

A Comparative Study of English And Indonesian Idioms and Proverbs

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Abstract: This study explores the similarities and differences between English and Indonesian idioms and proverbs, focusing on their meanings, structures, and cultural contexts. This research is intended to explore both the similarities and differences between English and Indonesian idioms and proverbs used in daily communication. An idiom refers to a combination of words that conveys a meaning different from the literal interpretation of each word. Idioms and proverbs are important elements of language that reflect the values, beliefs, and traditions of a society, making them essential for effective communication and cross-cultural understanding.

This study highlights the importance of understanding idiomatic expressions in language learning and translation, as literal interpretation may lead to misunderstanding. It is expected that the results of this research will contribute to better cross-cultural communication and provide useful insights for language learners, educators, and translators.

Keywords: Communication, language learning, cross-cultural, proverbs, conveys, highlights, explore, beliefs.

Introduction: Language is a means for humans to communicate with one another, allowing them to express their emotions and intentions. Idioms and proverbs are essential elements of language that reflect cultural values, social norms, and shared experiences within a community. Both English and Indonesian languages are rich in idiomatic expressions and proverbs that are widely used in daily communication. The comparative study of English and Indonesian idioms and proverbs, focusing on their similarities, differences, and cultural significance.

Modern youth often do not know or fully understand their meanings. Yet they contain centuries-old folk wisdom. They help express the thoughts of ordinary people and convey various aspects of human life. Proverbs and sayings are not only a form of speech, but also a reflection of thinking and logic. Time passes, and humanity is developing rapidly. We live in the 21st century, an age of new technologies, where fewer people read. People have stopped writing on paper and

sending letters in envelopes. Our grandparents could not have imagined that to obtain information, it would be enough to simply open a page on the internet.

However, we have inherited an invaluable gift from our ancestors: oral folk art. Lullabies are still sung, and fairy tales and humorous sayings are still told and passed down from generation to generation by word of mouth. The origin of proverbs and sayings dates back to ancient times, when people sought to understand the world around them. The dreams and hopes of the people, as well as their centuries of observations, were embodied in proverbs and sayings.

A proverb is a complete sentence that contains a moral lesson, guidance, or advice. A saying, unlike a proverb, is a phrase or expression—an eloquent form of speech that can be replaced with other words.

English and Indonesian proverbs reflect unique cultural wisdom, often sharing similar meanings while using different imagery. English proverbs tend to draw on maritime themes and direct expression, whereas

Indonesian proverbs (peribahasa) emphasize harmony, respect, and metaphors from nature.

Examples of proverbs:

- English: "Time is money."
- Indonesian: "Waktu adalah uang." (same meaning)
- English: "Better late than never."
- Indonesian: "Lebih baik terlambat daripada tidak sama sekali." (equivalent)
- English: "An apple a day keeps the doctor away."
- Indonesian: "Mencegah lebih baik daripada mengobati." (prevention is better than cure)

Key differences:

1. Cultural code: English expressions are often more practical and business-oriented, while Indonesian ones are more figurative and philosophically deep.
2. Style: English proverbs are usually short and punchy. In Indonesian, many proverbs function as idiomatic expressions (ungkapan) that require contextual understanding.

According to Selinker (1969), Idioms are an integral part of language, offering unique expressions and insights into a particular society's cultural and linguistic nuances. Idioms are the colorful feathers in the linguistic plumage of any language. They not only add vibrancy and richness to our speech but also reflect society's cultural and historical nuances. According to (O'Dell & McCarthy, 2010) , Translating idiomatic expressions poses significant challenges due to their symbolic nature and culture-specific meanings. In the context of literary works, idioms add depth and richness to the narrative, often capturing the essence of a character or situation.

Idioms are expressions whose meanings cannot be understood from the literal definitions of the individual words. For example, the English idiom "spill the beans" means to reveal a secret, while the Indonesian idiom "besar kepala" (literally "big head") refers to someone who is arrogant. Proverbs, on the other hand, are short, traditional sayings that convey moral lessons or practical wisdom. An English proverb like "Actions speak louder than words" is similar in meaning to the Indonesian proverb "Perbuatan lebih penting daripada

kata-kata." One similarity between English and Indonesian idioms and proverbs is their figurative nature. Both languages use metaphor, symbolism, and imagery to convey meanings indirectly. These expressions often require cultural and contextual understanding, making them challenging for language learners. Additionally, both English and Indonesian proverbs often serve as tools for teaching values, offering advice, and reinforcing social norms.

Proverb according to Meider (1985) in Dabaghi, a proverb is "a simple terms usually in the form of popular memorable folk sentences with wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views conveyed using metaphor and is handed down from generation to generation (Dabaghi et al., 2010) . Proverbs consists of traditional and an expression of a nation's shared knowledge, experiences, values, history, and thoughts so they become cultural references. Therefore studying on proverbs can aid in the development of cultural and intercultural competency by providing learners with insights into how local speakers understand experiences, things, and events in their language (Can Daşkın & Hatipoğlu, 2019) . Some of the proverbs are used all over the world, however even if they have the same meaning, they may be employed with various phrases or words in each country (Syzydykov, 2014) . In Indonesian proverbs we know Nasi sudah menjadi bubur, while in English proverbs it is better known as No use to cry over the spilled milk. Both proverbs have the same meaning but each proverb uses different words to express it. Indonesian proverbs use the word rice while English proverbs use the term milk. This word choice is certainly not something coincidental, but is caused by culture in this case related to the type of food. Indonesian Proverb uses the word nasi (rice in English) while English proverbs use the term milk. This word choice is certainly not something that is coincidental, but is caused by culture in this case related to the type of food.

Compare two proverbs and then determine why there are differences in the terms used in the two proverbs which actually have the same meaning. For example, "Like father like son" and "Buah jatuh tidak jauh dari pohinnya". Both proverbs have similar meanings, namely that children are not much different from their parents. In English proverbs, the words father and son are used literally. Meanwhile, the Indonesian proverbs

use the simile of fruit (child) and tree (parent).

Comparative Analysis: Same Meaning — Different Imagery

Many proverbs have exact equivalents in meaning, but their wording differs depending on the cultural context.

- **On the irreversibility of actions:**

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- **On adapting to one's environment:**

- English: "When in Rome, do as the Romans do"

- Indonesian: "Di mana bumi dipijak, di situ langit dijunjung" (Where the earth is stepped on, there the sky is respected)

- The English version refers to the historical center of civilization (Rome), while the Indonesian version uses a more universal image of nature and emphasizes respect for local customs.

Peribahasa vs. Proverbs

Indonesian Proverb	Literal Translation	English Equivalent	Meaning
Ada udang di balik batu	A shrimp hides behind a stone	<i>To have a hidden agenda / Something is fishy</i>	Even the small and weak try to protect themselves.
Sambil menyelam minum air	Diving, drink water	<i>To kill two birds with one stone</i>	Trying to do something risky while benefiting at the same time.
Ada asap ada api	Where there is smoke, there is fire	<i>Where there's smoke, there's fire</i>	Rumors or signs usually have some truth behind them.
Tong kosong nyaring bunyinya	An empty barrel makes the most noise	<i>Empty vessels make the most noise</i>	People who know little often speak the most.
Air tenang menghanyutkan	Still water carries away with the current	<i>Still waters run deep</i>	Quiet people may have hidden strengths or intentions.
Besar pasak daripada tiang	A peg is bigger than a pole	<i>To live beyond one's means</i>	Someone exaggerates the importance of something small

However, there are also notable differences. English idioms and proverbs are often influenced by Western culture, history, and literature, while Indonesian expressions are shaped by local traditions, beliefs, and diverse ethnic backgrounds. For instance, many Indonesian idioms are closely related to nature,

agriculture, and communal life, reflecting the country's agrarian roots. In contrast, English idioms may draw from industrial life, seafaring, or historical events.

Another difference lies in structure and usage. English idioms are frequently used in both formal and informal contexts, whereas Indonesian idioms are more

commonly found in informal speech or literary works. Moreover, the translation of idioms between the two languages is often not straightforward, as direct translation may lead to misunderstanding or loss of meaning.

Due to these differences, Indonesian learners may encounter difficulties when translating informal idioms, idioms with specific key terms, theme-based expressions, and paired idioms. Within the informal idioms, Indonesian learners may make a mistake by translating, for example, "It looks pretty phoney to me into" "Bagisaya itu terlihat sangat palsu", instead of the better one "Mencurigakan sekali". This is because the English idiom is idiomatic, while the Indonesian equivalent is non-idiomatic.

"Senang bisa kembali dengan kaki saya lagi", instead of the better one "Senang sudah bisa jalan lagi"; and English "The whole bunch of cut-throats" into Indonesian "Sejumlah pemotong tenggorokan", instead of the better one "Semua bandit yang ada disini".

Indonesian learners need to be mindful of these differences when translating idioms, as English idioms are figurative in nature. Their meanings are non-literal and cannot be accurately conveyed through direct or word-for-word translation into Indonesian.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, while English and Indonesian idioms and proverbs share similarities in their figurative nature and communicative functions, they differ in cultural background, structure, and usage. Understanding these expressions not only enhances language proficiency but also provides deeper insight into the cultures they represent. Therefore, comparative studies like this are valuable for learners, educators, and researchers interested in language and cross-cultural communication.

Comparing Indonesian and English proverbs can help students gain a deeper understanding of both their own culture and others. Furthermore, such comparisons can promote mutual respect between the two cultures. It can also strengthen a sense of pride in Indonesian cultural heritage.

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