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## Proverbs: An Analysis of Translation from Urdu to English

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### Abstract

*The translation of proverbs, which has always been a difficult area, is always emerged in culture because of its relevance to folklore, and hence translators face problems at the lexical, syntactical, or cultural level. Keeping in view this fact, the present study aimed to analyze Urdu proverbs and their equivalence in English, i.e., their translated version. For this purpose, as a source of data, the proverb book Khazina-e-Muhawarat by Craven, where translated version is also available, was used. These proverbs were analyzed and were searched for whether they were translated literally or sense-wise. From the data, it was found that there is a blend of both literal and sense translation, where equivalence varies from one version to another.*

**Key Words:** Translation, Proverb, Equivalent, English, Persian, SL/TL

### Introduction

Translation, a dynamic area, is full of many gaps where issues ranging from literal to sense translation still exist. Especially, translation of proverbs is an area that usually presents a problem for translators. Sometimes, the literal translation of proverbs keeps the meaning far off from the real meaning. It reminds me of one of my class events where بدلتے ہے رنگ آسمان کیسے کیسے "Badalty Hay Rang Asmaan Kaisy Kaisy" was translated by one of my class fellows as "change the colour sky how how" "The word proverb is derived from one of the classical languages 'Latin' where proverb means proverbial, and it is also known as 'Disambiguation.'" "A proverb is a plain, frequent, and practical saying which explores reality based on common sense, and experience as well." "They are often 'Metaphorical' not having real existence but symbolic and showing some truth about a situation or other subject". (Cambridge advanced learner's

dictionary). "A proverb that describes the basic rule of conduct may also be known as Maxim: a brief statement of a general truth, principle, or rule for behavior" (Cambridge advanced learner's dictionary) "a saying that is widely accepted for its own merits. "According to the multistage model of figurative language understanding, literal meanings must be developed before figurative meanings." Although the model implies that figurative Understanding should take longer than literal understanding, Kemper (1981) reported that "figuratively biased proverbs were processed more quickly than literalized proverbs." By contrast, in the present study, the results from six experiments yielded the opposite conclusion. "These results support the multistage model and the conceptual base theory of proverb comprehension which incorporates it." Discrepancies between "studies that

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have examined the multistage model may crucially depend on methodological factors such as type of experimental design, materials, and, as apparent in the present case, the task and dependent measure used. Temple and Honeck' Jon G. Temple Richard P. Honeck" "proverb is, a term which indicates wisdom." "Wisdom in a sense that proverb is considered the language of mature people, because mature people use proverbs which have some bid meaning, and then they use to apply to their daily life. We can call it common sense but not the language of common people because common sense plays an important role in life. Common sense means to understand word meaning which is not as much strength in common people as in literal or intellectual people. Every culture and every nation has its own created proverbs which have some hidden meaning. One of our villagers used the proverb "*Neat Da Peat Daro De*" "نیٹ دہ پیٹ دارو دی" on one occasion where I was there. The proverb "*Meat Da Peat Daro De*" literal meaning is change than contextual meaning Here literal means "Meat" is refers to medicine and "Peat" word used for "Belly", and contextual means is "They Understand Each Other." Or "They Know Each Other" Proverbs are often borrowed from the same languages and cultures and sometimes come down to the present culture of more than one or two languages. In short, almost every language and culture has its unique proverbs which express their inner meaning and unique example regarding the same language and culture.

Translation of English proverbs into the Persian language makes Iranian translators encounter at the Source Language (SL) comparing Target Language (TL) levels such as lexical, stylistic, cultural, and rhetorical parameters. In this respect, the main concerns would be on the three corresponding SL/TL bases: form, content, and context. This goes back to similar and different parameters of English and Persian languages regarding contrastive Analysis studies in the 1940s. At the content and context levels, there may be several shared properties between SL and TL equivalents that are connotatively motivated, while at the formal level, the lexical differences can be problematic. This survey provides a model which facilitates the translation of English

proverbs into Persian with the minimum loss in the connotative meaning of the SL proverbs. It also proposes a theoretical model concerned with weak, moderate, and strong versions of conceptual translation equivalents. This model is applicable in the other domains of translation practices at linguistic and metalinguistic levels.

### Literature Review

There is no doubt that as translators we face constant challenges while doing our job. An example would be like; while translating literary works, we may come across more than one cultural obstacle to which we must have an answer. Amongst these cultural obstacles, we find Proverbs quite challenging. (Posted on January 13, 2014, by Maria Fernanda R)

According to Maria Fernanda (2014), "while translating proverbs, cultures can express social, economic, and also political characteristics and while some have been invented long before our time, they may still be considered up to date we might still apply them in our daily conversations". However, she further noted "when it comes to translating such idioms, the task can be more complex than just a literal translation". According to Maria (2014) "Finding the equivalent in the languages you're translating into the target language is not always the case, and replacing it with something that sounds natural, flows, and additionally conveys the same message will not be an easy task to accomplish that is tagged with: expressions, idioms, and literal translations of proverb proverbs". "The difficult task of translating proverbs is, some countries share common cultural similarities and thus have equivalency in proverbs but sometimes it becomes more challenging when there is a gap between the concepts for which the proverb is used". "Translating proverbs, the translator should know the linguistic, pragmatic, and cultural properties of the proverbs in SL/TL corresponding to each other". Furthermore, "each proverb conveys a specific meaning in a specific context of situation". "Therefore, a proverb should be rendered with care to carry the same cultural conventions in the original proverb". [Wittgenstein \(1958\)](#): para 43, as cited in Robinson,

1997: 128) "believed that "the meaning of a word is its use in the language." In other words, language is what people use in daily interactions in social contexts. In this case, dictionary meanings cannot be safe and the sole source for rendering a piece of a text into TL". [Nord \(1991\)](#) believed "in cultural-bound linguistic signs and noted that" both the source and the target texts are determined by the communicative situation in which they serve to convey a message." In other words, according to Robinson (1997: 128), "culture will always be more productive and effective than a focus on abstract linguistic structures or cultural conventions". "Proverbs are sometimes multi meanings and can be used to convey the senders' intended meanings" (Gorjian & Molonia, 1999; 2001; 2004; 2005)."

[Saad \(2003\)](#) believes "for a translator, transferring a literary text, it is not enough to grasp the internal structure of the text". [Barnwell \(1980\)](#) states, "a translator needs to understand the internal and external structures operating within and around a work of art". [Venuti \(1998: 21\)](#) "focused on the limitations of linguistics in the" "translation of literary texts in translation studies (ST) in the 1980s". [Toury \(1995\)](#) stated, "translation theory should be scientific, avoiding perspective accounts of translation to examine actual translation practices". "He emphasized translation and discourse strategies to arrive at the "acceptability" of a translation". [Duff \(1989\)](#) noted, "idiomatic expressions are notoriously untranslatable". "These include similes, metaphors, proverbs and sayings (as good as jargon, slang, and colloquialisms)". [Toury \(1995: 61\)](#) defines "acceptability" of a translation as "how various shifts constitute" a type of "equivalence" "which conforms to domestic values at a certain historical moment."

Translation of proverbs becomes more challenging when it comes to translating proverbs from the source text to the target text. Because sometimes people translate proverb that didn't give the desired meaning in the TT as it has in the ST. i.e the proverb "جیسی کرنی ویسے برنی" *Jaisi Karni Waisi Bharni* "As you sow so shall you reap" when the same proverb is translated the translation would "as you do the crops you will have reap" that is not the correct

translation. Whenever we translate one language to another, we face some difficulties in translation because of the unavailability of the Exact word in TT. Therefore, most of the translation is unauthentic as Tariq could not make the exact translation of the proverb "انگور کھٹے ہیں" "grapes are sour" that is translated by Tariq as "Sour Grapes"

There is no doubt as stated above by Maria Fernanda "it is extremely difficult to find out the matching words that strike resemblance with a target language of translation". Therefore "it is understood that it is a very laborious task to translate proverbs from one language to another the most frequent task is that of cultural differences cultural priorities and cultural stander and values". "There are also some issues while translating proverbs some are semantics, and others are stylistic" as we mentioned above that translation of proverbs is something difficult because of some Cultural differences and social aspects as well because every language represents its culture, and every culture has its own created proverbs to which they refer some secret meaning.

According to Maria Khodorkovsky, "literal or word-for-word translation does not work for popular sayings such as proverbs". To translate a proverb appropriately requires several steps, and it often requires a translator to delve deeper into the culture of the source and target languages to determine the idiomatic translation" "proverb is the expression of knowledge, knowledge about morality, and virtue". "The proverb is metaphorical language, and sometimes people use metaphoric language for irony which is the wise saying and thought to be the language of experts". "Experts use it in a very good and appropriate way. It is a universally acknowledged fact that the greatness of a nation among other nations is expressed through their proverbs". Oxford Learner's Dictionary (2004) defined "a proverb as "a well-known phrase or sentence that gives advice or says something that is generally true" for example, "waste not, want not". "Proverbs are wise saying that describes the hidden and internal meaning of the discourse means that the use of proverb in conversation exposes the actual aim of the conversation which occur among the two or more".

According to “proverb’s signifier exists as two units, linguistic meaning, and linguistic structure, in terms of the duality” Eugene Nida “specifies for linguistic meaning, Linguistic meaning must be carefully distinguished from other types of meaning, for the linguistic signification of a form does not refer to anything outside of the language itself, as referential or impassioned meaning, but rather to the meaningful association which exists within the language”. On the other hand, linguistic meaning is similar to referential and emotive Meanings for all types of meaning are derived basically from the signaling of a relationship” (Nida 1964:57)

Freeda C. Wilson. noted “however, the idiom “Beggars Can’t Be Chooser” also has a linguistic meaning, people who beg do not have choices’ or people who beg should be satisfied with what they get if it is not exactly what they want, that gives one particular message”. “The linguistic structure plays a linguistic role and provides a linguistic insight in a particular structure for the message while the linguistic meaning contributes meaning to the message”. “As each message has Both linguistic meaning and linguistic structure, the translator must read both while translating the message from the source language to the target language.” As Nida mentioned above that linguistic meaning must be slightly different from another type of meaning. A word can give different meanings in linguistic context and different in comprises literature. “for example” “We have the word Morpheme in linguistics”. “It is considered the smallest unit of sound which cannot be divided further it has its merit in linguistics”. “In literature Morphemes haven't If they have, it may not as authentic as in linguistics”. Translation of proverbs is complicated but challenging as well because it gives different meanings both in semantics and contextual as well. i.e. “جو گرجتے ہے وہ برستے نہیں” “Jo Garajte Hain Wo Barraste Nahe” gives different meaning in both pragmatics and semantics as well. The translation of this proverb is “Barking Dogs Seldom Bites” its contextual meaning is changed from semantics

meaning. If we look at its grammatically function i.e. “Barking Dogs Seldom Bites”(bark = verb and Bark+ing = Gerund )and (dogs noun )(seldom= adverb)(bites-verb), The Proverb " Barking Dogs Seldom Bites" word by word meaning is "Jo Kuttay Bonkte Hain Wo Kattety Nahe" is different from contextual meaning.

Andre Lefevere (1999: 76) argues, "Western cultures have constructed non-Western cultures by translating them into Western categories, a process that distorts and falsifies the signs and texts of those who are at the receiving end of this cultural transfer". "In cultural translation studies, it is believed that proverbs play a significant role in translations. It gives the idea about the similarity and dissimilarities between the cultures".

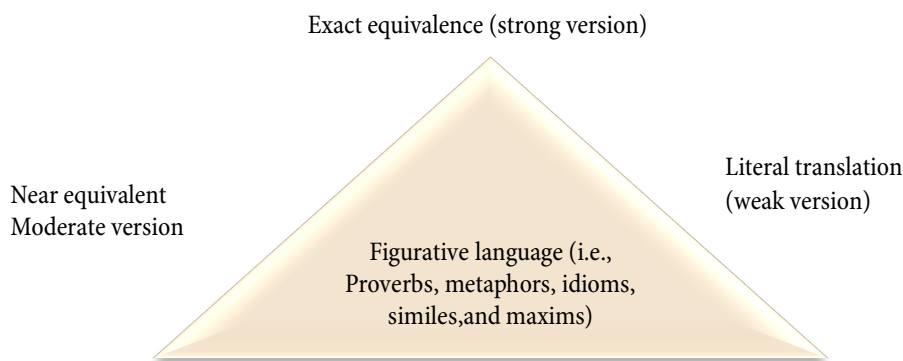
### Methodology

In this study, Urdu proverbs have been studied and what sort of strategies have been used while Translating these into English. For this purpose, Urdu proverbs were collected from the proverb Book Khazina-e-Muhawarat by Craven, where the translated version was also available. In the present context, data was analyzed while keeping in view the framework of Gorjian.

### Framework

This study has been worked out while keeping in view the model given by Gorjian. According to Gorjain (1996) “proverbs can be translated while keeping in view meaning at three different levels:

(1) Exact equivalence, (2) near equivalence, and (3) literal meaning. An exact equivalent refers to Linguistic and discourse similarities in SL/TL”. “A near equivalent refers to linguistic differences, but discourse similarities”. “The literal translation of proverbs refers to the literal meaning of translation in TL is rendered to a non-proverbial simple sentence in TL. The latter strategy May be applied when the translator faces the problem of finding exact or near-equivalents in TL”. This model is as the following...



### Weak Version

[Gorjian \(1996\)](#). Claims “In the TL, there is no equivalent of the proverb.”

“In other words, the equivalents in the TL do not have any shared lexical, semantic, or conceptual qualities.” In this scenario, “the translator attempts to understand and develop a deeper understanding of the proverb in SL before reproducing the message as a simple statement”. “The TL is devoid of the proverbial load. Consider the following scenario:” 1. “There are no eyes in anger, according to an English saying while seeing and judge the things.” 2. “English translation: An angry person is unable to judge or see the truth” 3. “Persian literal equivalent 4. ندارد چشم. Phonetic Persian translation: / xshm chsm ndr/”

### Moderate Version

According to [Gorjian \(1996\)](#). “The proverb has a partial TL equivalent. In other words, whereas the TL lacks shared grammatical and syntactic features, the SL and TL proverb equivalents share a notion”. As a result, “the translator comprehends the proverb's essence and seeks out a proverb in the target language that is as close to the original as possible” (i.e., this is called near equivalent). As an illustration: “Carrying coals to Newcastle is an old English adage.” 2. English translation: “Taking or carrying anything plentiful at the intended location. It can also apply to expressing something that has already been understood or found. : conceptual Persian analogs”. “/zi:rh (Cumin) bh krmn bu:rdn/ /zi:rh (Cumin) bh krmn bu:rdn/ /zi:rh (Cumin) bh krmn bu:rdn/” “The example above demonstrates that English and Persian have

similar conceptual qualities when it comes to proverbs”. “These two languages, however, do not have the same lexical and semantic properties”. “The shared concepts between SL and TL are the major factor that aids the translator in rendering the sort of moderate rendition of the proverbs.” The translator may “concentrate on the element of “plenty,” that is the same meaning in English and Persian languages, when studying the similar concept of the previous example.” The shared “elements of SL/TL corresponding proverbs can be found as follows if the translator maps these two proverbs upon each other” “English proverb Carrying coal to Newcastle Zi: rh to Kerman is the Persian equivalent. بردن کرمان به زیره “ “There are coal mines in “Newcastle” in Great Britain, according to the English language, hence “coal” is plentiful there. In the Persian version, there is a cumin plant (i.e., Zi: rh) that is grown in “Kerman city” and can be easily found in that city in Iran's central region. Transporting “Zi: rh “to” Kerman” is hence worthless, as is carrying “coals” to “Newcastle,” which is likewise futile.” [Gorjian \(1996\)](#).

### Strong Version

[Gorjian \(1996\)](#) exclaimed, “there is an exact TL equivalent that corresponds to the SL proverb. In other ways, both SL and TL have lexical, semantic, and conceptual qualities in common”. “The translator can accomplish this one-to-one connection between the two counterparts if the three-fold technique for conveying figurative language outlined above is followed”. Consider the following scenario: 1. “The wolf in sheep's clothes is an English proverb”. 2. “English translation: People who are savages in private yet act kind in public”.

equivalents conceptual equivalents Persian is the third language. 4. “Phonetic Persian translation: of *میش در لباس مینش گرگی* is /gu:rgi: dr lebs mi:sh/ /gu:rgi: dr lebs mi:sh/”.

### Analysis

An analysis of proverbs needs a great deal of comprehension power especially in the translation of proverbs from the source text to the target text. Because the understanding of proverbs is tougher than the understanding of a passage, and the main cause is, that the majority proverb is about the contextual meaning. Some of the people just translate proverb through literal meaning and getting literal meaning from it, as in the very first lines I have given an example of the proverb *بدلتے ہیں رنگ آسماں کیسے کیسے* was translated by one of my classmates “Change The Colour Sky How How”. He translated it but with exact literal meaning, but the correct and exact translation of the said proverb is “Every Day Changes Its Colour” rather than Change The Colour Sky How How. Translating proverbs from one culture to another culture can be a challenging task for translator because this is the translation of one to culture another. The translation of proverbs is a very complicated task for the translator who has little knowledge about sense translation. The proverb “As You Sow So Shall You Reap” is translated in Pashto language *Che Sa Kare Haga Ha Rebe* if we look at and compare the above-mentioned English proverb and Pashto proverb by both literal and sense translation; it gives the same concept in both English and Pashto language. But the proverbs “As you sow so shall you reap” when we translate it into the Urdu language it will give a slightly different meaning while translating it through literal meaning i.e., The proverb “As You Sow So Shall You Reap” is translated in the Urdu language “Jaisa Karo Gy Waisa Baro Gy. Which is changed from the literal translation of the target Text. i.e. *As You Do The Same Crops You Will Have To Reap*. In the book, I have analyzed some proverbs. i.e.” *Aanso Pe Jana*” To Restrain Someone Tear *آنسو پی جانا* the literal meaning of the idiom is to force tears from shedding while the connotative or sense meaning is *to tolerate something unpleasant or endure*. The equivalent of this idiom in Urdu – “the literal meaning of the related Urdu idiom is to “Drink Tear” is quite different from “To Restrain One’s Tear”

similarly another proverb the book *Sabz Bagh Dekana* سبز باغ دکھانا “Allure By Specious Promises” the denotative meaning of the same proverb is seduced by seemingly favorable promises. The identical of this proverb in Urdu is “Sabz Bagh Dekana” which means to show Someone Green Garden the literal meaning both of the proverbs are different with the same sense Or connotative meaning. Another proverb which I have analyzed is “*Jaly Per Namak Charrakna*” *چلے پر نیک چھڑکنا* “To Sprinkle Salt On A Wound” The Urdu equivalent proverb for “To Sprinkle Salt On A Wound” is “*Jaly Per Namak Charrakna*” which means to sprinkle salt on a burnt spot in one’s body. There is a slight difference in the literal meaning of both Urdu and English proverbs. Both of the proverbs give the same sense i.e. to add or increase someone's trouble. Another proverb from the book is “*Thinky Ko Paharh Kar Dekana*” *تنکے کو پہاڑ کر دیکھانا* “To Make Mountain Out Of Mole Hills” The literal meaning of the idiom “To Make Mountain Out Of Mole Hills” is to make mountain from the soil dig out from a rat-like an insectivore called a mole. The Urdu alternative of the above proverb is “*Tinky Ko Paharh Kar Dekana*” which means to show or declare straw as a mountain. We can easily differentiate between the literary meanings of both equivalent proverbs. While the sense or connotative meaning of both is the same i.e. “To exaggerate about a commonplace object”. Another proverb taken from the same book is as *Bin Ro Kay Maa Bi Doodh Nahi Daiti* “بن رو کے ماں بھی دودھ نہیں دیتی” “A Close Mouth Catches No Flies” The Urdu equivalent of the proverb “A Close Mouth Catches No Flies” which means that a mother does not give milk to her baby until the baby cry for it. The denotative meanings of both the proverbs are different with the same connotation. Both emphasize the fact that “Movement Has Improvement” “these proverbs show that the accomplishment of any undertaking requires some practical steps”. Similarly, another proverb from the book is *Ont Ke Mon Main Zeera* “اونٹ کے منہ میں زیرہ” the reciprocal proverb of “A Drop In The Ocean” in Urdu is “*Ont Ke Mon Main Zeera*” which means a small grain in camel mouth. We observe the difference in the literal meaning of both the alternate proverbs with the connotation. As a drop of water is negligible in the ocean same is the case of grain in the big mouth

of the camel. Another proverb from the book is “نیکی کر” “*Neiki Kar Darya Ma Dhall*” “Do Good And Forget It” “The alternative of English proverb “Do Good And Forget It” is “*Neiki Kar Darya Ma Dhall*” Which means do good and cast into the river. The literal meaning of both reciprocal proverbs are different with the same contextual meaning i.e. Virtue Has Its Rewards”. Do good and not look forward to rewarding. Translating the same proverb through literal meaning didn't give the exact meaning as it gives in sense translation. Another proverb from the book is “Loha Lohy Ko Kathta Hy” “لوہا لوہے کو کٹتا ہے” “Diamond Cuts Diamond” The equivalent proverb of “Diamond Cuts Diamond” in Urdu is “loha lohy Ko kathta hy” which means “Iron Cuts Iron” the difference in the literal meaning of the proverbs is very little while looking and keeping in view the concept in mind that is to some extent similar to one another. Here the difference is of one word that is *iron* has been used. Connotatively both the proverbs convey the same message i.e, everyone or everything has his equal in terms of strength and potential. Another proverb from the book is “*Behte Drya Ma Hath Dhoona*” Strike While The Iron Is Hot” ُwhich means to wash hands in the flowing river. The literal meaning of both the proverbs is quite different from each other with the connotative meaning. Both the idioms tend to convey the fact of availing opportunity. Another proverb from the book is “Tak Saans Tab Tak Saans” “جب تک ہے سانس تب تک آس” “Where There Is A Will There Is A Way” which means hope never cease until death. The literal translation, as well as the sense translation of both the proverbs, are different from each other while both express the same message.

Another proverb from the book is “A little knowledge is a dangerous thing” “*ula o ba ti*” “Neam Khakim Khatra-e-Jan” “نیم حکیم خطرہ جان” the equivalent proverb of “a little knowledge is a dangerous thing in Urdu is “نیم حکیم خطرہ جان” which means *an incompetent physician kills*. The literal sense of both the proverbs is poles apart as shown, while both aim at the same fact that incompetency in any walk of life leads to disastrous and destruction. Another proverb from the book is Child is in the armpit “Chaos in the city. The alternative proverb of the child is in the armpit chaos in the city in Urdu is “bacha baghal ma

Dhandora shehr ma” بادشاہ بغل میں ڈنڈورا شہر میں which is quite similar in literal as well as in connotative meaning to its English equivalent proverb. Another proverb is also taken from the same book Good mind good friend. Aankon Me Dhool Dhalna” “To throw the dust into the eyes” the Urdu alternative of the idiom to throw the dust into the eyes” is “Aankho Me Dhol Dhalna” both the proverbs got the same literal meaning with the same connotations as well. Both means To deceive in the bright daylight. Another proverb from the book is Good Mind Good Friend. The Urdu equivalent of the proverb “good mind good find” means if you are good, you will find the world as such. We see both the proverbs almost convey the same literal sense with a slight change. Both the proverbs convey the same contextual meaning i.e, positive thinking makes one's life beautiful. Another proverb from the book is “دماغ آسمان پے ہونا” “Demagh Aasman Per Hona-To Be Very Proud” the literal meaning of the above-mentioned proverb is “To set the brain on the sky” the equivalent meaning of both proverbs is pole apart the connotative meaning of the same proverb is – To consider himself above than other” to consider himself superior and the others inferior. That is why the dictionary meaning and the contextual meaning of the same proverb are poles apart. Another proverb from the book is “Aaftab Ko Chiragh Dekana” To lend light to the sun” aftab Ko – “آفتاب کو چراغ دکھانا” The Urdu alternative of the idiom to lend light to the sun which means to show lamp to the sun. Here we find a little difference in the literal meaning of the proverbs. The verbs lend and shown are different while the nouns light and lamp are different from one other. Both give the same connotative meaning i.e. try to teach an eagle how to fly. All these differences in translation occur because of differences in cultures. Translating proverb metaphors and metonymy as well from ST to TT sometimes we are discouraged by the culture gaps.

## Findings

The analysis comes to conclude the research study with the findings as it was found that there is a mixture of both literal and sense translation in these proverbs. There are proverbs in Urdu where the sense is the same but literal meanings are different. At the same time, many proverbs have the same literary and

contextual meaning. It is also found that while translating proverbs one needs to translate proverbs through sense rather than denotative meaning. It must be noted that the difference in the literary meaning of any proverb in two languages occurs because of different cultures and social associations. Every culture has its connotations regarding different experiences of life depending on its day-to-day business, happenings, and misshaping. In the above discussion, we have pointed out that often proverbs

have the same denotative and connotative meaning in both languages. This similarity occurs because of the universal validity and global acceptability. In other words, certain norms and values get the same prestige around the globe. Such norms are perceived by the word with the same comprehensive power which gives very few options in the sense of different denotations. That is why universally accepted norms and values often have the same denotative and connotative meaning.

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