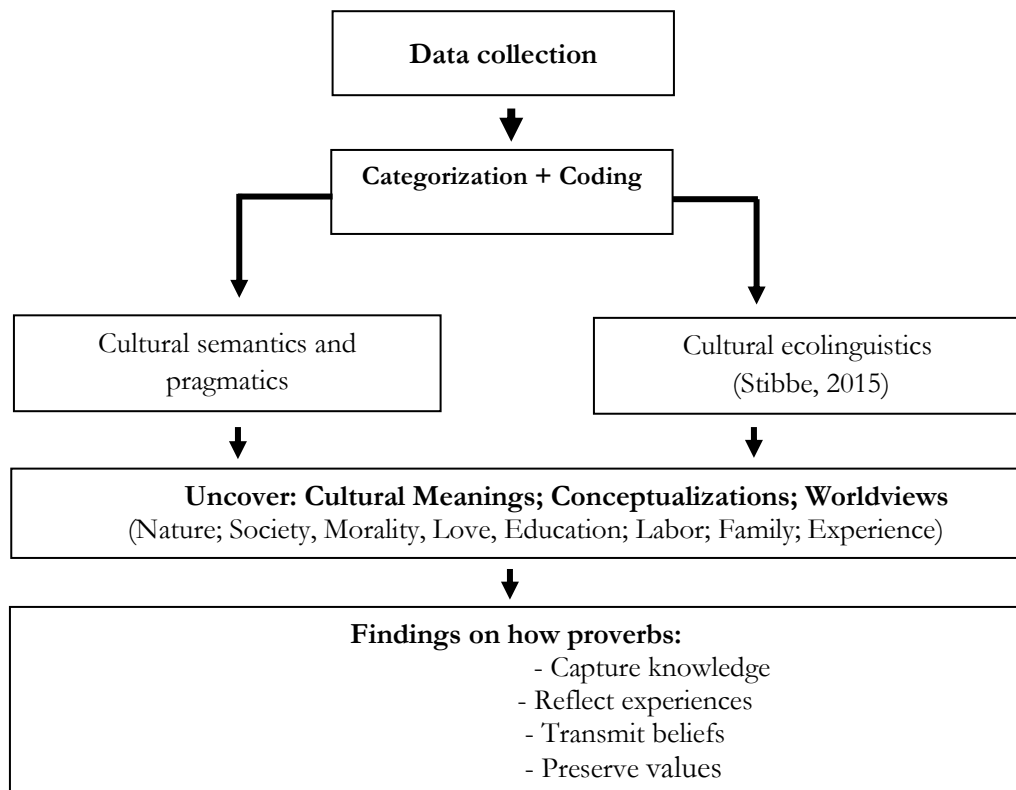


Figure 1. Process of data analysis

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Cultural Meanings in Proverbs

Across a wide range of language and cultural traditions, the aim of this section is to investigate the complex utilization of metaphysical imagery in proverbs as a means of conveying and conserving cultural beliefs, viewpoints, and worldviews that are associated with the worlds of life, death, destiny, and spirituality.

### Figurative Languages

Figurative language is crucial in proverbs, as it serves as a potent means of distilling important cultural meanings and values in brief and memorable forms. The application of figurative language aims to go beyond literal interpretations and communicate deeper symbolic meaning that resonates within a cultural context. These linguistic strategies possess the capacity to succinctly express intricate concepts using vivid imagery and metaphorical representations. This aids in the preservation and transmission of cultural learning from one generation to another.

Table 2. Figurative languages in proverbs

Topics	Metaphor	Metonymies	Personifications	Hyperboles	Litotes	Euphemism
Nature	Very frequent	Frequent	Very frequent	Moderate	Rarely	Frequent
Family	Very frequent	Moderate	Frequent	Frequent	Rarely	Frequent
Ethics	Very frequent	Frequent	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Very frequent
Society	Very frequent	Very frequent	Frequent	Moderate	Rarely	Moderate
Education	Frequent	Moderate	Frequent	Frequent	Moderate	Moderate
Love	Very frequent	Frequent	Moderate	Moderate	Rarely	Frequent
Labor	Very frequent	Moderate	Frequent	Frequent	Rarely	Frequent
Experience	Very frequent	Frequent	Moderate	Frequent	Rarely	Moderate

Table 2 reveals the frequency of these gadgets' use, facilitating a comparative analysis and understanding of their significance in each field. To begin with, metaphors are the most prevalent form of figurative language, appearing "very frequently" in various categories, including nature, family, ethics, society, love, labor, and life experience. This underscores the significance of metaphorical language in conveying abstract concepts and cultural values through tangible and comprehensible links. Next, various categories prominently utilize metonymies and personifications, ranging in frequency from "frequent" to "very frequent". Using metonymies makes it easier to explain complicated ideas in a few words, while using personifications gives nonliving things human traits, reflecting cultural attitudes and views. Depending on the cultural circumstances, people use hyperbole and euphemisms in limited ways to either highlight or minimize certain characteristics. Finally, the analyzed proverbs rarely employ litotes, a type of understatement, indicating a preference for more straightforward and powerful statements. Therefore, figurative language in proverbs is a potent tool for expressing and conveying cultural wisdom, as demonstrated by the following examples:

First, the metaphorical adage *Nước chảy đá mòn* (Water wears down stone, PLE04) illustrates the strength of persistence and resolve by comparing the unyielding force of water to its capacity to gradually dissolve even the most resilient materials. This metaphor strongly connects with cultures that prioritize the qualities of resilience and unshakable determination. Second, the use of personification in *Gừng càng già càng cay* (The older the ginger, the spicier it gets—PLE01) endows the ginger with anthropomorphic attributes as it ages and increases in potency. This adage not only conveys practical information regarding the enhancement of flavors, but also symbolizes the accumulation of experiences and knowledge that comes with age, a highly valued concept in numerous cultures. Finally, metonymies, such as the phrase *Giàu vì bạn, sang vì vợ* (Wealth comes from friends; status comes from a wife—PF20), succinctly include intricate societal conventions and value systems. Here, the proverb symbolizes the cultural importance of social connections and marital partnerships in establishing one's position in the community.

Although figurative language certainly enhances proverbs and aids in the conveyance of cultural values, some argue that an excessive dependence on metaphors and symbolism could potentially obfuscate the intended meaning, resulting in misinterpretation or weakening of the cultural message. They argue that excessive use of figurative elements may make proverbs difficult for people outside a culture or future generations to understand, thereby diminishing their ability to effectively communicate cultural wisdom. Advocates counter this claim by asserting that cultural customs firmly embed these linguistic mechanisms, and accurate understanding requires complete immersion in the cultural milieu. The intentional use of figurative language helps to safeguard the fundamental principles of cultural wisdom, ensuring its enduring significance and applicability across successive generations. They also say that the vagueness and lack of clarity of figurative language allows for many interpretations, which leads to a deeper connection with the cultural ideas they represent. Furthermore, proponents of figurative language in proverbs argue that these linguistic expressions are not only meant for people outside the community or future generations, but primarily function as a way to maintain and strengthen cultural identity within the group. The use of metaphors, personifications, and other literary devices fosters a collective comprehension and resonance among individuals within the cultural group, enhancing their affiliation with their heritage and cultivating a sense of belonging.

Both cultural semantics and pragmatics (Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2014) and cultural ecolinguistics (Stibbe, 2015) are examples of theoretical frameworks that take into account the complex interaction that exists between language and cultural conceptualizations. The findings are consistent with these frameworks. The ubiquity of figurative language in proverbs and idiomatic expressions across a variety of cultures is further evidence that the significance of figurative language in the preservation and transmission of cultural values extends beyond the confines of human language.

## Symbolic Representations

In order to fully express the essence of value systems, ideas, and attitudes of culture, proverbs usually make use of symbolic representations. These symbols are formidable vessels that convey significant meanings and promote an emotional relationship with the cultural history that they represent. Symbols in proverbs go beyond their literal interpretations, providing a complex tapestry of metaphorical interpretations that resonate with the collective experiences and traditions of a community instead of being interpreted literally. Nature symbols, family and social symbols, and moral and ethical symbols are the three primary categories that are used to classify the common symbols that may be found in proverbs, as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3. Symbolic representations in proverbs**

Topics	Nature Symbols	Family and Social Symbols	Moral and Ethical Symbols
Nature	Yes	No	No
Family	No	Yes	No
Ethics	No	No	Yes
Society	No	Yes	Yes
Education	No	No	No
Love	No	Yes	No
Labor	No	No	Yes
Experience	Yes	No	Yes

Animals, plants, and atmospheric occurrences are examples of nature's symbols. A civilization draws these symbols from the natural world around it, imbuing them with symbolic meanings that depict society's interaction with the environment. Family and social symbols represent the complex network of familial roles, societal structures, and communal values that contribute to the formation of a culture's identity. In conclusion, ethical and moral symbols are the embodiment of the ethical principles, virtues, and moral teachings that serve as the basis for a community's ethical framework. Proverbs related to love, society, and family more frequently feature family and social symbols. In contrast, a variety of proverb categories contain social and moral/ethical symbols. These symbolic representations' dispersion reveals the underlying connection they share with their respective cultural areas.

In the proverb *Lá rụng về cội* (Leaves fall back to the root, PN20), for example, the imagery of fallen leaves returning to their source is used to signify the cyclical cycle of life as well as the significance of valuing one's roots and legacy. This proverb is a classic example of a natural symbol. At the opposite end of the spectrum, the saying *Giàu vì bạn, sang vì vợ* (Wealth comes from friends; status comes from a wife—PF20) makes use of family and social symbols, underscoring the traditional relevance of social connections and marriage alliances in establishing an individual's standing within the community. Another example of the use of moral and ethical symbols is the adage *Chữ tín quý hơn vàng* (Trust is more precious than gold, PE15), which emphasizes the importance of ethical behavior in the culture and elevates the virtue of trustworthiness above the achievement of financial prosperity.

A few individuals may claim that an excessive emphasis on symbols could obfuscate the intended meaning, which could lead to misinterpretation or a dilution of the cultural message. This is despite the fact that symbolic representations increase the depth and resonance of proverbs, which is undeniably true. Those who advocate for these symbolic aspects, on the other hand, argue that they are deeply rooted in cultural traditions and that, in order to correctly comprehend them, one must be immersed in the cultural environment. By consciously employing symbolic language, one can protect the fundamental principles of cultural wisdom, ensuring that these ideas will continue to be relevant and applicable over consecutive generations. Symbolic language is characterized by its ambiguity and open-endedness, which allows for many readings and encourages a more profound connection with the cultural ideals that it represents.

In summary, the findings regarding symbolic representations in proverbs align with the theoretical frameworks of cultural semantics and pragmatics (Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2014) and cultural ecolinguistics (Stübbe, 2015). These frameworks understand that linguistic artifacts such as proverbs serve as stores of cultural knowledge and worldviews, which is something that these frameworks understand. They also acknowledge the delicate interplay that exists between language, culture, and the environment. Furthermore, the abundance of symbolic representations in proverbs is not something that distinguishes Vietnamese culture from other cultures. With the purpose of encapsulating commonly held ideals, ideas, and experiences, proverbs frequently make use of symbolism across a wide range of linguistic and cultural traditions. For instance, English proverbs frequently employ symbols such as the eagle, symbolizing strength

and independence, and the snake, symbolizing treachery and cunning, to convey moral lessons or cultural interpretations.

### Metaphysical Imagery

In order to convey significant cultural beliefs and viewpoints regarding life, death, destiny, and spirituality, proverbs frequently make use of imagery found in the realm of metaphysics. Through the use of these succinct linguistic jewels, we are able to cross across the bounds of the physical reality and gain a glimpse into the perspectives of a community toward the supernatural realm. A unique insight into the belief systems and cultural worldviews that form our knowledge of existence and the metaphysical realms can be gained through the utilization of metaphysical imagery, which is a characteristic of proverbs. An overview of the numerous themes of metaphysical imagery that may be found in proverbs across a variety of topics is presented in Table 4. This table highlights the various ways in which these metaphysical understandings are represented.

**Table 4. Metaphysical imagery in proverbs**

Topics	Life and death	Fate and destiny	Spirituality and religion
Nature	Yes	Yes	No
Family	No	No	No
Ethics	Yes	No	Yes
Society	No	Yes	No
Education	No	No	No
Love	Yes	No	No
Labor	No	Yes	No
Experience	Yes	Yes	Yes

Proverbs contain a variety of topics that each contribute to the rich fabric of cultural beliefs and viewpoints. These themes are manifestations of metaphysical imagery. The cyclical nature of life and death is one of the most significant themes, which reflects the cultural attitudes that people have regarding these crucial experiences. Proverbs may use metaphors of rebirth or imagery of natural cycles to communicate a cultural knowledge of the transience of life and the continuation of existence. The adage *Lá rụng về ôi* (PN20) is an example of a proverb that employs the imagery of falling leaves returning to their source. This imagery represents the cycle of life and death, as well as the significance of recognizing and appreciating one's roots and legacy. There is also a topic that dives into the domain of fate and destiny, examining the cultural ideas that people have about the supernatural forces that shape their lives. Proverbs may use imagery of threads, routes, or heavenly bodies to depict the predetermined nature of one's journey through life. These proverbs may also offer insights on the cultural acceptance of fate or the belief in free will to a certain extent. One example is the adage *Trời sinh voi, trời sinh cỏ* (PLE08), which expresses the belief in a predefined order and the existence of a higher force that rules the natural world. This proverb reflects the idea that heaven creates elephants and heaven creates grass.

Proverbs include imagery that reflects spiritual and religious ideas, serving as vehicles for the transmission of sacred education and teachings. In order to portray the cultural relevance of spirituality and its role in the formation of individual and collective identities, these linguistic pearls may make use of metaphors such as light, water, or personal spiritual guides. Consider the Vietnamese adage *Gừng càng già càng cay* (PLE01), which states that the pepperness of ginger increases with its age. This is an example of the power of metaphysical imagery. Many different cultures highly appreciate the accumulation of experiences and wisdom over time. To convey this concept, this proverb employs the imagery of ginger gradually becoming spicier as it ages. This concept is extremely resonant with cultural values that revere experience and old age.

According to certain academics, an extreme use of metaphysical imagery might obscure the intended meaning, leading to misunderstandings or diluting the cultural message. Despite the fact that metaphysical imagery in proverbs aids in weaving a complex web of historical ideas, this remains the case. Advocates, on the other hand, contend that these metaphysical representations are deeply rooted in cultural traditions and that, in order to comprehend them in an appropriate manner, one must completely submerge oneself in the cultural environment that comprises them. The theoretical frameworks of cultural semantics and pragmatics (Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2014) and cultural ecolinguistics (Stibbe, 2015) provide a strong foundation for the investigation of metaphysical imagery in proverbs. In recognition of



the complex relationship that exists between language, culture, and the environment, these frameworks acknowledge language as a repository of cultural knowledge and worldviews.

It is not a phenomenon that is exclusive to Vietnamese culture; rather, it is a phenomenon that is pervasive across a variety of languages and cultural traditions. Proverbs utilize metaphysical imagery. One example is the use of metaphysical imagery in English proverbs, such as *The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away*, which reflects views regarding the intervention of God and the acceptance of the circumstances that one encounters in life. In a similar manner, to communicate cultural viewpoints on fate and destiny, African proverbs may employ images of ancestor spirits or cosmic forces.

In short, for encapsulating and transmitting cultural beliefs, viewpoints, and worldviews, metaphysical imagery in proverbs is a potent tool that achieves this purpose. These linguistic treasures give essential insights into the metaphysical worlds that influence cultural identities and beliefs throughout generations. They do this by deploying symbolic representations of life, death, fate, destiny, and spirituality across their language.

### **Worldviews in Proverbs**

The goal of this section is to investigate the ways in which proverbs reflect and encapsulate cultural worldviews. These worldviews include viewpoints on nature, the environment, social order, hierarchy, and fundamental views on human nature and behavior at the fundamental level.

### **Nature and Environment**

The topic of discussion in this section examines the ways in which proverbs capture human relationships with nature, the environment, and the wisdom that is drawn from natural phenomena. The purpose of this investigation is to highlight the cultural and ethical considerations that are associated with the environment, as well as the function that proverbs play in transmitting the thematic representation of nature. Putting an emphasis on harmony, environmental stewardship, and the interpretation of natural occurrences, the study intends to demonstrate the myriad of ways in which nature is woven into cultural narratives and everyday wisdom. This will be accomplished by classifying these proverbs.

**Table 5. Nature and environment in proverbs**

Topics	Harmony with nature	Environmental wisdom	Natural phenomena
Nature	Yes	Yes	Yes
Family	No	No	No
Ethics	No	Yes	No
Society	No	Yes	No
Education	No	No	No
Love	No	No	No
Labor	No	No	No
Experience	Yes	Yes	Yes

Three fundamental ideas emerge from the analysis of proverbs associated with the natural world and the environment. In the first place, there are proverbs that stress the significance of harmoniously coexisting with the natural world. These proverbs frequently emphasize the interdependence of all living things, advocating for a balanced and respectful approach to the environment. Secondly, a distinct category encompasses the dissemination of cultural knowledge and the ethical principles of environmental conservation. These proverbs address the methods of sustainable living, resource management, and appropriate exploitation of natural resources. Furthermore, a third category reflects a community's attentive observation and interpretation of natural occurrences, leading to the attribution of symbolic meanings to these natural phenomena.

There are a great number of proverbs that eloquently express these ideas. By utilizing an analogy from the natural world, the saying *Nước chảy đá mòn* (Water wears down stone, PN05) serves as an example of a proverb that imparts the virtue of perseverance. Furthermore, the saying *Ăn quả nhớ kẻ trồng cây* (When eating fruit, remember who planted the tree—PL19) serves to instill a sense of gratitude for the labor and resources that are necessary for human perpetuation. As an additional point of interest, there are proverbs such as *When crows bathe, it will be sunny*. Examples of the

understanding of natural occurrences using symbolic representations are provided by the phrase *Quạ tắm thì nắng, sáo tắm thì mưa* (When starlings bathe, it will rain, PN09).

On the other hand, people criticize proverbs for their overly simplistic or romanticized depiction of the interaction between humans and the environment. Proponents contend that cultural traditions strongly establish these linguistic artifacts as stores of collective wisdom, accumulated over an entire generation. Proponents also argue that proverbs significantly contribute to the development of a sustainable worldview and a sense of environmental responsibility within communities.

Therefore, the theoretical frameworks of cultural semantics and pragmatics (Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2014) and cultural ecolinguistics (Stibbe, 2015) acknowledge language as a repository of cultural knowledge and worldviews, and the intricate interplay between language, culture, and the environment. Nature-inspired proverbs are not unique to Vietnamese culture. Proverbs across a wide range of linguistic and cultural traditions commonly use the natural environment as a source of knowledge and metaphorical representation. For instance, in the English language, proverbs like *A rolling stone gathers no moss* and *After the rain comes the sunshine* teach people about perseverance and the cyclical nature of life through their reference to natural occurrences. We can conclude that proverbs serve as an effective tool for conserving and conveying cultural values, beliefs, and wisdom related to the natural world and the human-environment relationship.

### Social Order and Hierarchy

A cultural fabric of the society is woven together by a complex web of social order and hierarchies, and proverbs, as linguistic pearls, have the ability to shed light on this highly complex web. By revealing how proverbs across a variety of topics represent the diverse characteristics of social structures and power dynamics, the research presents a complete overview in Table 6 of the findings. We are able to decipher the intricate representations of family and familial ties, communal rules, and the allocation of authority by delving into this table. All of these representations are trapped within the concise yet profound wisdom of these linguistic jewels.

Table 6. Social order and hierarchy

Topics	Family and kinship	Community and society	Power and authority
Nature	No	No	No
Family	Yes	Yes	No
Ethics	No	Yes	Yes
Society	No	Yes	Yes
Education	No	No	No
Love	Yes	Yes	No
Labor	No	No	No
Experience	No	Yes	No

Within the realm of proverbs, there is a subject that is deeply resonant, and that theme is the fundamental unit of family and kinship, which forms the core of societal organization. These metaphorical terms explore the relevance of familial bonds, roles, and responsibilities. A drop of blood is thicker than a pond of water (PS13) is a saying that emphasizes the unshakable bond that exists between relatives, regardless of external circumstances or loyalty from outside sources. In addition, proverbs like *Chồng bừa vợ cấy* (husband plows, wife plants, PS15) showcase the traditional gender roles and hierarchical systems that exist inside the household. Deeply rooted in cultural norms, these proverbs offer valuable insights into the division of labor and societal expectations.

Proverbs not only apply to family situations but also reflect the complex network of societal rules and values that regulate social interactions in a wider environment. The proverb *Anh em khinh trước, làng nước khinh sau* (When siblings hold contempt for one another, the entire community holds contempt for them - PF15) emphasizes the mutual influence of personal behavior and societal attitudes, underscoring the importance of maintaining harmonious relationships to uphold respect and social status within the wider community. Moreover, proverbs that pertain to power and authority, such as *Kẻ tám lạng người nửa cân* (One person weighs eight taels, another weighs half a kilogram—PS11), offer insights into the cultural viewpoints on hierarchy, status, and the allocation of influence within social systems.

Proverbs provide useful insights into the social structure and hierarchies of a culture. However, it is important to analyze these linguistic artifacts with a critical perspective and a willingness to consider different viewpoints. As civilizations

advance and develop, certain proverbs may continue to promote biases, antiquated viewpoints, or inflexible standards that no longer correspond with modern social values or the principles of inclusivity and fairness. Therefore, it is crucial to place these proverbs in their historical and cultural contexts, which will promote a more detailed and comprehensive comprehension of social dynamics. By adopting the knowledge contained in these proverbs and questioning outdated ideas, we can participate in a productive conversation that encourages beneficial societal transformation and cultivates a fair and impartial society.

The findings about social order and hierarchy in proverbs are in line with the ideas behind cultural semantics and pragmatics (Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2014) and cultural ecolinguistics (Stibbe, 2015), which say that language holds cultural knowledge, values, and points of view. Furthermore, the occurrence of social hierarchies and power dynamics in proverbs is not exclusive to any particular culture. Proverbs in different languages and cultures typically reflect the societal structures, roles, and expectations that influence relationships and social interactions. They provide evidence of the universal character of these topics in human communities. English proverbs contain phrases such as *The husband is the head of the household*, which reflect traditional patriarchal values, or *Too many cooks spoil the broth*, which highlight the importance of well-defined duties and authority in a group setting.

### Human Nature and Behavior

A society's views and presumptions about human nature and acceptable behavior are explained through the proverbs, which are a rich language archive. Using a large corpus of Vietnamese proverbs, this study explores how these brief but powerful statements capture and convey cultural conceptions of virtues, vices, social norms, and psychological insights into human motives and behavior.

**Table 7. Human nature and behavior in Vietnamese proverbs**

Topics	Virtues and vices	Behavioral norms	Psychological insights
Nature	Yes	No	No
Family	No	Yes	Yes
Ethics	Yes	Yes	No
Society	No	Yes	No
Education	No	Yes	No
Love	Yes	Yes	Yes
Labor	Yes	Yes	No
Experience	Yes	Yes	Yes

As depicted in Table 7, an exhaustive examination of Vietnamese proverbs across several thematic categories reveals three notable trends pertaining to human nature and conduct. Firstly, numerous proverbs articulate a society's moral values and avoidable qualities through commanding perspectives on virtues and vices. The ethical aspect is present in subjects like nature, ethics, love, labor, and life experience. Furthermore, a substantial compilation of proverbs clearly outlines established standards of behavior, including societal expectations for human relationships, familial obligations, and suitable behavior within communities. Categories such as family, ethics, society, education, love, and labor strongly display these behavioral principles. In addition, numerous proverbs communicate profound psychological observations, demonstrating a sophisticated cultural comprehension of human cognitive processes, emotions, and the fundamental factors that inspire behaviors. The psychological aspect is particularly evident in proverbs that pertain to family, love, and life experience.

The proverb *Cây ngay không sợ chết đứng* (A straight tree does not dread standing death, PLE07) praises moral integrity by comparing a person of upright character to a resolute tree that remains unwavering in the face of challenges or severe outcomes. In contrast, the proverb *Gà cùng một mẹ chớ hoài đá nhau* (Chickens of one mother should not fight, PS16) promotes family unity and discourages internal conflicts by using the metaphor of chickens that, despite having the same mother, should not peck at each other. Moreover, the proverb *Lời nói gió bay, bút sa gà chết* highlights a deep psychological insight on the transient nature of spoken words compared to the lasting influence of written words. These metaphorical proverbs distill abstract ideals, interpersonal norms, and psychological realities into concise yet evocative linguistic expressions.

Although there are many who believe that complex symbolism may obscure literal meanings, proponents maintain that these symbolic representations are firmly grounded in cultural traditions and necessitate full immersion for accurate

comprehension. Symbolic language preserves essential knowledge, guaranteeing its pertinence over successive eras. Furthermore, the lack of clarity in its meaning creates a rich variety of interpretations that encourage profound reflection on the principles and beliefs conveyed via the accumulation of language. Advocates also argue that proverbs serve mainly to strengthen cultural identity among the community, promoting a collective connection through common metaphors and literary techniques. Viewed in this context, the symbolic essence of proverbs serves as a notable advantage, enabling subtle explanations while upholding fundamental cultural principles in a memorable and easily transportable manner.

The observations concerning human nature and behavior in proverbs are consistent with the theoretical frameworks of cultural semantics and pragmatics (Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2014) and cultural ecolinguistics (Stibbe, 2015). These frameworks consider language as a storehouse of cultural knowledge, values, and perspectives. Moreover, the examination of human nature and behavior through proverbs goes beyond cultural limits, as proverbs from different languages and cultures often mirror societal perspectives on moral values, flaws, anticipated actions, and psychological insights. English proverbs such as *Honesty is the best policy* and *Birds of a feather flock together* offer moral instruction and psychological insights into human behavior. Examining proverbs provides a general insight into how societies view human nature and the social rules that regulate relationships between people. This fosters a greater understanding and respect of our common human experiences and values.

## CONCLUSION

This study delves into the intricate cultural implications and viewpoints woven into Vietnamese proverbs' figurative language and visuals. We conducted a qualitative study covering 160 proverbs across various topics, which yielded several significant insights. While rewriting the text, keep the following in mind:

Proverbs effectively capture and communicate intricate cultural ideas in a vivid and memorable manner by employing substantial figurative language such as metaphors, personifications, and metonymies. Symbolic depictions of nature, family, ethics, and other areas serve as potent means of safeguarding and conveying cultural values, beliefs, and wisdom. Furthermore, the use of metaphysical imagery in relation to concepts such as life, death, spirituality, and destiny provides valuable insights into a society's viewpoints on existential and metaphysical domains. Furthermore, proverbs serve as expressions of core cultural beliefs concerning the interplay between people and the natural world, social structures, and hierarchies. They also encapsulate essential perspectives on human virtues, vices, and anticipated conduct. The symbolic meanings encapsulate a community's collective experiences, ideologies, and goals for living in harmony with the environment, societal roles and obligations, moral integrity, and psychological drives.

This research makes a valuable contribution to the domains of cultural semantics, pragmatics, and ecolinguistics. It does so by conducting a detailed case study that sheds light on how linguistic objects, such as proverbs, serve as repositories of cultural information and influence conceptual systems. Nevertheless, the main constraint of the study lies in its exclusive examination of Vietnamese proverbs, which hinders broader cross-cultural comparisons.

Subsequent studies have the potential to broaden the analysis by including proverbs from more linguistic and cultural traditions, facilitating more extensive comparative investigations. Furthermore, an examination of how contemporary circumstances and cultural shifts impact the understanding and significance of conventional proverbs would yield interesting perspectives. Finally, combining linguistic, historical, and anthropological points of view in multidisciplinary projects could lead to a deeper and more complete understanding of the complicated links between language, culture, and how people think and learn.

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