

A Cross-Cultural Comparative Analysis of Indonesian and English Proverbs: Paremiology and Translation Equivalence

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.46961/mediasi.v7i2.2046>

Article Info

Received: 21/04/2026

Revised: 29/05/2026

Accepted: 30/05/2026

Published: 31/05/2026

e-ISSN: 2721-0995

p-ISSN: 2721-9046

Keywords

Functional Equivalence;
Intercultural Communication;
MKITS;
Proverb Translation;
Qualitative Analysis;

Abstract

This study explores the cultural values embedded in Indonesian and English proverbs through a cross-cultural comparative analysis, addressing a phenomenon that has received limited attention within translation frameworks. A total of thirty proverb pairs with equivalent meanings were selected and classified using the Matti Kuusi International Type System (MKITS), focusing on social life themes. The data were collected from proverb dictionaries, academic sources, online databases, and native speakers. Qualitative content analysis is employed to explore thematic patterns, cultural meanings, and type of equivalence between Indonesian and English proverbs. The findings indicate that equivalence operates primarily at the functional type and pragmatic levels rather than through formal or structural similarity. Many Indonesian proverbs employ indirect and nature-based imagery while several English equivalents express meanings more directly and situationally. Functional and partial equivalence appear most frequently, suggesting that proverb translation often requires cultural adaptation rather than literal transfer. The analysis also shows that some proverbs cannot achieve full equivalence due to differences in metaphorical structure, cultural association and communicative nuance. Rather than making broad cultural generalizations, this study identifies tendencies within the selected data regarding how Indonesian and English proverbs represent social life and moral values. By combining MKITS thematic classifications with equivalence analysis, this present study offers a structured approach to examining cross-cultural proverb translation and highlights the importance of cultural context in interpreting proverbial meaning across language.

INTRODUCTION

Proverbs comprise an important form of figurative language that reflects wisdom and culture in one society. As part of everyday communication, they represent an essential element of daily communication and cultural expression. As part of figurative communication, proverbs serve as cultural representation through which societies transmit moral teaching, ethical principles and social expectation across generations ((Widawati, Fuadin & Damayanti, 2018; Belkhir, 2021; Kemi & Chijioke, 2021). While some argue that proverbs are nearing extinction (Yektingtyas & Mawene, 2018), they remain significant and continue to hold relevance in contemporary societies. Consequently, the study of proverbs has become in translation and in intercultural communication studies since proverb meanings are often embedded in cultural context and cannot always be transferred literally across language.

Previous studies on proverb translation have predominantly focused on translation equivalence (Pegulescu, 2016), semantic meaning (Rietveld & Van Hormelen, 2019) and translation strategies (Mounadil, 2023). Other studies have also discussed cultural representation in proverbs, such as plant (Wijana, 2024) and the relationship between local philosophy and cultural norms (Moeis et al, 2022). However, only limited attention has been given to Indonesian proverbs within specific thematic categories, particularly those related to social life theme and their equivalence in English. In addition, the application of the Matti Kuusi International Type System (MKITS) in proverb translation studies in relation to semantic and cultural equivalences analysis remains underexplored. Consequently, there is still insufficient understanding of how Indonesian social life proverbs are culturally transferred and represented in English proverbs equivalents.

This study advances proverb translation research by introducing an integrated analytical framework that combines Matti Kuusi International Type System (MKITS) with semantic and cultural equivalence to investigate Indonesian proverbs and their English counterpart under social life theme. By focusing specifically on the social life category of MKITS, this study provides a structured cross-cultural mapping of proverb meanings, social functions, and cultural representations. Unlike previous studies that mainly discuss equivalence in general terms, the present study demonstrates how thematic proverb typology can be integrated with translation equivalence analysis to reveal culturally embedded meaning across languages. Therefore, this study contributes not only to proverb translation research but also to intercultural and cross-cultural linguistic studies by offering a more systematic approach to analyzing Indonesian–English proverb equivalence.

Matti Kuusi International Type System (MKITS) is a comprehensive classification framework for proverbs worldwide. The system identifies universal proverb themes and patterns, allowing researchers to trace cultural similarities, historical developments, and regional variations in proverbial expression (Lauhakangas, 2001). One of the proverb themes listed is social life. The main classes under this theme are coded into G1. kinship, G2. development — a person's background, G3. Child: parents / upbringing, G4. man: woman / ranking & position of both sexes, G5. Marriage, G6. youth: old age G7. health: illness G8. death / the dead. Through this framework, the study examines how social values and ethical norms are metaphorically represented in Indonesian and English proverbs.

Based on the explanation above, this study seeks to investigate the equivalence of Indonesian social-life proverbs and their English counterparts within the framework of Matti Kuusi International Type System (MKITS). The study aims to examine how social values, interpersonal relations and ethical norms embedded in Indonesian proverbs are represented and transferred into English through semantic and cultural equivalence. Furthermore, the study explores the similarities and differences between Indonesian and English proverb traditions in expressing social norms and moral guidance, thereby providing a deeper understanding of cross-cultural representations in proverb translation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Proverbs as Cultural and Communicative Expressions

There are several functions of the proverbs to society. They not merely enable people to express folk wisdom, but they also reflect the history of the people, their customs, traditions, views and values. However, proverbs can also reflect societal criticism or express disagreement with certain behaviors or viewpoints. Through the use of proverbs, speakers can reduce potential conflicts, as their messages are conveyed indirectly rather than stated openly (Lomotey & Csajbok-Twerefou, 2021). Additionally, they can be functioned to praise others, to make predictions about the future, or to explain events that are difficult for people to understand, particularly things like sickness or natural disasters which may be viewed as beyond human

control or as acts of a higher power. Hence, proverbs also function as a form of social control by communicating culturally accepted norms, values, and expectations in a concise and memorable way (Akbarian, 2012). Therefore, proverbs can be understood as part of discourse practices that shape and reflect cultural communication patterns.

In communication contexts, proverbs serve pragmatic functions such as advising, teaching, criticizing, and persuading (Diabah & Amfo 2018). Their indirect nature allows speakers to convey sensitive messages without causing direct confrontation, making them effective tools for maintaining social harmony. This is particularly evident in cultures that prioritize politeness and indirectness in communication. Proverbs encode cultural values by representing socially accepted norms, ethical principles, and collective worldviews. Previous studies have shown that proverbs often reflect fundamental cultural orientations such as collectivism and individualism (Tamimy & Sahragard, 2021). Research on Indonesian proverbs demonstrates a strong orientation toward communal life, kinship, and harmony, often expressed through metaphorical references to nature and rural life (Nugraha, 2024; Ibrahim & Usman, 2021). In contrast, English proverbs frequently employ direct expressions related to individual behavior, domestic life, and interpersonal relationships. This difference indicates that cultural values are not only embedded in meaning but also in linguistic form and metaphorical choices

Collectivism and Individualism in Proverbial Expressions

The contrast between collectivism and individualism has been widely discussed in cross-cultural studies as a fundamental dimension shaping human behavior, communication, and social organization (Triandis, 1995; Weng et al, 2021). One of the most influential frameworks is proposed by Geert Hofstede, who conceptualizes collectivism and individualism as cultural dimensions that determine the relationship between individuals and their social groups (Chen, 2013, Triandis, 1996). Collectivist values are reflected through harmony-oriented and indirect proverbial expressions, whereas individualist cultures emphasize personal agency and explicit moral evaluation. In contrast, proverbs in more individualist cultures such as English-speaking societies commonly highlight personal responsibility, self-reliance, and direct moral evaluation. Therefore, the distinction between collectivism and individualism provides an important analytical framework for understanding how cultural values are embedded in the meanings, structures, and communicative functions of proverbs across different societies.

Applying these frameworks to the present study allows for a deeper understanding of how Indonesian and English proverbs reflect different cultural orientations. Indonesian proverbs, shaped by collectivist values, tend to highlight communal relationships and interdependence, while English proverbs, influenced by individualist values, foreground individual agency and personal accountability. Therefore, the theories of collectivism and individualism provide a crucial analytical lens for interpreting both the linguistic forms and cultural meanings embedded in proverb usage across cultures.

Paremiological Approach to Proverb Analysis

Paremiology analysis provides a systematic framework for analyzing proverbial expressions as both linguistic and cultural phenomena. As it has been stated previously, proverbs are concise, traditional statements that convey collective wisdom, moral values, and social norms. As such, paremiology does not merely focus on the structural aspects of proverbs but also examines their meanings, functions, and roles within specific cultural contexts (Ali, 2023). In addition, it emphasizes the importance of classification and typology in proverb analysis. Thematic categorization allows researchers to identify recurring patterns and universal motifs across cultures.

By applying a paremiological approach, this study is able to examine Indonesian and English proverbs beyond their linguistic structures, focusing both on the way they construct and communicate cultural values. This approach also enables a more comprehensive understanding of proverb equivalence by integrating thematic classification, cultural interpretation, and functional analysis. Consequently, paremiology serves as a crucial analytical lens that bridges language, culture, and meaning in the study of proverbs. Through thematic classification and typology, paremiology helps identify recurring patterns and shared cultural values across societies. Since proverbs often contain metaphorical and culturally bound expressions, their analysis requires attention to both literal and figurative meanings. This approach is particularly relevant in translation studies because proverb equivalence often depends on preserving cultural meaning and communicative function

rather than literal form. Therefore, a paremiological approach enables this study to analyze Indonesian and English proverbs in terms of thematic classification, cultural interpretation, and functional equivalence.

The Matti Kuusi International Type System (MKITS)

The Matti Kuusi International Type System (MKITS) is a widely recognized framework for classifying proverbs based on their thematic content and functional meanings. Developed by Matti Kuusi and further refined by Outi Lauhakangas (2001 & 2023). This system enables the systematic organization of proverbs across different languages and cultures. By grouping proverbs into comparable categories, MKITS facilitates cross-cultural analysis and helps identify both universal patterns and culturally specific expressions. In this study, the analysis focuses on the social life theme within MKITS, which encompasses key aspects of human interaction and social organization. This theme is divided into several subcategories, including kinship, personal development, child upbringing, gender roles, marriage, youth and old age, health and illness, as well as death. These categories provide a structured basis for classifying Indonesian proverbs and their English equivalents, ensuring that comparisons are made within equivalent thematic domains.

The use of MKITS in this research allows for a more systematic and reliable comparative analysis by linking thematic classification with cultural interpretation (Inayatullah et al, 2016). Rather than relying solely on surface-level similarities, this framework supports the identification of semantic and functional equivalence between proverbs across cultures. Therefore, MKITS serves as an essential analytical tool in examining how Indonesian and English proverbs convey cultural values within similar social contexts.

Equivalence in Proverb Translation

Equivalence remains one of the most debated concepts in translation studied, particularly in proverb translations where linguistic meaning is inseparable from cultural context. Early translation scholars such as Catford (1965) viewed equivalence primarily from a linguistic perspective by emphasizing formal correspondence between source and target languages. Some scholar emphasizes formal equivalence, arguing that the structural and metaphorical form of the source proverb should be preserved to maintain stylistic authenticity (Koller, 1995). However, this approach is often criticized for producing unnatural translations and failing to convey the communicative intention of the proverb in the target language

In contrast, Nida's dynamic equivalence prioritizes the equivalent effect on the target audience rather than literal form. From this perspective, proverb translation should reproduce similar responses, functions, and cultural implications in the target language (Nida & Taber, 1982). Similarly, Newmark (1988) proposes communicative translation, which emphasizes readability and naturalness, especially when translating culturally bound expressions such as proverbs. In addition, Mahmood & Ahmad (2024) also claimed that translators should aim for dynamic equivalence, meaning the translated text should make the same kind of reaction in the people who read it as the original text did in its original audience.

Furthermore, House (2015) argues that translation equivalence should be understood functionally by considering situational and cultural contexts. Likewise, Venuti (2018) emphasizes the cultural dimension of translation, suggesting that translators inevitably negotiate between preserving foreign cultural elements and adapting them to the target audience. These differing perspectives indicate that equivalence in proverb translation is not absolute but negotiated between linguistic form, cultural meaning, and communicative purpose. Therefore, this study adopts a functional-cultural perspective in analyzing Indonesian and English proverb equivalence, particularly in relation to social values and communicative functions. These differing perspectives indicate that equivalence in proverb translation is not absolute but negotiated between linguistic form, cultural meaning, and communicative purpose. Therefore, this study adopts a functional-cultural perspective in analyzing Indonesian and English proverb equivalence, particularly in relation to social values and communicative functions.

Based on these theoretical perspectives, this study adopts a classification of equivalence into four types: full equivalence, partial equivalence, functional equivalence, and zero equivalence. Full equivalence occurs when both the meaning and structure of the proverb are similar across languages. Partial equivalence refers to cases where the meaning is preserved but the form or imagery differs. Functional equivalence is identified when different expressions convey the same communicative purpose or social function. Zero equivalence occurs when no direct counterpart exists in the target language, requiring explanatory translation or approximation. (Koller, 1995; Nord, 2024). This framework is used to analyze the degree of equivalence

between Indonesian proverbs and their English counterparts, particularly in relation to meaning, structure, and communicative function. By applying this classification, the study aims to provide a more systematic understanding of how cultural values are transferred and adapted in proverb translation.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design with content analysis as the primary analytical method. A qualitative descriptive approach is appropriate for providing a systematic and comprehensive description of phenomena as they naturally occur without manipulating the research setting (Creswell, 2014). In the present study, this approach was used to examine how Indonesian proverbs and their English equivalents reflect cultural values, social norms, and communicative functions. Content analysis was applied to identify, categorize, and interpret the meanings embedded in the selected proverbs. This method enabled the researchers to systematically examine linguistic expressions and cultural messages contained in both Indonesian and English proverbial data. Through content analysis, the study explored how proverbs function as carriers of cultural knowledge, social control, and moral guidance across different cultural contexts.

To complement the analysis, thematic analysis was employed to classify the proverbs into thematic categories based on the Matti Kuusi International Type System (MKITS). Following Braun and Clarke (2006), Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis involves identifying, analyzing, and interpreting recurring patterns of meaning within a dataset. In this study, thematic analysis facilitated the identification of social-life themes and their subcategories, allowing for a more systematic comparison of cultural values and equivalence patterns between Indonesian and English proverbs.

Population and Sampling

The population of this study comprises Indonesian proverbs related to social life as classified in the Matti Kuusi International Type System (MKITS). This category encompasses proverbs that reflect various aspects of human relationship such as kinship, upbringing, marriage, gender roles, family obligations and life stages. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select data that were directly relevant to the objectives of the study.

Initially, fifty Indonesian proverbs were collected from various sources, including proverb dictionaries such as *Kamus Peribahasa: Memahami Arti dan Kiasan Peribahasa, Pepatah, dan Ungkapan* by Yus Badudu (2008), *Impunan Lengkap Peribahasa Nusantara* by Sudaryanto (2015), and *Kamus Lengkap 2200 Peribahasa Indonesia* by L. H. Santoso (2000), online proverb databases, and consultations with native speakers.

To ensure the validity and cultural accuracy of the data, the selected proverbs and their English translations underwent an expert review process involving three validators: a linguist specializing in semantics and sociolinguistics, a professional translator experienced in Indonesian–English translation, and one native speaker of Bahasa Indonesia with extensive cultural knowledge of traditional proverbs. The linguist validator was a university lecturer in linguistics, while the translator had professional experience in translation studies and bilingual translation practice.

In cases where differences in interpretation or translation occurred, discussions were conducted between the researchers and the validators until a consensus was reached. To enhance reliability, inter-rater agreement was calculated by comparing the validators' ratings across the evaluated items. The results indicated a high degree of consistency among the validators, suggesting that the data were sufficiently reliable for further analysis.

The sampling process was guided by specific inclusion criteria. A proverb was included if it (1) represented a social life theme according to the MKITS classification, (2) conveyed identifiable cultural, moral, or social values, and (3) had the potential to be compared with an equivalent proverb in English. Proverbs that were ambiguous in meaning, infrequently used, or lacked sufficient contextual information were excluded from the analysis.

From the initial dataset, thirty-two proverb pairs were finalized based on the availability of comparable English equivalents. As this study adopts a qualitative design, the adequacy of the sample was determined not by statistical representation but by analytical depth and thematic saturation. The selected data were considered sufficient to capture recurring cultural patterns, equivalence strategies, and cross-cultural variations, thereby ensuring the validity and relevance of the findings.

Research Procedures

This study employed a systematic and transparent procedure consisting of five main stages was applied in. First, data collection was conducted by compiling Indonesian proverbs from credible written source including proverb dictionaries, academic references, online databases, and consultations with native speakers. Second, each proverb was classified according to the MKITS framework to identify its thematic category within social life domains. Third, English equivalents were identified through semantic and functional comparison, prioritizing expressions that convey similar meanings, communicative purposes, and cultural implications (Preston, 2023). In cases where no direct equivalent was found, the closest functional equivalent or explanatory translation was proposed. Fourth, the data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis combined with thematic analysis. This process involved identifying patterns of meaning, cultural values, metaphorical structures, and equivalence types.

The study employed four categories of equivalence adapted from translation and semantic equivalence theories. Each category was determined based on semantic similarity, cultural correspondence, metaphorical structure, and communicative function between Indonesian and English proverbs. Full Equivalence is when the Indonesian and English proverbs shared highly similar meanings, communicative purposes, metaphorical imagery, and cultural implications. Both expressions conveyed nearly identical messages with minimal semantic shift. Partial equivalence referred to proverb pairs that shared similar core meanings or moral values but differed in metaphorical structure, lexical choice, or cultural imagery.

Although the intended message remained comparable, certain semantic or stylistic elements were not fully equivalent. Functional equivalence was identified when no direct semantic or metaphorical correspondence existed, but the English proverb performed a similar communicative or social function within its cultural context. In this category, emphasis was placed on pragmatic effect rather than literal similarity. Zero equivalence occurred when no comparable proverb or culturally equivalent expression could be identified in English. In such cases, the Indonesian proverb required descriptive explanation or paraphrased translation to convey its meaning.

The analysis also examined similarities and differences between Indonesian and English proverbs in representing social norms, moral values, and cultural philosophies. Finally, the findings and translations were validated through expert review involving a linguist, a professional translator, and native speakers of Bahasa Indonesia. This validation process aimed to ensure the semantic accuracy, cultural appropriateness, and consistency of the identified equivalents. Throughout the research process, systematic coding, organized data management, and analytical transparency were maintained to enhance the reliability and replicability of the study.

Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with ethical principles governing qualitative research involving linguistic and cultural data. The research did not involve extensive human participation such as interviews, surveys, experiments, or the collection of personal or sensitive data. Human involvement in this study was limited to expert validation and consultation with native speakers for the purpose of evaluating the accuracy and cultural appropriateness of proverb translations.

All validators and native speaker contributors participated voluntarily and provided informed consent prior to their involvement in the study. They were informed about the purpose of the research, the nature of their contributions, and the use of the validation results for academic purposes only. No personal, confidential, or sensitive information was collected, recorded, or disclosed during the research process.

All proverb data were obtained from publicly accessible sources and were properly acknowledged through academic citation practices. The study also maintained academic integrity by accurately representing cultural expressions and avoiding misinterpretation, stereotyping, or decontextualization of traditional proverbs. By ensuring transparency, voluntary participation, responsible data handling, and respect for cultural knowledge, this study demonstrates adherence to ethical research standards and academic integrity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Research Question 1: Indonesian proverbs and their English equivalents in social life themes

Thirty Indonesian proverbs and their English equivalents were identified and categorized into eight social life themes based on Matti Kuusi International Type System (MKITS), namely kinship (G1), development (G2), child–parent upbringing (G3), gender roles (G4), marriage (G5), youth and old age (G6), health and illness (G7), and death (G8).

Table 1. Indonesian Proverbs and Their English Equivalents (Kinship)

No	Indonesian Proverbs	English Equivalents	Equivalence Type	Analytical Notes
1	<i>Air dicencang tiada putus</i>	Blood is thicker than water	Full equivalence	Both proverbs express the idea that family relationships remain strong despite conflict or disagreement. Although the imagery differs, both share highly similar meanings, communicative purposes, and cultural implications regarding kinship loyalty.
2	<i>Seperti anjing dengan kucing</i>	Fight Like cat and dogs	Full equivalence	Both expressions describe constant conflict and incompatibility in interpersonal relationships. The metaphorical imagery involving domestic animals is also closely similar in both languages.
3	<i>Bertemu baji dengan baji</i>	Diamond cuts diamond	Partial Equivalence	Both proverbs describe encounters between equally strong, clever, or difficult individuals. However, the metaphorical structures differ, as the Indonesian proverb uses carpentry imagery while the English proverb uses the image of diamonds.
4	<i>Berat sama dipikul, ringan sama dijinjing</i>	United we stand, divided we fall	Functional Equivalence	Both expressions emphasize solidarity, cooperation, and collective responsibility. However, the wording and metaphorical representation differ significantly, making the equivalence primarily functional rather than semantic.
5	<i>Terendam sama basah, terampai sampai kering</i>	Through thick and thin	Partial Equivalence	Both proverbs convey loyalty and mutual support during difficult and favorable situations. Nevertheless, the metaphorical imagery differs. Indonesian proverb referring to physical conditions of wetness and dryness, while the English proverb employs abstract contrastive expressions.
6	<i>Menohok kawan seriring</i>	False friends are the deadliest foes	Functional Equivalence	Both expressions warn against betrayal by close friends or companions. The equivalence is functional because the communicative message is similar despite differences in linguistic form and imagery.

Similar pairings were identified across other categories. Table 2 shows examples in the development category.

Table 2. Indonesian Proverbs and Their English Equivalents (Development)

No	Indonesian Proverbs	English Equivalents	Equivalence Type	Analytical Notes
1	<i>Anak harimau tidak akan menjadi anak kambing</i>	The child is father of the man	Partial Equivalence	Both expressions relate to the continuity of personal traits or character across generations. However, the Indonesian proverb emphasizes inherited nature through animal imagery, while the English

				proverb highlights the formative influence of childhood on adulthood.
2	<i>Buah jatuh tak jauh dari pohonnya</i>	The apple never falls far from the tree	Full equivalence	Both proverbs convey the idea that children tend to resemble their parents in behavior, character, or habits. The metaphorical structures and communicative meanings are highly similar in both languages.
3	<i>Air cucuran atap jatuhnya ke pelimbahan juga</i>	Like father like son, like mother like daughter	Functional Equivalence	Both expressions emphasize that children often follow the behavior or characteristics of their parents. However, the Indonesian proverb uses environmental imagery related to flowing water, whereas the English proverb expresses the meaning directly through family relationships.
4	<i>Hidup bagai akar benalu</i>	A millstone around one's neck	Partial Equivalence	Both expressions describe a burdensome condition that restricts personal development or well-being. Nevertheless, the metaphorical imagery differs significantly, with the Indonesian proverb referring to parasitic roots and the English proverb using the image of a heavy millstone.

In the child–parent upbringing category, four pairs of proverbs were selected.

Table 3. Indonesian Proverbs and Their English Equivalents (Upbringing)

No	Indonesian Proverbs	English Equivalents	Equivalence Type	Analytical Notes
1	<i>Melentur bambu biarlah dari rebungunya</i>	As the twig is bent, so is the tree inclined	Partial Equivalence	Both proverbs emphasize the importance of early upbringing in shaping character and behavior. However, the Indonesian proverb employs bamboo imagery rooted in agrarian culture, while the English proverb uses tree imagery.
2	<i>Kasih ibu sepanjang jalan, kasih anak sepanjang penggalan</i>	A mother can take care of ten children, but ten children cannot take care of one mother	Functional Equivalence	Both expressions highlight the enduring and sacrificial nature of maternal love as well as children's limited reciprocity. The communicative message is similar, although the linguistic structures and imagery differ considerably.
3	<i>Bagaikan anak ayam yang kehilangan induknya</i>	Like a lost sheep	Partial Equivalence	Both expressions describe helplessness, confusion, or vulnerability caused by the loss of guidance or protection. Nevertheless, the metaphorical imagery differs, with the Indonesian proverb referring to chicks losing their mother, while the English expression uses the image of a lost sheep.
4	<i>Banyak anak, banyak rezeki</i>	Children are blessings	Functional Equivalence	Both Proverbs convey positive cultural attitudes toward having children and

associate children with fortune and happiness. However, the Indonesian proverb explicitly links children with prosperity and sustenance whereas the English proverb is broader and less culturally specific.

In the gender-roles category, four pairs of proverbs were also identified.

Table 4. Indonesia Proverbs and Their English Equivalents (Gender Roles)

No	Indonesian Proverbs	English Equivalents	Equivalence Type	Analytical Notes
1	<i>Perempuan tinggal di dapur</i>	Man's work lasts till set of sun; woman's work is never done	Functional Equivalence	Both expressions reflect traditional gender expectations regarding women's domestic responsibilities. However, Indonesian proverb directly associates women with kitchen work while English proverb emphasizes the continuous nature of women's labour.
2	<i>Istri cerdas membina suami, istri dungu membinasakannya</i>	A good wife makes a good husband	Partial Equivalence	Both proverbs emphasize the influence of a wife on her husband's character and success. Yet, the Indonesian proverb presents a stronger contrast between constructive and destructive roles, while the English proverb focuses only on positive influence.
3	<i>Perempuan adalah tiang negara</i>	Men make houses, women make homes	Functional Equivalence	Both proverbs highlight the vital role of women in maintaining family and social stability. Nevertheless, the Indonesian proverb presents women as foundational pillars of society whereas In English proverb, women are emphasized to contribute within the domestic sphere.
4	<i>Pria dinilai dari semangatnya, wanita dari parasnya</i>	A man is as old as he feels, and a woman as old as she looks	Partial Equivalence	Both expressions reflect gender-based social perceptions toward men and women. The Indonesian proverb contrasts male achievement with female appearance, whereas the English proverb associate's masculinity with vitality and femininity with physical appearance. Although related, the cultural implications are not fully identical.

In the marriage category, four pairs of proverbs were indicated.

Table 5. Indonesian Proverbs and Their English Equivalents (Marriage)

No	Indonesian Proverbs	English Equivalents	Equivalence Type	Analytical Notes
1	<i>Garam di laut asam di gunung, dalam belanga bertemu juga</i>	Marriages are made in Heaven	Partial equivalence	Both expressions convey the idea that destined individuals will eventually meet and unite in marriage. However, the Indonesian proverb employs geographical and culinary imagery, whereas the English equivalent expresses the concept of destiny more directly through a spiritual/transcendental lens.
2	<i>Bertemu ruas dengan buku</i>	A match made in heaven	Partial equivalence	Both proverbs describe a state of perfect compatibility or a flawless match between two entities. However, the Indonesian proverb uses a botanical metaphor derived from the joints of a bamboo stem (<i>ruas</i> and <i>buku</i>) to illustrate physical and functional alignment, whereas the English equivalent relies on spiritual imagery (heaven) or clothing metaphors (hand in glove) to signify perfect suitability.
3	<i>Bertepuk sebelah tangan tidak akan berbunyi</i>	It takes two to tango	Partial Equivalence	Both proverbs communicate the fundamental principle of reciprocity, emphasizing that certain actions, conflicts, or relationships—including marriage or romantic pursuits—cannot function or occur through the effort of one person alone. However, they employ distinct cultural imagery. The Indonesian proverb utilizes a physiological and auditory metaphor (clapping with one hand cannot produce sound) to highlight the futility of one-sided effort. Conversely, the English equivalent uses a cultural performance metaphor (the Argentine tango dance), which inherently requires two active participants to function. While the Indonesian idiom often carries a slightly melancholic or unrequited undertone, the English counterpart is frequently applied to mutual cooperation, shared responsibility, or romantic synchronicity.
4	<i>Jauh dimata Dekat dihati</i>	Absence makes the heart grow fonder	Functional Equivalence	Both proverbs capture the enduring nature of affection despite physical separation, suggesting that geographical distance does not weaken emotional bonds but can actually intensify them. Linguistically, they share a striking conceptual parallel by employing the "heart" (<i>hati</i>) as the locus of deep emotion and love. However, they structure this idea through different grammatical and structural lenses. The Indonesian proverb relies on a balanced, symmetrical antithesis (" <i>jauh di mata</i> " vs. " <i>dekat di hati</i> ") using sensory contrast (sight vs. internal feeling). On the other hand, the English equivalent is framed as a cause-and-effect philosophical statement, positioning "absence" as an active agent that causes affection to grow.

In Youth and Old Age category, four pairs of proverbs were revealed.

Table 6. Indonesian Proverbs and Their English Equivalents (Youth and Old age)

No	Indonesian Proverbs	English Equivalents	Equivalence Type	Analytical Notes
1	<i>Orang muda menanggung rindu, orang tua menanggung ragam</i>	The glory of young men is their strength, but the splendour of old men is their grey hair	Partial Equivalence	Both proverbs contrast youth and old age. The Indonesian proverb highlights the emotional burdens and changing concerns experienced at different life stages, while the English proverb emphasizes the physical vigor of youth and the wisdom associated with aging. Although the imagery differs, both reflect society's recognition of generational differences and age-related values.
2	<i>Belajar di waktu kecil bagaikan mengukir di atas batu</i>	Knowledge in youth is wisdom in age	Functional Equivalence	The two proverbs share the same educational and moral message: learning at a young age has lasting benefits throughout life. The Indonesian proverb uses the metaphor of carving on stone to symbolize permanence, while the English proverb directly links youthful learning to wisdom in old age. Both emphasize early education as a valuable investment for the future.
3	<i>Umur setahun jagung, darah setampuk pinang</i>	Wet behind the ears	Functional Equivalence	Both proverbs refer to youthfulness and lack of experience. The Indonesian proverb metaphorically describes someone who is still very young and immature, while the English equivalent idiom refers to someone inexperienced or naïve. Despite cultural differences in imagery, both function pragmatically to describe someone young and inexperienced.
4	<i>Berakit-rakit ke hulu, berenang ke tepian; bersakit dahulu bersenang kemudian</i>	An idle youth, a needy age	Partial Equivalence	Both proverbs discuss the relationship between effort in youth and future outcomes. The Indonesian proverb promotes perseverance and delayed gratification, suggesting that hardship in the present leads to future happiness. The English proverb warns that laziness during youth results in suffering in old age. Both emphasize discipline and preparation during one's younger years for a better future.

In category of Health and Illness, two pairs of proverbs were uncovered.

Table 7. Indonesian Proverbs and Their English Equivalents (Health and Illness)

No	Indonesian Proverbs	English Equivalents	Equivalence Type	Analytical Notes
1	<i>Mencegah lebih baik daripada mengobati</i>	An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure	Full Equivalence	Both proverbs express the same idea that prevention is more beneficial and effective than treatment after a problem occurs. The meanings are highly similar, although the English proverb uses measurement imagery (“ounce” and “pound”) while the Indonesian proverb states the idea more directly.
2	<i>Bagai kerakap di atas batu, hidup enggan mati tak mau</i>	To changes one's place but not one's pain	Partial Equivalence	Both proverbs describe a condition of ongoing suffering or discomfort that is difficult to escape. The Indonesian proverb emphasizes a helpless existence between life and death, while the English proverb focuses on the persistence of suffering despite changing circumstances. The thematic meaning overlaps, but the expressions are not completely identical.

The last category in social life themes of MKITS is death. Here, two pairs of proverbs were verified.

Table 8. Indonesian Proverbs and Their English Equivalents (Death)

No	Indonesian Proverbs	English Equivalents	Equivalence Type	Analytical Notes
1	<i>Mumbang jatuh, kelapa jatuh</i>	Death keeps no calendar	Functional Equivalence	Both proverbs convey the same communicative function: emphasizing the unpredictability and inevitability of death. Although the imagery differs, the pragmatic meaning and moral lesson are equivalent.
2	<i>Hangus tiada berapi, karam tiada berair</i>	Sorrow can drown a man without water	Functional Equivalence	Both proverbs use metaphorical imagery to express deep emotional suffering without physical causes. The Indonesian proverb describes invisible pain through the images of burning without fire and drowning without water, while the English expression similarly portrays sorrow as something powerful enough to destroy a person emotionally. Both function to emphasize the intensity of inner suffering.

Across all categories, the findings demonstrate that Indonesian and English proverbs share many similarities in expressing social life values, despite differences in cultural imagery and linguistic structure. The equivalence analysis reveals that full equivalence occurs when both proverbs convey nearly identical meanings and communicative purposes, while partial equivalence appears when only certain semantic aspects overlap. Functional equivalence is the most dominant type because many Indonesian and English proverbs perform similar social and moral functions although they employ different metaphors and cultural representations. In several cases, the English equivalents emphasize direct expression, whereas Indonesian proverbs tend to use symbolic and nature-based imagery rooted in local cultural experiences. These findings indicate that proverbs from different cultures may preserve universal human concerns related to kinship,

upbringing, gender roles, marriage, aging, health, and death, while simultaneously reflecting unique cultural perspectives in their metaphorical constructions.

Research Question 2: The ways Indonesian and English proverbs embody and transmit their communities and cultural philosophies.

The analysis reveals that both Indonesian and English proverbs function not only as linguistic expressions but also as carriers of cultural values, moral teachings, and collective philosophies inherited across generations. Through metaphorical language and symbolic imagery, the proverbs reflect how each society understands social relationships, personal behavior, family responsibilities, gender expectations, health, aging, and death.

Indonesian proverbs are strongly influenced by agrarian life, natural surroundings, and communal values. This can be observed in expressions such as *melentur bambu biarlah dari rebunginya*, *buah jatuh tak jauh dari pohonnya*, and *berakit-rakit ke hulu, berenang ke tepian*. These proverbs employ imagery related to bamboo, trees, rivers, and physical labor, reflecting the close relationship between Indonesian society and nature. Moreover, Indonesian proverbs tend to emphasize collectivism, social harmony, family loyalty, patience, and mutual responsibility. Such characteristics demonstrate the importance of maintaining balance and solidarity within the community.

In contrast, English proverbs often present ideas more directly and pragmatically. Although many English proverbs also contain metaphorical expressions, they frequently emphasize individual responsibility, practical wisdom, efficiency, and personal achievement. For example, expressions such as *An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure* and *It takes two to tango* communicate moral lessons through concise and straightforward structures. This reflects the tendency of English-speaking cultures to value practicality and individual agency in social interactions.

Despite these differences, both Indonesian and English proverbs share universal human concerns. Themes related to love, family, education, suffering, aging, and death appear consistently across both cultures. This indicates that proverbs serve as important cultural tools for preserving social norms and transmitting moral philosophies from one generation to another. Therefore, proverbs can be understood as reflections of collective cultural identity as well as instruments of informal social education within society.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that equivalence in Indonesian–English proverb translation operates primarily at the functional and pragmatic level rather than at the formal or structural level. Although the proverb pairs across the eight MKITS categories show difference in wording and imagery, they still share similar communicative meanings. This pattern confirms the relevance of dynamic equivalence as proposed by Eugene Nida, where the effectiveness of translation is determined by the equivalence of response rather than structural correspondence. In this context, the findings support Ebrahimi's (2020) argument that proverb translation is closely connected to cultural values and cultural interpretation. Ebrahimi emphasizes that proverbs cannot be translated literally because they contain social norms, beliefs, and cultural philosophies specific to a community. Similarly, the present study reveals that many Indonesian and English proverbs preserve equivalent moral messages despite differences in metaphorical representation and linguistic structure.

A key analytical insight emerging from this study is the contrast in semiotic representation between Indonesian and English proverbs. Indonesian proverbs predominantly employ natural and environmental imagery, such as water, bamboo, coconuts, and animals, particularly in categories related to kinship, upbringing, and death (Abbas & Kaharuddin, 2022; Tarigan et al., 2022; Nugraha, 2023). These metaphorical patterns reflect the close relationship between Indonesian society and nature-based cultural experiences. In contrast, English proverbs tend to use more human-centered and situational expressions that focus on actions, relationships, and social interaction (Babcock, 2024). This distinction suggests that Indonesian proverbs often convey meaning indirectly through symbolic representation, whereas English proverbs communicate ideas in a more explicit and direct manner. The finding aligns with previous paremiologically studies arguing that proverb meaning is deeply influenced by culturally specific metaphor systems and social worldviews (Issa, 2025; Ferrari & Siqueira, 2023).

From a cultural perspective, the findings reveal contrasting collectivist and individualist orientations embedded within Indonesian and English proverb traditions. Indonesian proverbs frequently emphasize communal harmony, interdependence, family loyalty, and social cohesion, particularly in categories related to kinship, marriage, and social roles. Expressions such as *berat sama dipikul, ringan sama dijinjing* and *terendam sama basah, terampai sama kering* illustrate the importance of solidarity and collective responsibility within Indonesian cultural values. This finding is closely related to Andayani, Ancok, and Wulan's (2018) study on Javanese family values, which highlights harmony, mutual care, and relational balance as central principles in Indonesian family and social life.

In contrast, English proverbs tend to foreground personal responsibility, independence, and individual responsibility through expressions emphasizing self-reliance and individual action. This tendency can be seen from Muddiman, Power, and Taylor's (2020) discussion of family interaction and personal voice in Western society, where individuals are encouraged to express personal opinions, negotiate relationships, and assert individual perspectives within social and family contexts. These characteristics are also reflected in Doyle and Mieder's (2020) discussion of modern English proverbs, which shows that contemporary proverb usage in English-speaking societies frequently highlights practical wisdom, personal experience, and individual judgment in social life. Therefore, the contrast between Indonesian and English proverbs reflects broader cultural differences between collectivist orientations that prioritize social harmony and individualist orientations that emphasize personal autonomy.

The classification of equivalence types (full, partial, functional, and zero equivalence) illustrates that proverb translation operates at different levels of semantic and cultural similarity. Functional equivalence appears most frequently in the data, indicating that communicative meaning is often prioritized over literal linguistic form when translating culturally bound expressions. In contrast, several proverb pairs demonstrate only partial equivalence because cultural imagery and pragmatic nuances cannot be fully transferred across languages. This can be seen in *garam di laut asam di gunung, dalam belanga bertemu juga* and *marriages are made in heaven*, where both express destiny in marriage but through very different cultural representations.

The findings suggest that equivalence in proverb translation is not purely linguistic but also cultural and pragmatic. Rather than fully confirming broad cultural differences between Indonesian and English societies, the data indicate tendencies in how each proverb tradition represents social values and experiences. Indonesian proverbs in this study more frequently employ natural and symbolic imagery, while many English equivalents express ideas more directly and situationally.

However, these patterns should be understood within the limited scope of the 30 proverb pairs analyzed in this research. This study also highlights the difficulty of achieving complete equivalence in proverb translation. Several expressions required adaptation because metaphorical meaning, emotional nuance, and cultural associations could not be transferred directly. Therefore, the findings support the view that proverb translation involves negotiation between literal meaning, cultural symbolism, and communicative purpose rather than direct lexical substitution alone (Khan, 2014; Molulela, 2021).

CONCLUSION

This study shows that equivalence in Indonesian–English proverbs involve not only linguistic similarity but also cultural and pragmatic negotiation. The analysis of thirty proverb pairs indicates that many equivalents operate primarily at the functional level, where communicative meaning is maintained despite differences in metaphorical imagery and linguistic structure. The findings also suggest recurring patterns in how Indonesian and English proverbs represent social experiences, particularly through differences in symbolic expression and communicative style. By combining the Matti Kuusi International Type System (MKITS) with equivalence analysis, this study provides a structured way to examine cross-cultural proverb translation within selected social life themes. However, the findings should be interpreted cautiously due to the limited dataset and the qualitative nature of proverb pairing. The identification of equivalence types remains partly interpretative and may involve subjective judgment, especially in cases of partial or functional equivalence where direct semantic correspondence is absent.

This study also highlights the difficulty of translating culturally bound expressions across languages. Several proverb pairs required adaptation because metaphorical meaning, emotional nuance, and cultural associations could not be transferred directly. Therefore, proverb translation should be understood as a process of negotiating meaning and communicative purpose rather than achieving exact lexical

correspondence future research is encouraged to expand the dataset across broader thematic categories and languages, while also incorporating validation from paremiological and translation experts to reduce subjectivity in proverb pairing and equivalence classification. Additional studies may further explore how cultural context, metaphor systems, and pragmatic usage influence the translation and interpretation of proverbs across societies.

DECLARATIONS

Author Contributions

Author 1: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Writing–Original Draft, Visualization, Project Administration.

Author 2: Supervision, Validation, Formal Analysis, Writing–Review & Editing, Intellectual Contribution.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

Data Availability

The data supporting the findings of this study consist of Indonesian and English proverb pairs compiled from publicly available sources, including proverb dictionaries, academic publications, and online databases. Due to the nature of data aggregation and selection criteria applied in this study, the full dataset is not deposited in a public repository. However, the dataset used and/or analyzed during the current study is available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. All sources used in compiling the data are properly cited within the manuscript to ensure transparency and traceability.

Funding

This research received no external funding.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to colleagues and experts who provided valuable insights and feedback during the validation process of the proverb data. Appreciation is also extended to the institutions supporting this research, particularly Politeknik Negeri Media Kreatif and Universitas Sumatera Utara, for providing academic resources and an enabling research environment.

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