Exploring Implicit Meanings in Mosuli Arabic Proverbs: A Relevance Theory Approach

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Abstract

Understanding the proverbs' relevance and the cognitive processes involved in their interpretation by the reader/hearer requires investigating beyond the literal meaning. This study examines the interpretation of culturally bounded Mosuli Arabic proverbs through the lens of Sperber and Wilson's (2002) Relevance Theory. The research addresses a critical gap in understanding how implicit meanings in proverbs are processed by different generations within their cultural framework. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining qualitative analysis of 15 selected proverbs—sourced from native speakers and historical texts—with quantitative data from a 10-point survey administered to two generational groups: elderly (n=10) and young (n=10) native Mosuli Arabic speakers. Findings reveal a clear generational divide. Elderly participants demonstrated strong cultural affinity for proverbs, valuing their metaphorical depth and historical significance. In contrast, younger participants favored linguistically simple, indicating a shift toward pragmatic communication and reduced tolerance for abstract or culturally embedded expressions. Cognitive engagement also varied significantly: while elders appreciated proverbs' reflective wisdom, youth often dismissed them as outdated or irrelevant, underscoring a decline in traditional knowledge transmission.

Keywords: *Relevance theory; cognitive process proverb.*

1. Statement of the Problem

Mosuli Arabic proverbs are rich in cultural meaning and often express wisdom through concise sayings. However, understanding how their relevance shapes the readers' interpretation and the cognitive processes involved in interpreting their implicit meanings requires investigating beyond their literal meaning. Thus, the present research addresses the need for a systematic approach to analyzing culturally bounded proverbs.

1.1 Aims of the Study

The study aims at investigating how relevance theory can be applied to understand the cognitive processes involved in interpreting the implicit meanings of Mosuli proverbs by readers/hearers within their specific cultural context.

1.2 Research questions

1. How does relevance, as defined by Relevance Theory, affect the interpretation of implicit meanings in culturally bounded Mosuli proverbs among readers/hearers within their cultural contexts?
2. How does Relevance Theory explain the cognitive processes involved in understanding the implicit meanings of Iraqi Arabic Mosuli proverbs by readers/hearers within their cultural contexts?

1.3 The Model

The model adopted in this study is Sperber and Wilson's (2002) Relevance Theory model, it provides a framework for understanding how proverbs are processed and interpreted in communication. Based in cognitive pragmatics, relevance theory holds that human thought is oriented toward maximizing relevance, the equilibrium between cognitive effort and interpretive consequences. Often metaphorical or indirect, proverbs need the listener to extract implicatures, meanings that transcend the literal sense. A main feature of Relevance Theory is the concept of relevance, which holds that every act of communication has its own best relevance. Being very conventionalized, proverbs take use of this concept by providing a cognitively efficient means to express rich social knowledge. Relevance is context-dependent; thus, depending on shared cultural knowledge, the same proverb may elicit different implicatures.

1.4 Data Collection and Analytical Procedure

The proverbs to be analyzed in the present study comprise 15 culturally bounded Mosuli proverbs. These proverbs were collected through interviews conducted with elderly Mosuli speakers who are familiar with local proverbs. Furthermore, some proverbs were gathered from literature and publications on Mosuli Arabic proverbs, namely, Al-Dabbagh (1956) and Al-Ghulamy (1964). The chosen proverbs are intentionally targeted due to their highly culturally bound nature that aligns with the aim of the study. Mostly, they are short sentences that rely heavily on metaphor, imagery, and cultural symbolism to convey deeper meanings beyond their literal words.

The proverbs chosen are given first in Arabic and then translated into English. A mixed approach for data analysis is used. Each proverb is analyzed qualitatively by explaining both explicit and implicit meanings in relation to relevance theory principles. Then, each proverb is analyzed quantitatively, using a 10-point survey distributed to the participants. The questions given in the survey follow relevance theory principles to arrive at steps that best show the relation between the selected proverbs and relevance theory.

The participants involved are categorized into two groups: elderly native speakers and young native speakers of Mosuli dialect. Each group consists of 10 individuals. The results are statically calculated to show the exact percentages of them.

2. **Theoretical background**

2.1 Proverbs

The study of proverbs has changed with time; academics have different views on their definition, use, and cultural relevance. Mieder (1993: 11) underlines their several function in communication by saying that proverbs are tools for coping with life's challenges; they support arguments, convey generalizations, and mock social concerns. Speake (2003: ix) defines proverbs as conventional sayings that convey advice or morals quickly. Proverbs, which are short, metaphorical language, capture knowledge, truth, and cultural values, therefore bridging speakers with their background (Martínez, 2024: 38).

Ehondor (2017: 6-7) elaborates on their uses, saying that proverbs reflect social ethnography, convey culture, and express emotional attitudes. They guarantee cultural continuity, highlight moral standards, and strengthen traditions. Collectively, these scholars demonstrate how proverbs blend tradition, pragmatism, and creativity, making them enduring instruments of cultural expression and guidance.

2.2 Relevance Theory

Crystal (2008: 412) points out that relevance theory is "*a theory of communication and cognition which claims that human cognition is geared to the maximizing of relevance*". New information is relevant when it interacts with old information, producing contextual effects. The more contextual effects it produces, the more relevant it is. However, the more processing effort it requires, the less relevant it is. The theory asserts that all communicative acts have optimal relevance, ensuring sufficient contextual effects and minimal processing effort (ibid).

Sperber and Wilson's Relevance Theory (1986, 2002) consists of several key components, including:

1) the Cognitive Principle of Relevance, which emphasizes the balance between cognitive effort and interpretive payoff. Proverbs are processed efficiently due to their conventionalized meanings, minimizing cognitive effort while yielding meaningful implications.

2) The Communicative Principle of Relevance assumes that every communicative act carries a presumption of its own optimal relevance, implying that the speaker intends to convey the most relevant message possible for the least processing cost.

3) Ostensive-Inferential Communication involves the speaker providing a stimulus to draw attention to their intended meaning, and the listener deriving implicatures based on context and shared knowledge.

4) Contextual Assumptions and Mutual Cognitive Environment also play a role in interpretation, with the meaning of proverbs varying depending on cultural and situational context.

5) Explicature and Implicitation, with Explicature being the literal meaning and Implicitation being the implied, context-dependent meaning.

6) Processing Effort and Cognitive Effects are also important aspects of the theory. In conclusion, Relevance Theory helps researchers analyze how proverbs convey meaning in different discourse settings.

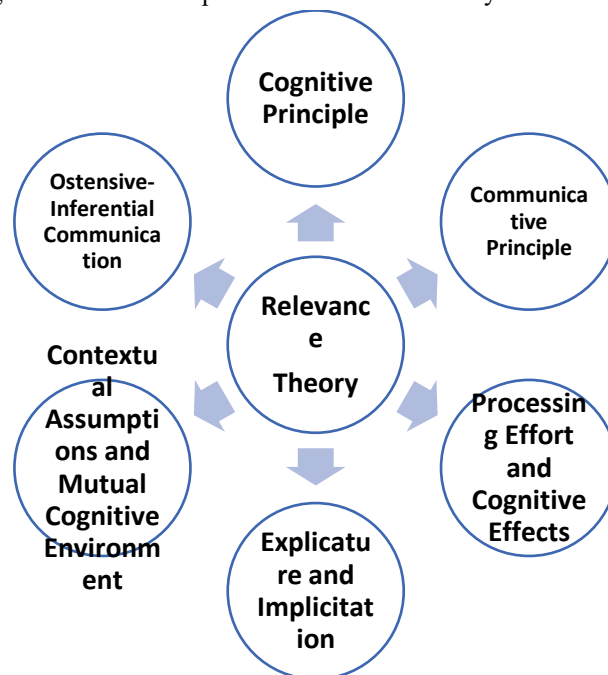The following figure shows the components of relevance theory model:

Figure (1): Sperber and Wilson's (1986, 2002) Relevance Theory Model

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3. **Data Analysis and Discussion**

The following is a Relative Theory-related analysis of 15 proverbs wherein ten questions with some possible answer options are given to find out how people conceive each proverb.

Proverb 1

الناس بالناس والاقرع يمشط الرأس

Literal Translation:

People are engaged with people, while the bald combs his own head.

Implied Meaning:

People are in anxiety and distress, while the careless amuses himself as if the matter does not concern him.

In elderly participants' answers survey, this proverb was met with notable difficulty in determining the implied meaning. Only 30% of participants found its explicit meaning clear, while 70% judged it unclear, indicating significant barriers to understanding. The same percentages applied to the implicit message and cultural relevance, suggesting that both surface-level and deeper meanings were difficult to grasp. When asked about mental effort, 70% of the participants reported needing a lot of effort, while only 30% of participants found it manageable. Language complexity was equally challenging, with 70% of participants finding it complex. Furthermore, contextual accessibility was poor: 70% of participants rated the context as inaccessible. This lack of clarity and accessibility led to a weak cognitive response: 70% of participants felt it had no real impact, and it only slightly strengthened assumptions (30% of participants). Regarding contradiction of prior assumptions, 70% of participants believed it had no effect, and when asked about its potential to generate new assumptions, none of the participants (0% of participants) thought it succeeded. In terms of overall relevance, 70% of participants rated it as not relevant, marking it one of the least effective proverbs in the dataset.

Young participants found this proverb largely unclear, with 80% of participants perceiving it as such, and only 20% of participants saying it was clear. Similarly, 80% believed it conveyed its cultural message poorly, and 80% of participants thought it required high mental effort to interpret. A significant 80% also found the language very complex, making it inaccessible for most (80% of participants said it was contextually inaccessible). Regarding cognitive impact, 80% felt it had no impact, and only 20% of participants said it strongly supported existing assumptions. It failed to inspire change: 80% of participants said assumptions remained unchanged, and 80% said it generated new assumptions ineffectively. Finally, 80% of participants rated the proverb as irrelevant, revealing that youth found it cognitively taxing and low in insight.

Proverb 2

بيت االسكيفي حيفي وبيت السقا عطشان   (Al-Dabbagh, 1956: 122)

Literal Meaning:

The shoemaker is barefooted and the water man is thirsty.

Implied Meaning:

It is often the case that those who are in a position to provide something for others do not have it themselves.

In elderly participants' answer survey, this proverb received highly favorable feedback. 90% of respondents rated both its explicit and implicit meanings as clear, indicating that the message was both understandable and culturally resonant. Only 10% of participants considered it unclear. Mental effort was minimal: 90% of participants said it required little effort to understand. Similarly, 90% of participants rated the language as simple, and the context as accessible. Despite this ease, the proverb was not considered cognitively powerful—70% of participants felt it had no clear impact, and only 30% of participants rated it as having a weak cognitive effect. It did, however, reinforce existing assumptions according to 90% of respondents. A small percentage (10% of participants) believed it contradicted assumptions, and

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another 10% of participants felt it generated new ideas. Its overall relevance was rated high by 90% of participants. The high clarity and low effort, even if not highly novel, made it a strongly accepted proverb.

In young participants' answer analysis, perception was more balanced here: 60% of participants found it clear and well-conveyed, and 60% of participants believed it strengthened assumptions. However, 40% still found it unclear and poorly conveyed. Only 50% of participants reported low mental effort, with 40% of participants seeing the language as very complex and 40% as moderately complex, suggesting mixed cognitive difficulty. Interestingly, 60% of participants claimed a weak impact, while 40% of participants cited no impact. Though 60% of participants said the assumptions remained unchanged, 60% of participants still rated it as relevant, showing a split in how youth engage with it both cognitively and culturally.

Proverb 3

<div dir="rtl">اعمي ويقود بصير من قلة التدابير</div>

Literal Translation:
In lack of measures, a blind man leads a sighted man.
Implied Meaning:
Due to a lack of planning, someone unqualified is leading someone else who should know better.

In elderly participants' answer analysis, 70% of the participants considered its explicit and implicit meanings clear, while 30% of the participants found them unclear. However, it required little mental effort according to 80% of participants, with only 20% of participants feeling it took considerable thought. The language was simple for 80% of participants, and context was accessible for 90% of participants. However, like many proverbs in this set, it fell short on surprise: 80% of participants felt it had no cognitive impact, while 20% saw a weak effect. 70% of participants felt it reinforced current assumptions, and 10% of participants believed it slightly challenged or contradicted their existing beliefs. Just 10% thought it led to new assumptions. Relevance was strong, with 80% rating it as high, largely because of its clarity and cultural familiarity.

Young people leaned towards a positive interpretation, with 70% of participants finding it both clear and well-conveyed, and 70% judging the contextual information as accessible (clear). However, only 30% of participants said it required low effort, and 40% of participants said moderate, showing it wasn't entirely easy. Language complexity was evenly split between very complex (30% of participants) and moderate (40% of participants). It made a weak impact on 60% of participants, and 70% of participants felt it merely reinforced assumptions. Only 30% believed it generated new ideas effectively, and 70% of participants found it relevant, making it moderately insightful but cognitively demanding.

Proverb 4

<div dir="rtl">يوديك عالشط ويرجعك عطشان</div>

Literal Translation:
He takes you to the river, and then brings you back thirsty.
Implied Meaning:
A cunning person promises you something he will fulfill, but in the end, he deceives you and does not keep his promise.

In elderly participants' answer survey, this proverb was interpreted very clearly: 90% of participants found its meaning explicit and culturally relevant, and it required low mental effort for 80% of participants. Language simplicity was acknowledged by 80% of participants, and contextual understanding was high (90% of participants). Although it was seen as culturally resonant, its cognitive depth remained shallow: 70% of participants felt it made no impact, and 30% of participants noted a mild effect. Still, 90% said it reinforced known assumptions, with no one perceiving any

contradiction. 10% of participants thought it introduced new assumptions. With 90% of respondents calling it relevant, this proverb demonstrated the power of clear language and familiar messages even when cognitive novelty is low.

In young participants' answer survey, this proverb was received extremely positively. A whopping 90% of participants found it clear, well-conveyed, and requiring low mental effort, with equally high agreement (90%) on its simplicity and contextual accessibility. Although 90% of participants considered its impact as weak, a matching 90% of participants said it strengthened existing assumptions, and 90% of participants still considered it as relevant despite the minimal cognitive stimulation. Only 10% of participants believed it inspired radical change, showing its comfort in reinforcing familiar ideas rather than challenging them.

Proverb 5

المايعرف تدابيره حنطته تاكل شعيره

Literal Translation:
He who does not know measures, his wheat will eat his barley.
Implied Meaning:
If someone does not manage his affairs well, the less important things will consume the more important ones.

In elderly participants' answer survey, this proverb maintained strong clarity: 90% of participants found both its explicit and implicit meanings clear, and 80% of participants felt it was easy to process mentally. Language was simple for 80% of participants, and the context was readily accessible to 90% of participants. Like others, it lacked strong cognitive stimulation: 70% of participants perceived no impact, though 30% of participants rated it as weakly impactful. 80% of participants claimed it as reinforcing their current beliefs, and no one perceived it as radically shifting their assumptions. A small group (10% of participants) thought it generated new interpretations. Overall, relevance was rated high by 80% of participants, suggesting this proverb was favored for its familiarity and ease.

In young participants' answer survey, 80% of the participants considered it clear, well-communicated, and accessible, while 60% of participants thought it required low effort, indicating ease of understanding. Still, 20% of participants maintained it as inaccessible, and 20% of participants called the language moderately complex. Only 10% of participants felt it had no impact, while 80% of participants noted a weak impact, suggesting its message landed softly. A solid 80% of participants said it strengthened existing assumptions, and 70% of participants felt it failed to generate new assumptions, yet 80% of participants still rated it as relevant, suggesting it was familiar but meaningful.

Proverb 6

عصفور كفل زرزور واثنيناتهم طيارة

Literal Translation:
A sparrow guaranteed a starling, and both are flyers
Implied Meaning:
A person who is unreliable guarantees another person with some traits or more, and in the end, both will run away from obligation.

In elderly participants' answer survey, this proverb was among the highest-rated proverbs. 100% of participants agreed on its explicit and implicit clarity. It required low mental effort, the language is simple, and accessible context (meaning). In every evaluative category of ease and clarity, it achieved perfect scores. However, its cognitive challenge was minimal: 90% saw no real impact, and only 10% of participants felt a slight effect. Nevertheless, 100% of participants felt it reinforced assumptions, showing that even without novelty, its affirmation of cultural truths was powerful. None felt it contradicted or inspired new assumptions. It scored 100% of participants in relevance, making it one of the most cognitively efficient proverbs: high benefit, minimal effort.

Young participants had more difficulty here: only 30% of participants found it clear, with 70% of participants calling it unclear. 70% of participants also found the language very complex, and the message poorly conveyed. The same

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percentage noted it had no impact, and 70% of participants found it ineffective in generating new assumptions. Still, 30% of participants said it strengthened assumptions, and 30% of participants called it relevant, showing that a small group still found value despite the overall cognitive strain.

Proverb 7

اتكندغ الدست ولقالو قبغ   (24 :1956 ,Al-Dabbagh)

Literal Translation:
The pot rolled and found its cover.
Implied Meaning:
People with similar interests tend to gravitate towards each other. (Birds of A feather flock together).

In elderly participants' answer survey, echoing Proverb 6, this one also scored 100% in clarity, both literal and cultural. All respondents found it effortless to understand, with simple language and easy context. Despite that, 100% rated its cognitive impact as weak, confirming that its strength lies not in novelty but in affirming shared beliefs. All participants reported that it reinforced what they already believed, with 0% of participants considering it as contradictory or generative of new ideas. Relevance again reached 100% of participants, confirming that proverbs don't need to be surprising to be meaningful—they just need to resonate cleanly and clearly.

In young participants' answer survey, this proverb was very well received: 100% of participants found it clear, well-conveyed, and accessible, requiring low mental effort and having simple language. It was also considered highly relevant by the same 100% of participants, although paradoxically, 100% of participants believed it had a weak impact and merely reinforced assumptions. No one thought it led to radical change or generated new ideas, showing it's valued for clarity and cultural alignment rather than novelty.

Proverb 8

قامت الكويغ و نامت البنيغ (Gulami-A1964:108)

Literal Translation:
Mud domes stood and minarets slept.
Implied Meaning:
The wrong people get to the top, while the right people do not.

In elderly participants' answer survey, this proverb maintained the high clarity and accessibility of the earlier ones: 100% of participants found it clear, easy, and simple in language. Its context was completely accessible. Its cognitive impact was slightly higher: while 80% of participants felt no strong effect, 20% of participants declared a moderate impact. Most (80% of participants) of the participants believed it reinforced existing assumptions, while 10% said it mildly challenged them, and another 10% of participants said it generated new ideas. Its relevance was once again unanimously high at 100% of participants.

Young participants struggled with this one: 90% of participants said it as unclear, poorly delivered, very complex, and contextually inaccessible. It was rated as requiring high effort (90% of participants) and had no impact (90% of participants), failing to change or reinforce assumptions for most. As a result, 90% of participants judged it ineffective and irrelevant, showing deep disconnection from its message.

Proverb 9

اذا كان صديقك حلو لا تأكلو كلو (Al-Dabbagh, 1956: 39)

Literal Translation:
 If your friend is sweet, do not eat him all up
Implied Meaning:
Do not take advantage of your friend if he is kind. (Do not abuse your friend's kindness).

In elderly participants' answer survey, this proverb was another top performer. It was rated 100% clear across both literal and cultural meanings, and 100% of participants reported that it required low cognitive effort and the language is. The context was fully accessible. It made a weak impression cognitively (90% of participants reported no real impact), but it was deeply affirming—100% of participants said it reinforced existing beliefs. It did not contradict or generate new assumptions. With its perfect clarity and alignment with cultural norms, it also scored 100% in relevance, making it one of the best examples of cultural efficiency.

In young participants' answer survey, this proverb saw more favorable reception: 70% of participants found it clear, well-conveyed, and accessible. Still, 30% of participants thought it required high effort, and 30% rated its language as very complex. 70% of participants said it strengthened assumptions, but only 10% of participants reported radical or noticeable changes. Despite low innovation, 70% of participants found it relevant, valuing familiarity over cognitive surprise.

Proverb 10

الحائط له اذان

Literal Translation:
Walls have ears
Implied Meaning:
This proverb means that conversations might be overheard even when it seems like no one is around. That is to say, it is wise to be cautious about what you say.

In elderly participants' answer survey, this proverb was commonly praised: 100% of participants for clarity, 100% of participants for low mental effort, simple language, and contextual accessibility. Its cognitive impact was weak (90% of participants), but it reinforced assumptions for 100% of participants. A small minority (10% of participants) said it as slightly challenging, and 10% of participants believed it created new ideas. Despite this minimal novelty, its relevance was perfect, with 100% of participants saying it gave meaningful insights without too much effort.

In young participants' answer survey, participants responded positively: 80% of participants marked it as clear, well-conveyed, and accessible, requiring low to moderate mental effort. 70% of participants said it as strengthening assumptions, but 80% said it had no real impact. 80% of participants also called it relevant, suggesting it fit well within their worldview without significantly altering it.

Proverb 11

وجو باب حمام

Literal Translation:
His face is like a bathroom door

Implied Meaning:
He is a man devoid of shame. (He is a man who knows no sham.)

In elderly participants' answer survey, this proverb gives a slight dip in clarity: 70% of participants rated it clear, 30% of participants unclear. Still, 80% of participants found it low-effort, and language simplicity was affirmed by 80%.

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The context was accessible for 90% of participants. It had limited cognitive impact (70% of participants maintained it had no impact), but 80% of participants felt it reinforced assumptions. Only 10% of participants believed it created new beliefs, and its relevance remained high at 80% of participants, owing to ease of understanding despite a slight drop in clarity.

In young participants' answer survey, this proverb saw positive reception from youth: 70% of participants found it clear and well-conveyed, with 60% of participants saying it required low effort, and 70% of participants calling the contextual information accessible. Language complexity was moderate to low, with 60% of participants saying it was not complex. While 70% of participants said it had a weak cognitive impact, 70% also said it strengthened existing assumptions, making it familiar rather than transformative. Interestingly, 60% of participants believed it effectively generated new assumptions, a rare case where a proverb was seen as both familiar and inspirational. 70% of participants found it relevant, striking a balance between ease and insight.

Proverb 12

جيبو مضغوب أوتي

Literal Translation:
   His pocket is ironed flat.
Implied Meaning:
 He is penniless.

In elderly participants' answer survey, 70% of the participants considered it clear, this proverb required some effort, with 70% of participants saying it was easy and 30% of participants finding it hard. Language was simple for 70% of participants, and easily to be accommodated with the implied meaning for 80% of participants. Cognitive impact was low (70% of participants), and 20% said it reinforced known ideas (i.e. it needs moderate effort). A small portion (10%) said new assumptions generated. Relevance was high at 80%, showing that it remained broadly acceptable even if not a standout.

In young participants' answer survey, this proverb received mixed to positive feedback. 60% of participants considered it as clear, and 70% of participants said it was well-conveyed, yet only 40% of participants found it low-effort; the rest found it moderate to difficult. The language was seen as very complex by 40% of participants, and only 50% of participants found the context accessible. Its cognitive impact was low for 70% of participants, though 60% of participants felt it reinforced assumptions, and 50% of participants said it could generate new ones. Despite these moderate marks, 70% of participants still rated it as relevant, suggesting some youth saw deeper meaning in it despite the cognitive challenge.

Proverb 13

جوز مقشقش وتين مطبق

Literal Translation:
Empty nuts and piled-up figs.
Implied Meaning:
There is a man whose nature is frankness and purity of heart, and there is another man whose nature is secrecy and cunning.

In the elderly participants' answer survey, this proverb had slightly weaker clarity: 60% of participants found it clear, and 40% of participants unclear. 70% of participants found it needs low effort, and language was simple for the same proportion. Meaning was rated as easily understood by 70% of participants, though not unanimously. It had minimal cognitive effect (70% of participants maintained it had no impact), and 60% of participants said it reinforced existing beliefs. 10% of participants believed it generated new assumptions, and 70% of participants found it relevant.

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In young participants' answer survey, this proverb was not well received. 70% of participants found it unclear, with 70% of participants saying it was poorly conveyed, and 70% of participants saying it required high effort. The language was too complex for 70% of participants, and 80% of participants said it was contextually inaccessible. Unsurprisingly, 80% of participants found it cognitively ineffective, with 70% of participants saying it did not reinforce or challenge assumptions, and 70% of participants saying it did not generate new ideas. Only 30% of participants considered it relevant, showing it failed to resonate with the youth.

Proverb 14

مستقيم من الصلاة، باب الجيمع مسدود

Literal Translation:
Straight from prayer and the mosque door is closed.

Implied Meaning:
He is a man who presents himself as religious but behaves oppositely socially and morally.

In elderly participants' answer survey, this was one of the least successful proverbs in the sense of getting their implied meaning by the participants in question. Only 30% of participants found it clear, while 70% of them said it was unclear. It required a lot of mental effort for understanding the meaning (according to 70% of participants), and its language was rated as complex by the same proportion. Meaning was inaccessible (unclear) for 70% of participants, and 70% of them rated it as having no cognitive impact. Just 30% of participants said it reinforced beliefs, and none found it generative or contradictory. Its relevance was low: 70% of participants said it gave little insight, confirming its position as one of the weakest in the set.

In young participants' answer survey, this was one of the more easily understood proverbs among youth. 90% of participants found it clear, well-conveyed, and accessible, and 80% of participants said it required low effort. The language was also simple for 90% of respondents. However, cognitive impact was still weak for 80% of participants, with 80% of participants saying it only reinforced assumptions. Still, 80% of participants found it relevant, showing its cultural and communicative value, even if it didn't shake up mental models.

Proverb 15

اللي ينغادلو قول وحكي ينغادلو تعديد وبكا

Literal Translation:
He who needs a lot of talking and discussion needs a lot of wailing and crying.
Implied Meaning:
The one who is inert, dull, and lacks self-motivation will make you get tired when dealing with him.

In elderly participants' answer survey, 60% of participants said it was clear, and 40% of them disagreed. Consequently, the mental effort for 60% of participants was low, while 40% of them reported that they required a high mental effort. Language and meaning were accessible (clear) to 70% of participants. Cognitive impact was minimal (70% of participants claimed it needs no effect), but 60% of participants felt it reinforced assumptions. A small 10% of participants said it generated new ideas. Its relevance score was moderate, with 70% of participants finding it insightful.

In young participants' answer survey, 90% of participants found it unclear, poorly conveyed, and high-effort, with 90% of participants saying the language was very complex. the meaning was seen as inaccessible (unclear) (90% of participants), and 90% of participants said the proverb had no impact cognitively. It didn't reinforce assumptions for

90% of participants, nor did it generate new ones. A final blow came with 90% of participants calling it irrelevant, making this proverb one of the least successful among the youth group.

4. **Comparison of Elderly and Young Participants' Responses Analysis**

The comparison between elderly and young participants' responses reveals a pronounced generational divide in how proverbs are perceived, understood, and valued. Elderly respondents consistently demonstrated greater tolerance for complexity, ambiguity, and metaphorical language. They often appreciated the layered meanings and cultural depth embedded in the proverbs. Even when a proverb required significant cognitive effort, they were more likely to describe it as meaningful, relevant, and insightful. This was reflected in the data, where 75% of participants of elderly participants rated the proverbs as clear and well-conveyed, in contrast to only 55% of young respondents. Similarly, 75% of the elderly participants found the contextual information accessible, while only 55% of youth participants shared this view.

When examining cognitive effort, the generational divide becomes even more evident. While 63% of the elderly participants reported that interpreting the proverbs required low mental effort, this percentage dropped to 39% among youth participants. In fact, 45% of young participants considered the proverbs to require high cognitive effort, compared to just 25% of the elderly participants. Language complexity followed the same trend: 63% of elderly respondents found the language "very simple," while only 39% of youth participants agreed. Conversely, 45% of young participants rated the language as "very complex," showing their lower tolerance for traditional or nuanced phrasing.

Despite the potential richness of the proverbs, both age groups generally rated the cognitive impact as low. However, 75% of elderly participants acknowledged at least a weak impact on their cognitive environment, while only 50% of youth felt similarly. Notably, 49% of young participants felt that the proverbs had no impact, compared to only 25% of the elderly participants, highlighting a generational difference in perceived intellectual or emotional resonance.

In terms of how proverbs influenced assumptions, 65% of elderly respondents said that the sayings helped reinforce existing beliefs, while this view was shared by 55% of youth participants. Younger participants were more likely to feel the proverbs offered nothing new or challenging, often citing them as outdated or irrelevant to their current worldview. This sentiment also appeared in responses to the question of whether the proverbs generated new assumptions—only 6% of elderly participants and a mere 4% of youth participants thought they did. Furthermore, 69% of elderly participants and 51% of youth participants felt the proverbs simply reiterated what was already known.

Perhaps the most telling difference between the two groups lies in perceived relevance. While 75% of elderly participants found the proverbs relevant, despite complexity or effort, only 55% of youth participants felt the same. For the younger group, if a proverb wasn't immediately accessible or cognitively rewarding, it was likely deemed irrelevant. This stark contrast suggests that while elderly individuals connect with proverbs through cultural memory, interpretive patience, and traditional values, young people tend to favor immediacy, clarity, and direct applicability. Ultimately, the elderly are more receptive to the nuanced, metaphorical, and sometimes effortful nature of proverbial wisdom, while the youth lean toward pragmatic, clear, and succinct expressions that require minimal interpretive work.

5. **Discussion of Findings**

In this part of the study, how Mosuli Arabic proverbs are perceived by elderly participants and young ones is explored. The findings are organized in a table to reveal the percentage of the level of understanding the proverbs under study. Consider (Table 1):

Table 1: Comparison of Proverb Perception Between Elderly and Youth: Cognitive and Interpretive Dimensions

Dimension in Relevance Theory	Elderly (%)	Youth (%)
Clarity	75	55
Conveyance	75	55
Low Effort Required	63	39
Language Simplicity	63	39
Context Accessibility	75	55
Cognitive Impact (any)	75	50
Reinforces Assumptions	65	55
Generates New Assumptions	6	4
Relevance	75	55

The table shows that the understanding and appreciation of Mosuli Arabic proverbs vary significantly by generation. Elderly participants recorded consistently higher on all measured dimensions, indicating greater familiarity and comprehension. This illustrates how these old proverbs have been in-built in their daily speech throughout their lives. Seventy-five percent of older speakers believe that proverbs are still useful for conveying cultural values and wisdom.

The engagement patterns of younger participants with the same proverbs were significantly different. Their higher difficulty with metaphorical language and lower comprehension scores (averaging 55%) point to a change in communication styles across cultures. Just 39% of young people thought the proverbs were linguistically understandable, suggesting that they preferred more straightforward, modern ways of expressing themselves. This generational divide demonstrates how traditional language transmission pathways may be changing as a result of digital-era communication patterns.

The results have significant ramifications for the preservation of culture. Youth's proverb fluency is on the decline, which could indicate that this linguistic legacy is being lost. Younger speakers increasingly view proverbs as historical artifacts rather than useful communication tools, even though elders naturally incorporate them as living wisdom. This shift begs the question of how oral traditions can change to stay relevant in societies that are modernizing quickly.

Future studies ought to investigate whether these trends are consistent across various social settings and geographical areas. The study also recommends that it would be beneficial to look into how digital media or educational strategies could aid in bridging this generational gap in the transmission of cultural knowledge. The preservation of intangible cultural heritage in the face of social change and language evolution are two topics that these findings add to the larger conversations about.

6. Conclusions

There is a clear generational divide in how Mosuli Arabic proverbs are perceived. Elderly participants demonstrate a stronger cultural and emotional connection to proverbs, recognizing their depth, historical value, and interpretive richness. In contrast, younger participants are more disconnected from the cultural roots that give these proverbs meaning, often finding them unclear or irrelevant.

Young participants consistently favored proverbs that were easy to understand, direct, and linguistically simple. This suggests a shift toward more pragmatic and literal communication styles. Proverbs that demanded interpretive effort or relied on implicit cultural references were rated poorly, pointing to reduced patience for metaphorical or abstract expressions among the youth.

While the elderly were more open to engaging cognitively with proverbs, even those that challenged assumptions or required deeper reflection, the younger generation showed a much lower threshold for cognitive effort. A significant portion of youth perceived the proverbs as offering little cognitive impact or insight, which may reflect a broader trend of disengagement from traditional forms of reflective thinking.

Relevance was a critical measure of the proverbs' vitality. For the elderly, most proverbs were considered highly relevant despite their complexity or indirectness. However, the youth often dismissed the same proverbs as outdated or unhelpful. This indicates that the cultural and moral values encoded in proverbs may no longer align with younger people's lived experiences or worldviews.

The data suggests a weakening in the intergenerational transmission of proverbial wisdom. What was once a central vehicle for moral, practical, and cultural guidance is now at risk of fading as younger generations no longer find proverbs meaningful or applicable. This reflects a broader cultural shift in how knowledge and values are communicated.

Thus, unless efforts are made, educationally or socially, to bridge this gap, traditional proverbs may continue to lose their place in everyday communication. Incorporating proverbs in contemporary contexts, updating the way they're taught, or linking them to modern scenarios could help preserve their role as cultural assets.

7. Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

8. Funding Declaration

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استكشاف المعاني الضمنية في الامثال العربية الموصلية: مقاربة نظرية الملاءمة

الخلاصة

تتطلب معرفة مدى ملاءمة الأمثال والعمليات المعرفية التي ترافق تفسيرها من قبل القارئ/السامع فهم التحقيق فيما وراء المعنى الحرفي. تتناول هذه الدراسة تفسير الأمثال العربية الموصلية ذات الابعاد الثقافية من خلال منظور نظرية الملاءمة لسبيربر وويلسون (2002)، والتي تفترض أن التواصل تحكمه الكفاءة المعرفية والأهمية السياقية. يتصدى البحث لقصور جوهري في فهم كيفية معالجة الأجيال المختلفة للمعاني الضمنية في الأمثال ضمن إطارها الثقافي. جرى توظيف منهج مختلط الأساليب، يجمع بين التحليل النوعي لخمسة عشر مثلًا مختارًا ـ من مصادر متحدثين أصليين ونصوص تاريخية ـ مع بيانات كمية من استطلاع مكون من 10 نقاط تم إجراؤه على مجموعتين من الأجيال: كبار السن (ن = 10) والشباب (ن = 10) من المتحدثين الأصليين باللهجة الموصلية. أظهرت النتائج انقساما واضحا. أظهر المشاركون المسنون الفة وانسجاما ثقافيًا قويًا مع الأمثال الشعبية، مُقدّرين عمقها المجازي وأهميتها التاريخية. في المقابل، فضّل المشاركون الأصغر سنًا الأمثال الشعبية البسيطة والمباشرة لغويًا، مما يُشير إلى تحوّل نحو التواصل التداولي وانخفاض في تقبّل التعبيرات المجردة أو المُترسخة ثقافيًا. كما تفاوت التفاعل المعرفي بشكل كبير: فبينما قدّر كبار السن الحكمة التأملية للأمثال الشعبية، غالبًا ما رفضها الشباب باعتبارها قديمة أو غير ذات صلة، مما يُؤكد تراجع نقل المعرفة التقليدية.

About Author

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