
Proverbs as Metaphorical Maps: A Comparative Analysis of Traditional and AI-Generated Discourse

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Abstract

This paper is thoroughly based on the comparative analysis of traditional proverbs and AI generated proverbs to find out whether using artificial intelligence can in any way mimic the metaphorical, cultural, and cognitive richness involved in human proverbs. Proverbs are brief cultural items containing generations of wisdom, values, and moral teachings expressed as metaphorical mappings that are intrinsically well experienced. Thanks to the development of Natural Language Processing (NLP), models like GPT-3 and GPT-4 have been shown to have exceptional ability to result in coherent and human-like texts, which makes it difficult to believe that such systems are capable of producing culturally resonant proverbs. This study is based on the conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) and cognitive linguistics and explores the role of metaphors in understanding abstract concepts and facilitating the transmission of cultures. The study objectives are presented by defining various underlying conceptual metaphors in both traditional and AI-generated proverbs and to make comparisons between cultural and cognitive patterns expressed in them. A qualitative comparative study will show that AI can replicate the structural and linguistic characteristics of proverbs but does not easily replicate the emotional undertones, cultural internalization, and sense of experience that proverbs have. Traditional proverbs are known to do not only pass moral direction and societal standards, but also create cohesiveness, strength and generational identity. On the other hand, AI generated proverbs lack the contextual grounding which is a matter of statistics not of the lived realities. The results point to the possibilities and constraints of AI in the generation of cultural texts and that human wisdom cannot be replaced in the meaning-making process. This work can be discussed as making a contribution to the interdisciplinary contribution to the field of linguistics, cognitive science, and etc. AI ethics because it argues that technology indeed is not able to capture the essence of cultural wisdom.

Key Words: Proverbs, Tradition, Wisdom, Artificial Intelligence, Culture, Interdisciplinary, Linguistics, Cognitive Science, Metaphorical Maps

1. Introduction

Proverbs are one of the most enduring forms of figurative language, functioning as condensed expressions of collective wisdom, cultural values, and moral understanding. Their strength lies in their ability to communicate complex and abstract ideas through familiar images drawn from everyday life. By mapping intangible concepts such as patience, wisdom, effort, and morality onto concrete experiences, proverbs enable

speakers to interpret and navigate the world with clarity and shared understanding (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). From a cognitive linguistic perspective, proverbs are not merely decorative language forms but reflect fundamental mechanisms of human thought. Conceptual Metaphor Theory explains that humans understand abstract concepts through metaphorical mappings between a concrete source domain and an abstract target domain (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Proverbs exemplify this process by transforming lived experiences—such as agriculture, nature, tools, and social interaction—into metaphorical frameworks that guide reasoning and behavior (Kövecses, 2010).

Traditional proverbs are deeply embedded within cultural and social contexts. They emerge from repeated human experiences and are transmitted across generations, gaining authority and emotional resonance over time. Because they are shaped by collective memory and cultural practice, traditional proverbs serve not only as linguistic expressions but also as carriers of cultural identity and moral instruction (Mieder, 2004). Their metaphorical imagery is grounded in environments familiar to the communities that produce them, which enhances their interpretive power and relevance.

With the rapid development of artificial intelligence and natural language processing, language models have demonstrated an increasing ability to generate texts that resemble human discourse. AI systems can now produce proverb-like statements that imitate the brevity, metaphorical structure, and didactic tone of traditional proverbs. This raises important questions regarding whether such systems can genuinely reproduce the cognitive and cultural dimensions of proverb formation or whether they merely replicate surface-level linguistic patterns (Bender et al., 2021).

Proverbs play a crucial role in shaping how individuals and communities understand abstract aspects of human life. They function as culturally shared cognitive tools that compress complex experiences into brief, memorable expressions. Through metaphorical language, proverbs translate intangible concepts such as wisdom, morality, patience, love, and fate into concrete images that are easily understood and widely shared (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). This metaphorical compression enables proverbs to operate efficiently within everyday discourse, guiding behavior and interpretation without the need for lengthy explanation.

From a cognitive linguistic perspective, the effectiveness of proverbs lies in their reliance on embodied experience. Conceptual Metaphor Theory explains that human thought is fundamentally metaphorical and grounded in bodily interaction with the world (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Gibbs, 1994). Proverbs exemplify this principle by mapping abstract target domains onto familiar source domains such as nature, physical labor, movement, and social interaction. Because these source domains are rooted in lived experience, traditional proverbs achieve a level of emotional resonance and cultural stability that allows them to persist across generations (Kövecses, 2010).

In addition to their cognitive function, proverbs also serve as cultural artifacts. They reflect the values, beliefs, and moral frameworks of the societies in which they originate. As Mieder (2004) notes, proverbs are not merely linguistic expressions but repositories of cultural knowledge that encode social norms and collective wisdom. Their repeated use across time reinforces communal identity and ensures continuity of cultural understanding. This cultural embeddedness distinguishes traditional proverbs from other figurative expressions, as their authority is derived from communal acceptance rather than individual creativity.

The emergence of artificial intelligence as a language-producing entity introduces a new dimension to the study of proverbial discourse. Advances in natural language processing have enabled AI systems to generate text that closely resembles human language in structure and coherence. As a result, AI-generated proverbs appear increasingly fluent and proverb-like on the surface. However, the ability to generate metaphorical language does not necessarily imply the ability to reproduce the cognitive and cultural processes underlying proverb formation (Bender et al., 2021). This distinction raises important questions regarding the nature of metaphor, understanding, and cultural participation.

Unlike humans, artificial intelligence does not possess embodied experience, emotional awareness, or cultural memory. Its metaphor production is based on statistical associations within large datasets rather than lived

interaction with the world. Consequently, AI-generated proverbs often rely on technological and system-based imagery that reflects the digital environments in which AI operates. While such metaphors may be logically coherent and contextually relevant, they differ fundamentally from traditional metaphors that arise from human interaction with nature, society, and moral struggle.

By situating this study within the intersection of cognitive linguistics, cultural studies, and artificial intelligence, the research seeks to explore the extent to which metaphorical meaning can be separated from human experience. Through a comparative analysis grounded in Conceptual Metaphor Theory, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the limitations of AI in generating culturally resonant figurative language and reinforces the view that human wisdom, as expressed through proverbs, remains inseparable from embodied cognition and cultural life.

This study investigates this issue by conducting a comparative analysis of traditional human proverbs and AI-generated proverbs through the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory. Rather than evaluating creativity in general, the focus is on metaphorical mapping, cultural grounding, and cognitive depth. By examining how abstract meanings are structured in both forms, the study seeks to determine whether AI-generated proverbs reflect the same conceptual and cultural richness found in traditional proverbial discourse.

To guide this investigation, the following research objectives shape the direction of analysis:

Research Objectives

1. To identify and categorize the underlying conceptual metaphors in traditional and AI-generated proverbs.
2. To compare the cognitive and cultural patterns reflected in metaphor usage between traditional human proverbs and those generated by AI.

These objectives ensure that the analysis does not focus merely on surface linguistic form but instead investigates how meaning is conceptualized through metaphor, how imagery differs across sources, and how cultural grounding shapes cognitive interpretation.

In line with these objectives, the present study answers the following research questions:

Research Questions

1. How do the conceptual metaphors in traditional proverbs differ from those in AI-generated proverbs in terms of metaphorical mapping?
2. To what extent do AI-generated proverbs reflect the same cognitive and cultural insights as traditional proverbs?

By addressing these questions, the study contributes to ongoing discussions in linguistics, cognitive science, and AI ethics by demonstrating the limits of artificial systems in reproducing culturally grounded human wisdom.

These research questions link directly to metaphor theory and cognitive linguistics. They guide the examination toward the core issue of how meaning is constructed differently when metaphors emerge from human communities versus computational modeling. Because proverbs are highly metaphorical and culturally encoded expressions, they provide an ideal lens through which to observe these contrasts.

The analysis explores fifteen proverb pairs selected from different thematic clusters that represent some of the most common metaphorical patterns found in both traditional and AI-generated proverbs. These clusters include themes such as patience, loyalty, justice, courage, emotional restraint, adaptability, trust, risk-taking, and the inevitability of change. Each proverb pair conveys a similar message but does so through markedly different metaphorical source domains. The examination across these themes makes clear where AI successfully mirrors the structure of human metaphor and where it fails to reproduce the cultural and experiential grounding that gives traditional proverbs their lasting power.

Traditional proverbs, shaped by generations, carry emotional meaning and moral guidance because the

communities that produced them live the experiences they describe. AI-generated proverbs, however, emerge from patterns in digitally available text. Although they are often clever or insightful, they lack the cultural lineage that makes traditional proverbs enduring carriers of shared wisdom. This contrast reveals both the impressive capabilities of AI and its inherent limitations.

Ultimately, this study argues that while AI can replicate the linguistic structure of proverbs, it does not replicate the cultural substance behind them. The imagery used in AI-generated proverbs reflects a technological worldview rather than a culturally grounded one. The lack of embodied experience limits the emotional resonance, moral depth, and communal wisdom that traditional proverbs provide. As a result, the comparison draws attention to the irreplaceable role of human experience in shaping the metaphors through which communities understand life.

2.Literature Review

Proverbs occupy a central role in human societies as compact carriers of cultural knowledge, moral guidance, and collective memory. Scholars emphasize that their longevity is tied to their ability to distill complex experiences into brief, memorable expressions that communities recognize as authoritative (Mieder, 2004; Wierzbicka, 1996). Because proverbs emerge from repeated use across generations, they encode shared values and worldviews shaped through lived experience. The literature consistently identifies proverbs as cultural tools that help individuals interpret their surroundings and navigate social relationships, reinforcing their significance as a linguistic and cognitive resource (Gibbs, 1994; Mieder, 2004).

The metaphorical nature of proverbs has been a major focus in linguistic and cognitive studies. According to conceptual metaphor theory, metaphor allows humans to understand abstract ideas through concrete, familiar domains of experience (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Gibbs, 1994). Proverbs rely on this cognitive mechanism by mapping everyday experiences—such as planting seeds, navigating storms, or tending animals—onto abstract concepts like patience, resilience, or caution. Because of this structure, proverbs effectively communicate meaning through imagery drawn from embodied life. Scholars argue that the strength of proverbs lies in this fusion of metaphor and cultural experience, which makes figurative meaning immediately accessible (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Honeck, 1997).

Cultural specificity is another recurring theme in proverb scholarship. While all cultures use metaphor, the metaphors embedded in proverbs differ according to environment, lifestyle, and social organization (Wierzbicka, 1996; Mieder, 2004). Agricultural communities rely on metaphors associated with land, seasons, and harvest, whereas pastoral groups use imagery tied to animals and grazing. Maritime cultures frequently employ nautical metaphors. These differences demonstrate that proverb imagery arises from the lived realities of the people who create them (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Honeck, 1997). Thus, the cultural background of a community shapes the metaphorical maps through which it interprets life.

The literature also highlights the social and communicative functions of proverbs. They operate not only as expressions of wisdom but also as persuasive devices that reinforce social norms (Mieder, 2004; Gibbs, 1994). When speakers use proverbs in conversation, they draw on collective knowledge that listeners already recognize, lending authority to their message. This reliance on shared cultural understanding enhances the social impact of proverbs and explains why they are commonly used to settle disputes, offer moral lessons, or provide guidance (Wierzbicka, 1996; Mieder, 2004). Through their frequent use, proverbs strengthen cultural cohesion by reinforcing the values they contain.

In cognitive linguistics, proverbs are frequently analyzed as mental models that guide interpretation and influence decision-making. Because proverbs rely on metaphorical structures, they reveal patterns in how people conceptualize the world (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Gibbs, 1994). For instance, metaphors such as “life is a journey” or “time is a resource” reflect deeply embedded conceptual systems. Proverbs draw on these systems to help individuals understand emotional or social experiences through analogy. This metaphorical organization makes proverbs cognitively powerful tools, shaping perception and guiding behavior in subtle

yet persistent ways (Honeck, 1997; Wierzbicka, 1996).

With the rise of artificial intelligence and natural language processing, researchers have begun to explore whether AI can generate expressions that resemble traditional proverbs. Although AI can produce coherent and structurally similar statements, scholars note that AI-generated proverbs lack the cultural grounding that defines human-made expressions (Gibbs, 1994; Honeck, 1997). Because AI operates through statistical patterns rather than embodied experience, its metaphors emerge from textual associations rather than lived social reality. This leads to figurative expressions that mimic proverb form but not proverb depth (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Mieder, 2004). As a result, AI-generated proverbs raise important questions about the nature of cultural meaning.

A major point of comparison between traditional and AI-generated proverbs concerns the source domains used in metaphorical mapping. Traditional proverbs draw heavily from nature, bodily experience, manual labor, and interpersonal interaction because these domains reflect the embodied life of human communities (Wierzbicka, 1996; Gibbs, 1994). By contrast, AI-generated proverbs frequently rely on technological metaphors—such as loading screens, notifications, or system updates—because these are common in the digital texts from which AI models learn (Honeck, 1997; Mieder, 2004). This difference reveals how metaphor is shaped by the environment and experience of the speaker, whether human or artificial.

Another theme in the literature concerns the emotional resonance of proverbs. Traditional proverbs carry emotional depth because they emerge from real struggles, joys, hardships, and communal experiences. Their images evoke familiar feelings tied to relationships, nature, and survival (Mieder, 2004; Wierzbicka, 1996). AI-generated proverbs do not share this emotional lineage. Although they may sound clever or insightful, they do not arise from emotional memory or collective history but from computational pattern recognition (Gibbs, 1994; Honeck, 1997). This difference affects how readers interpret AI-generated expressions and limits their ability to function as moral or cultural guides.

Some scholars argue that AI-generated language reflects the symbolic landscape of the digital era. As societies increasingly conceptualize daily activities through technological metaphors—such as processing, updating, or connecting—AI-generated proverbs mirror these conceptual trends (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Mieder, 2004). These metaphors are intelligible because they represent contemporary experience, yet they lack the historical endurance and cultural richness associated with traditional proverbs. Thus, AI-generated proverbs reveal more about modern digital environments than about deep cultural wisdom (Wierzbicka, 1996; Gibbs, 1994).

The stylistic features of proverbs have also received considerable attention. Scholars note that traditional proverbs are often characterized by brevity, parallelism, rhythm, and balanced structure (Mieder, 2004; Honeck, 1997). These stylistic traits allow proverbs to be memorable and easily transmitted. AI models are capable of imitating these structural features because they can detect recurring patterns in language data. However, the cultural evolution behind stylistic refinement cannot be reproduced computationally. Traditional proverbs endure because they are tested and validated socially, whereas AI-generated expressions lack this cultural trajectory (Gibbs, 1994; Mieder, 2004).

Within cognitive linguistics, metaphor is understood not simply as a linguistic ornament but as a fundamental component of human thought. Traditional proverbs embody this principle by revealing stable conceptual patterns across generations (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Wierzbicka, 1996). AI-generated proverbs, however, showcase patterns derived from algorithmic processes rather than human cognition. This contrast allows researchers to examine differences between human conceptual systems and computational modeling, providing insight into the limitations of AI in producing culturally meaningful metaphor (Gibbs, 1994; Honeck, 1997).

Identity formation is another area where traditional proverbs play a significant role. Proverbs help individuals connect to their cultural heritage and locate themselves within a collective narrative (Mieder, 2004; Wierzbicka, 1996). They reflect the values, priorities, and lived realities of the communities that produce

them. AI-generated proverbs, however, do not emerge from a cultural group and therefore do not carry identity markers or communal significance. Although they may sound similar in structure, they lack the cultural lineage that defines traditional proverb use (Gibbs, 1994; Honeck, 1997).

Finally, the literature distinguishes between human creativity and AI creativity. Human creativity emerges from emotional experience, cultural participation, and personal interpretation. AI creativity, by contrast, is recombinatory, based on reorganizing patterns found in data (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Gibbs, 1994). Therefore, while AI-generated proverbs may appear original or clever, they do not originate from cultural wisdom or lived insight. This reinforces the idea that AI can imitate the form of proverbs but cannot reproduce their cultural or emotional essence (Mieder, 2004; Wierzbicka, 1996).

Scholars in cognitive linguistics have long emphasized that metaphor is not merely a linguistic ornament but a central mechanism of human thought. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that metaphor structures everyday reasoning by allowing abstract concepts to be understood through concrete experiences. Proverbs exemplify this mechanism in a condensed form, as they rely heavily on metaphorical mappings to communicate wisdom efficiently. Because proverbs are repeated across generations, their metaphors become cognitively entrenched, reinforcing shared conceptual frameworks within a culture (Gibbs, 1994).

Research on proverbial language further highlights the strong connection between metaphor and culture. Kövecses (2010) notes that while some metaphors may appear universal, their specific realizations are deeply shaped by cultural experience. Traditional proverbs reflect local environments, social practices, and historical conditions, which influence the choice of metaphorical source domains. As a result, proverbs do not merely describe reality but actively shape how members of a community perceive moral values, social relationships, and acceptable behavior (Mieder, 2004).

Several studies have emphasized the role of proverbs as repositories of collective memory and cultural identity. According to Mieder (2004), proverbs function as “cultural fossils” that preserve long-standing social norms and ethical principles. Their authority does not stem from individual authorship but from communal validation over time. This distinguishes traditional proverbs from other figurative expressions and explains their durability and moral force within discourse. Through repeated use, proverb metaphors become normalized cognitive tools rather than creative innovations.

With the emergence of artificial intelligence as a language-generating agent, recent scholarship has begun to question whether machines can replicate culturally grounded figurative language. While AI systems demonstrate remarkable fluency, researchers argue that such fluency should not be confused with understanding. Bender et al. (2021) caution that large language models operate through pattern recognition rather than meaning construction, which raises concerns about their ability to generate culturally meaningful metaphors. From this perspective, AI-generated proverbs may resemble human proverbs linguistically while lacking experiential depth.

Studies on metaphor generation in AI suggest that machine-produced metaphors often rely on domains familiar to computational environments, such as systems, networks, and data processing (Kövecses, 2020). These metaphors reflect the operational logic of machines rather than embodied human experience. As a result, while AI-generated proverbs may appear innovative, they tend to prioritize functionality over emotional or cultural resonance. This limitation becomes particularly evident when AI metaphors are compared with traditional proverbs rooted in nature, labor, and social interaction.

Overall, the existing literature supports the view that proverb formation is inseparable from embodied cognition and cultural participation. While artificial intelligence can reproduce the surface structure of metaphorical language, it lacks the experiential grounding necessary to generate culturally internalized wisdom. This gap in the literature justifies a comparative investigation of traditional and AI-generated proverbs, particularly through the analytical lens of Conceptual Metaphor Theory.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative comparative research design to investigate the metaphorical, cognitive, and cultural dimensions of traditional and AI-generated proverbs. A qualitative approach is considered most appropriate because the study focuses on depth of meaning, metaphorical structure, and cultural interpretation rather than numerical measurement. Proverbs are inherently interpretive and symbolic linguistic units; therefore, their analysis requires close reading and conceptual examination rather than statistical evaluation. The data for this study consists of fifteen pairs of proverbs, with each pair containing one traditional proverb and one AI-generated proverb that convey a similar thematic idea. The proverbs are organized into five thematic clusters: human virtues and values; work, effort, and risk; human emotions and inner life; life philosophy and existence; and knowledge, morality, and society. From each cluster, three proverb pairs were selected to ensure thematic balance and systematic comparison. This selection allows the study to examine how similar abstract concepts are expressed through different metaphorical source domains.

The purpose of pairing traditional and AI-generated proverbs is to enable direct comparison between human-derived and machine-generated metaphorical constructions. By analyzing proverb pairs within the same thematic category, the study isolates differences in metaphorical mapping, cultural grounding, and cognitive representation. This method ensures that variations observed in the analysis result from differences in metaphor construction rather than thematic inconsistency.

The analytical procedure involves identifying the underlying metaphors in each proverb and examining how abstract meanings are conveyed through concrete imagery. Each proverb is analyzed individually and then compared with its paired counterpart to highlight similarities and differences in metaphor usage. The focus remains on interpretation rather than evaluation, with particular attention given to how meaning is shaped by lived experience in traditional proverbs and by technological contexts in AI-generated ones.

3.2. Theoretical Framework

The study is grounded in Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), which views metaphor as a fundamental cognitive mechanism through which humans understand abstract concepts in terms of concrete experiences. According to this framework, meaning is constructed through mappings between a source domain (concrete and familiar) and a target domain (abstract and complex). Proverbs provide an ideal site for applying CMT because they frequently rely on metaphorical mappings to communicate moral, social, and philosophical insights.

Using CMT, each proverb in the study is analyzed by identifying its source domain, target domain, and the conceptual metaphor linking the two. This framework allows for systematic comparison between traditional and AI-generated proverbs by revealing how different experiential domains are employed to structure meaning. In traditional proverbs, source domains are often grounded in nature, physical labor, and social interaction, reflecting embodied human experience. In contrast, AI-generated proverbs frequently rely on technological and system-based domains, reflecting computational environments rather than lived reality. By applying Conceptual Metaphor Theory, the study provides a coherent analytical lens through which the cognitive and cultural limitations of AI-generated proverbial discourse can be examined without altering or extending the original data.

4. Analysis

This section presents a detailed comparative analysis of traditional and AI-generated proverbs using Conceptual Metaphor Theory. Each proverb pair expresses a similar abstract theme but employs different source domains, allowing comparison between embodied human cognition and technologically mediated metaphor construction.

Cluster A – Human Virtues and Values

1. Patience and Perseverance

Traditional Proverb: *“Rome wasn’t built in a day.”*

This proverb draws its source domain from **construction and architecture**, while the target domain is **patience and long-term achievement**. Through the conceptual metaphor **ACHIEVEMENT IS CONSTRUCTION**, abstract success is understood as a gradual process requiring time, labor, and endurance. The metaphor is grounded in historical human experience, emphasizing collective effort and delayed gratification. The proverb reflects cultural memory and reinforces the moral value of perseverance.

AI-Generated Proverb: *“Even a frozen screen moves if you let it load.”*

The source domain here is **digital technology**, specifically system loading behavior, while the target domain remains **patience**. The metaphor **PATIENCE IS SYSTEM LOADING** conceptualizes waiting as a technical delay rather than an emotional or moral challenge. Although the proverb successfully communicates the necessity of waiting, it lacks embodied experience and emotional depth, reducing perseverance to a mechanical process.

2. Wisdom and Knowledge

Traditional Proverb: *“A fool and his money are soon parted.”*

The source domain of this proverb is **economic exchange**, while the target domain is **wisdom and judgment**. The metaphor **WISDOM IS FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT** presents intelligence as the ability to handle resources responsibly. This mapping reflects lived social experience, highlighting moral accountability and practical insight developed through observation and experience.

AI-Generated Proverb: *“An empty inbox doesn’t mean you’ve read everything.”*

Here, the source domain is **digital communication**, and the target domain is **knowledge and awareness**. The metaphor **KNOWLEDGE IS MESSAGE PROCESSING** frames understanding as consumption of information rather than interpretation. While the proverb conveys caution against superficial knowledge, it lacks moral evaluation and reduces wisdom to information management.

3. Love and Relationships

Traditional Proverb: *“Absence makes the heart grow fonder.”*

The source domain involves **physical distance**, while the target domain is **emotional attachment**. The conceptual metaphor **LOVE IS A GROWING ENTITY** suggests that emotional bonds deepen through longing and reflection. This metaphor reflects human emotional experience and reinforces the idea that distance can intensify affection rather than weaken it.

AI-Generated Proverb: *“A muted phone still waits for a call.”*

The source domain is **communication technology**, while the target domain is **emotional connection**. The metaphor **LOVE IS COMMUNICATION SIGNALING** frames relationships as dependent on technological interaction. While the idea of waiting is present, emotional complexity is replaced by device functionality, limiting cultural and emotional resonance.

Cluster B – Work, Effort, and Risk

4. Hard Work and Effort

Traditional Proverb: *“No pain, no gain.”*

This proverb uses **physical struggle** as its source domain and **achievement** as its target domain. The conceptual metaphor **EFFORT IS PHYSICAL SUFFERING** reflects embodied experience, emphasizing endurance, sacrifice, and resilience. The proverb reinforces the moral belief that reward is earned through

hardship.

AI-Generated Proverb: “A file won’t save itself.”

Here, the source domain is **computer operation**, and the target domain is **effort**. The metaphor **EFFORT IS MANUAL INPUT** frames work as a necessary technical action. While it communicates responsibility, it removes emotional struggle and reduces effort to procedural behavior.

5. Risk and Caution

Traditional Proverb: “Don’t put all your eggs in one basket.”

The source domain is **agriculture and transport**, while the target domain is **risk management**. The conceptual metaphor **RISK IS FRAGILE CARGO** highlights vulnerability and foresight. This proverb reflects practical wisdom gained through lived experience and emphasizes cautious decision-making.

AI-Generated Proverb: “Don’t keep all your files in one folder.”

The source domain shifts to **digital storage**, mapping risk through **data organization**. The metaphor **RISK IS DATA LOSS** conveys a similar warning but lacks emotional weight and cultural continuity. Risk becomes a technical problem rather than a life consequence.

6. Opportunity and Luck

Traditional Proverb: “Make hay while the sun shines.”

The source domain is **farming**, while the target domain is **opportunity**. The metaphor **OPPORTUNITY IS WEATHER** emphasizes timing and awareness of natural conditions. This proverb reflects agricultural heritage and experiential knowledge of seasonal cycles.

AI-Generated Proverb: “Download while the Wi-Fi’s strong.”

Here, the source domain is **network connectivity**, while the target domain remains **opportunity**. The metaphor **OPPORTUNITY IS SIGNAL STRENGTH** is immediate but technologically dependent, lacking historical and cultural depth.

Cluster C – Human Emotions and Inner Life

7. Envy and Jealousy

Traditional Proverb: “Jealousy is the tribute mediocrity pays to genius.”

The source domain is **social hierarchy**, and the target domain is **envy**. The metaphor **ENVY IS ACKNOWLEDGMENT** reframes jealousy as recognition of superiority. This proverb reflects complex social psychology and emotional awareness.

AI-Generated Proverb: “The slowest download hates the fastest stream.”

The source domain is **internet speed**, mapping envy through system performance. The metaphor **ENVY IS SPEED COMPARISON** simplifies emotional rivalry into mechanical difference, reducing psychological nuance.

8. Kindness and Compassion

Traditional Proverb: “A kind word costs nothing.”

The source domain is **economic cost**, while the target domain is **kindness**. The metaphor **KINDNESS IS A FREE RESOURCE** emphasizes moral generosity and social harmony.

AI-Generated Proverb: “A shared link costs no bandwidth.”

The source domain is **digital sharing**, framing kindness as technical efficiency. While the message aligns, emotional warmth is replaced by functional logic.

9. Anger and Forgiveness

Traditional Proverb: “He who angers you controls you.”

The source domain is **power and dominance**, while the target domain is **emotional regulation**. The metaphor **ANGER IS CONTROL** emphasizes psychological autonomy and moral strength.

AI-Generated Proverb: *“Don’t let a crashing app ruin your whole system.”*

Here, **system malfunction** serves as the source domain. The metaphor **ANGER IS A SYSTEM FAILURE** frames emotion as disruption, encouraging containment but lacking moral reflection.

Cluster D – Life Philosophy and Existence

10. Fate and Destiny

Traditional Proverb: *“What’s meant to be will be.”*

The source domain is **natural inevitability**, mapping destiny as uncontrollable flow. The metaphor **LIFE IS PREDETERMINED PATH** reflects existential acceptance.

AI-Generated Proverb: *“The final download never skips a step.”*

The source domain is **process automation**, portraying destiny as system execution. The metaphor lacks spiritual or emotional depth.

11. Time and Change

Traditional Proverb: *“Time heals all wounds.”*

The source domain is **physical healing**, while the target domain is **emotional recovery**. The metaphor **TIME IS A HEALER** reflects embodied emotional experience.

AI-Generated Proverb: *“A crashed app still resets tomorrow.”*

The metaphor **RECOVERY IS SYSTEM RESET** frames healing as technical renewal rather than emotional process.

12. Growth and Transformation

Traditional Proverb: *“Mighty oaks from little acorns grow.”*

The source domain is **nature**, mapping growth as organic development. The metaphor **SUCCESS IS NATURAL GROWTH** emphasizes patience and potential.

AI-Generated Proverb: *“Every startup once ran on empty code.”*

Growth is framed through **software development**, replacing organic imagery with technical progress.

Cluster E – Knowledge, Morality, and Society

13. Wisdom and Knowledge

Traditional Proverb: *“Knowledge is power.”*

The metaphor **KNOWLEDGE IS STRENGTH** presents learning as empowerment within social structures.

AI-Generated Proverb: *“The brightest screen still needs a user who knows where to click.”*

Knowledge becomes **operational skill**, reducing wisdom to interface navigation.

14. Love and Relationships

Traditional Proverb: *“The heart has its reasons that reason knows not of.”*

The source domain is **internal reasoning**, framing love as emotional logic beyond rationality.

AI-Generated Proverb: *“Even the strongest signal fades without someone to connect to.”*

Love is conceptualized as **connectivity**, lacking emotional subtlety.

15. Trust and Betrayal

Traditional Proverb: *“He who digs a pit for others falls into it himself.”*

The source domain is **physical traps**, mapping morality through consequence. The metaphor **EVIL RETURNS TO THE ACTOR** reflects ethical justice.

AI-Generated Proverb: *“A hacked password always comes from a trusted click.”*
Trust is framed as **security vulnerability**, emphasizing technical causality over moral accountability.

Synthesis

The comparative analysis of the fifteen proverb pairs across five thematic clusters reveals a consistent and meaningful contrast between traditional and AI-generated proverbial discourse. While both forms employ metaphor to convey abstract ideas, the nature of their metaphorical mappings differs significantly in terms of cognitive grounding, cultural embeddedness, and experiential depth. This pattern remains stable across all clusters, regardless of theme, indicating a systematic distinction rather than isolated variation.

Across the clusters related to human virtues, work, emotions, life philosophy, and morality, traditional proverbs consistently rely on embodied source domains derived from nature, physical labor, social relationships, and lived human experience. These source domains enable abstract target concepts—such as patience, wisdom, effort, love, anger, destiny, and justice—to be understood through familiar, sensory-rich experiences. Within the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory, this demonstrates how traditional proverbs reflect deeply entrenched conceptual metaphors shaped by bodily interaction with the physical and social world. Because these metaphors arise from shared experience, they carry emotional resonance and cultural authority, allowing them to function as vehicles of collective wisdom.

In contrast, AI-generated proverbs across all clusters draw predominantly from technological and system-based source domains, including digital communication, software operations, data storage, and network connectivity. These metaphors conceptualize abstract ideas through processes such as loading, saving, downloading, resetting, and crashing. While such mappings are logically coherent and often contextually relevant in contemporary digital life, they remain fundamentally procedural rather than experiential. From a CMT perspective, these metaphors lack embodied grounding, as they are not rooted in sensory or emotional human experience but in interactions with abstract technological systems.

The synthesis also highlights a clear difference in emotional depth. Traditional proverbs frequently encode moral evaluation, caution, encouragement, or warning through metaphor, reflecting an implicit ethical stance shaped by cultural norms. Their metaphors do not merely describe situations but guide judgment and behavior. AI-generated proverbs, by comparison, tend to neutralize emotional and moral complexity. Their metaphorical structures often frame problems as technical disruptions or system inefficiencies, which shifts interpretation away from moral responsibility and toward functional resolution.

Another significant finding across clusters is the distinction in cultural continuity. Traditional proverbs operate as intergenerational cultural artifacts, carrying historical memory and reinforcing shared identity. Their metaphorical imagery is stable and recognizable across time, contributing to their authority and longevity. AI-generated proverbs, however, lack this continuity. Their metaphors are temporally bound to current technological environments and therefore lack the cultural permanence associated with traditional proverbial wisdom.

Taken together, the synthesis of all clusters demonstrates that although AI-generated proverbs successfully replicate the formal structure of proverbial language, they do not replicate its cognitive or cultural essence. Traditional proverbs emerge from lived experience and embodied cognition, while AI-generated proverbs emerge from statistical pattern recognition within digital systems. This fundamental difference explains why AI can imitate the appearance of wisdom without fully reproducing its depth. The findings across all clusters thus reinforce the conclusion that metaphorical meaning in proverbs remains inseparable from human experience and cultural participation.

Across all clusters, traditional proverbs demonstrate embodied cognition, emotional depth, and cultural continuity, while AI-generated proverbs rely on technological metaphors rooted in digital systems. This confirms that AI can simulate metaphorical form but cannot reproduce the lived experience that underpins human wisdom.

5. Conclusion

This study set out to examine whether artificial intelligence can replicate the metaphorical, cultural, and cognitive richness of traditional proverbs by comparing human-generated and AI-generated proverbial discourse through the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory. The analysis of fifteen proverb pairs across five thematic clusters demonstrates that while AI can successfully imitate the structural and linguistic form of proverbs, it does not fully reproduce the depth of meaning embedded in traditional proverbial wisdom.

Traditional proverbs consistently draw upon embodied human experience, natural environments, social interaction, and emotional reality. Their metaphorical mappings are grounded in lived experiences such as farming, construction, physical effort, interpersonal relationships, and moral accountability. These proverbs function not only as linguistic expressions but also as cultural artifacts that transmit values, norms, and collective memory across generations. Through culturally familiar source domains, traditional proverbs enable abstract concepts to be understood in emotionally resonant and socially meaningful ways.

In contrast, AI-generated proverbs rely heavily on technological and system-based source domains, such as digital interfaces, network connectivity, data storage, and software processes. Although these metaphors effectively convey similar abstract meanings, they remain limited to functional and mechanical representations of experience. The absence of embodied emotion, historical continuity, and cultural participation results in metaphorical expressions that are coherent but comparatively shallow. AI-generated proverbs reflect statistical patterning rather than experiential understanding.

The findings confirm that conceptual metaphors produced by AI differ significantly from those found in traditional proverbs in terms of cultural grounding and cognitive depth. While AI demonstrates the ability to simulate metaphorical structure, it lacks the lived human experience necessary to generate culturally internalized wisdom. Therefore, artificial intelligence may serve as a tool for linguistic imitation but cannot replace human participation in the creation and transmission of cultural knowledge.

Overall, this study highlights both the potential and the limitations of AI in the domain of figurative language. It reinforces the view that human wisdom, as expressed through proverbs, remains inseparable from embodied cognition, emotional experience, and cultural memory. As such, traditional proverbs continue to stand as irreplaceable expressions of human understanding that cannot be fully replicated by artificial systems.

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