

Semantic Analysis of English Proverbs of love

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Abstract:

This study examines the language and meaning systems of English proverbs about love, with an emphasis on how differences in meaning enhance their persuasive impact and beauty. Love is a common feeling shared by people everywhere, but in stories and sayings, it is often described using phrases that do not mean exactly what they say. This is done to clearly express deep social and emotional ideas. The research focuses on the issue of insufficient semantically quantitative analysis of how particular linguistic features—such as metaphor, oxymoron, and hyperbole—operate to fulfill unique semantic roles within the category of love proverbs. The study has two main goals: first, to recognize and group the most common types of semantic deviations found in English love proverbs; and second, to analyze how these deviations are communicated to the audience.

The procedure included a quantitative examination of a carefully selected dataset containing fourteen English proverbs. These data were collected from different dictionaries and literary works, selecting information that relates to a general understanding of love, such as romantic, family, and friendly feelings. Based on the analytical frameworks proposed by Leech (1969) and Gibbons and Whiteley (2018), the researcher classified the proverbs into six main categories: metaphor (which includes personification), simile, metonymy (which includes synecdoche), tautology, hyperbole, and oxymoron. The results show that these changes in meaning enable proverbs to move beyond their direct interpretations, offering a deeper way to understand and express the various aspects of love, including its complexities, conflicts, and strong emotions, making it easier for both the speaker and the listener to grasp and remember.

Keywords: English Proverbs, Semantic Deviation, Quantitative Analysis, Love, Metaphor, Stylistics.

1. Introduction

Proverbs are more than just pithy sayings; they are the distilled wisdom of a culture, encapsulated in a brief, memorable, and often figurative form. Among the various themes explored in proverbial lore, love remains one of the most prolific and complex. It is a concept that defies simple definition, encompassing a spectrum of emotions from the heights of romantic ecstasy to the depths of domestic hardship. Because love is inherently abstract, the English language relies heavily on semantic deviations to make these feelings tangible and relatable. (Santori, 2025:7)

In linguistic study, a semantic deviation happens when a phrase moves away from its usual, straightforward meaning to add a more complex or profound sense. While straightforward language may not fully express the complexities of human feelings, creative expressions such as metaphors, oxymorons, and hyperboles offer effective ways to convey emotions that are difficult to put into words. For example, referring to love as "blind" or as a "lottery" uses everyday experiences to explain how the heart can act in unpredictable ways. (Raymond W. Gibbs. 2002:25)

The extent of this investigation is purposely wide. Instead of restricting the concept of love to just romantic passion, this analysis covers

Romantic Love: The deep emotional connection and passion experienced during the process of courtship and in marriage.

Familial Love: The connections formed through parenthood and family relationships.

Friendship is based on loyalty and the common values that peers share.

The main purpose of this introduction is to prepare the reader for a thorough look at fourteen carefully chosen proverbs. This study seeks to uncover how language is intentionally altered to capture the complex nature of love in the English-speaking world, by examining the connection between stylistic elements and meaning. By examining these sayings, we gain a clearer insight into why they remain important in today's discussions about society and human behavior.

2. Semantic

Considering that literary works are primarily composed of figurative language, semantic deviation represents a significant amount of linguistic variance. The departure in meaning is called semantic deviation. "Words, phrases, or sentences" have ambiguous senses, according to Widayanti (2014: 4). Semantic deviation might be regarded as "absurdity" or "non-sense," according to Leech (1969: 48). There are various categories of semantic aberrations, according to Leech (Ibid: 49). Honest deception and semantic weirdness (transference) make up the first category. The transference of meaning in literary works is where semantic

strangeness is most common. Put otherwise, it is the process of changing meaning from literal to figurative. Metonymy (including synecdoche), simile, tautology, oxymoron, and metaphor (including personalization) are among the several forms of figurative language that make up semantic strangeness

Metaphor, which is more common in literary works and proverbs, is defined as "the most important figure of speech, in which one thing, idea, or action is referred to by a word or expression normally denoting another thing, idea, or action" (Baldick, 2001: 153). By employing metaphors, particularly personifications, the literal meaning of proverb is transformed into figurative meanings.

According to Li and Shi (2015:44), synecdoche is "a rule of applying the term for the part to the whole." The other type of speech that employs "the name of one thing for that of something else with which it is associated" is **metonymy** (ibid.). Make a list about the following proverb about love:

Example (3): *Love is easy to start, difficult to stop, and impossible to forget, much like war.*

The word "like" is used explicitly to compare love and war in example (3) above. It implies that love and war are similar in that they are simple to begin but extremely difficult to finish. Another kind of semantic strangeness is **tautology**, which occurs when the same thing is said twice but in a different way. It is when words are repeated or duplicated (Cruse, 2006: 165). This situation is exemplified by the following saying:

Example (4): *Love breeds love.*

Because the word "love" appears twice in the proverb, the listener may find it unclear.

Example (5): *Love makes a wit of the fool.*

As demonstrated by the saying "Love makes a wit of the fool," **oxymoron** is also seen as a semantic deviation that occurs when two opposite terms or phrases are combined into a single statement. Prafitri and Suhatmady (2014) state that "honest deception," which entails "misrepresenting the truth," is the other category of semantic deviation. Litotes and exaggeration are part of honest deception (ibid.). The paradoxical usage of the term "honest deception" by literary writers to emphasize a point is not actually deception (Fowler, 1926: 608, referenced by Li and Shi, 2015: 35).

Given that they all distort the truth, Leech (1969: 166) suggests that these tropes are connected to one another in this regard. The saying "In a thousand pound of Law there's not an ounce of love" is an example of how **hyperbole** affects reality by speaking too much (figure of speech of overstatement) Another kind of

semantic distortion that appears in love proverbs is hyperbole, which is an overstated statement.

Example (6): *Love will go through stone walls.*

In example (6), An exaggeration of the capacity of love to transcend stone walls. Simply put, this proverb uses exaggeration to illustrate a strong bond between two people, suggesting that they are so closely connected that they cannot be parted.

A **simile** Similar to metaphors, similes are built on combining two things to show an analogy or relationship; however, the use of terms like "as" or "like" makes this connection clear.

Example (7): *Inconstant as a woman's love.*

The aforementioned example uses the word "as" to explicitly compare a woman's love to that of an inconsistent person. It indicates that he or she has a logical perspective, much like a lady with a malleable heart.

3. Proverbs of love

Proverbs are a component of common spoken language that are passed orally from one generation to the next until they are documented and preserved as an important part of folklore for future generations (Karagiorgos, 1999: vii). According to Norrick (1985: 30), proverbs are frequently regarded as "traditional items of folklore." "A well-known phrase or sentence that states the truth or gives advice" is what the Oxford dictionary defines as a proverb (2003: 345). Proverbs can take the place of common words, as this term is derived from the Latin "proverbium," where "pro" means "in front of" and "Verbium" means "word." "Every culture and language has its own proverbs, which belong to the popular culture and tradition of their language," according to Fergusson (2000: 137–138).

Paremiology is the study and compilation of proverbs. The study of folklore, philosophy, and linguistics are all interested in paremiology (Singh, 2016: 2). The Greek philosopher Aristotle, who investigated several facets of proverbs, is the source of this type of research. Paremiography and paremiology are two branches of paremiology. Gathering and categorizing proverbs is of interest to paremiographers. The definition, shape, structure, style, substance, function, meaning, and value of proverbs are among the problems faced by paremiologists (Mieder, 2004: xii). Using disciplines including "anthropology, art, communication, culture, folklore, history, literature, philology, psychology, religion, and sociology," paremiologists are typically interested in proverbs (ibid: xiii).

Similar to jokes or fairy stories, proverbs are created by humans, whether consciously or unconsciously. They do not appear out of thin air or originate from the folklore of the people. According to Meiner and Dundes (1981: 3),

proverbs are creative bits of cultural wisdom that are "in form and idea." They were initially created in order to be applied to specific situations.

People can use a variety of literature, including poems, quotes, and proverbs, to verbally communicate their feelings. Proverbs are typically seen as cultural metaphors that people use to offer practical guidance when necessary in specific circumstances. Therefore, it is argued that the proverbs of love illustrate the truth of love as it is experienced by people and offer guidance on how to handle it. For example, the saying "Absence makes the heart grow fonder" carries wisdom related to the experience of love, meaning that the lover's feelings of love increase when the loved one is not present. Furthermore, the saying "Love will find a way" implies that people will eventually come into contact with love in some form (Danesi, 2019: 67).

There are similar sayings, quotations, and proverbs about love in every culture, which together provide a wonderful body of useful information on love that anthropologists have called folk wisdom. Fascinatingly, the focus on a range of human relationships that usually center on affection sets Lover proverbs apart from other kinds of proverbs. This appears to be in line with what the word "love" means lexically. "A strong feeling of deep affection for someone or something" is how the Oxford Dictionary defines the term "love" (2003: 256).

4. English proverbs

The universality and cultural distinctiveness of human experience are both reflected in proverbs, a curious category of idiomatic words. Proverbs, on the one hand, create and display a society's history of culture. Conversely, they represent the universal truths of human existence, shared norms and beliefs, and common values like ambition, honesty, love, tolerance, affection, loyalty, and familial bonds (Brosh, 2013: 21). Although proverbs are believed to transmit cultural knowledge in all languages, their meanings can vary depending on the culture (Al-khresheh, 2018:159).

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis was the first to elaborate on the notion that individuals who speak various languages have distinct ways of thinking. Because language is a component of culture and is affected by it, the concept of love itself might be perceived differently in Arabic and English. Proverbs are a particularly good example of how languages like Arabic and English vary not just linguistically but also culturally, according to Al-Shehab (2016: 10). According to the saying "Marriage is entanglement," which expresses the idea that marriage in Arab culture is a tie between families rather than just two people getting married, language and culture are therefore inextricably intertwined (Farghal, 2019: 73).

5. Methodology and Data collection

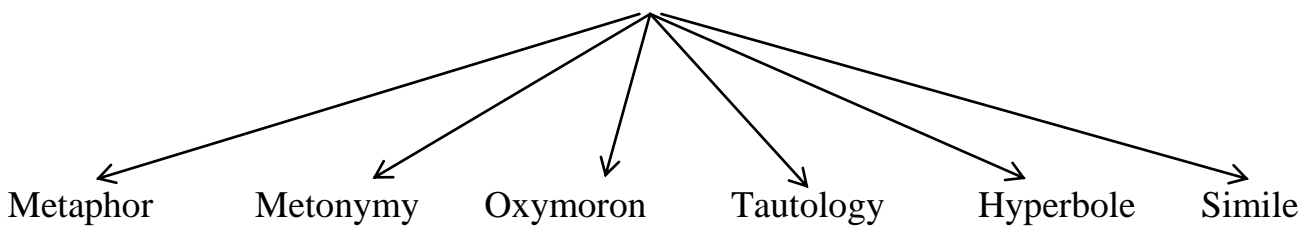
This study, which focuses mostly on quantitative analysis, examines some of the language patterns found in English proverbs of love that serve various semantic purposes. However, in order to examine how different linguistic patterns might serve distinct semantic purposes and provide diverse aesthetic effects in diverse situations, quantitative analysis appears to be required. Thus, by emphasizing context and relying on "statistical data by defining variables and carrying out analysis using statistical methods," the quantitative approach seeks to comprehend social interactions (Paltridge, 2012: 244).

Fourteen English proverbs about love are among the data gathered for analysis in this study. The following table illustrates how the love proverbs were chosen from these books and dictionaries based on a variety of precise standards, the most significant of which is that they must somehow relate to the idea of love. It is crucial to remember that this study takes a broader and more general definition of love, concentrating on the ways in which the idea is portrayed in English love proverbs to encompass romantic love, friendship, the feelings of fatherhood, and other types of familial loves. Many English proverbs were gathered using the previously specified criteria.

6. Model of Analysis

The researcher used the six primary categories of semantic deviations—metonymy (synecdoche), simile, hyperbole, tautology, oxymoron, and metaphor (personification)—to code the two datasets in order to analyse the semantic deviations. This analysis is based on Leech (1969) and Gibbons and Whiteley (2018). The following diagram provides a summary of the overall findings:

Semantics



7. Semantic Analysis of English Proverbs of Love

7.1 Metaphor (personification)

Example (1): *Marriage is a lottery*

In example (1): proverb illustrates, in a metaphorical sense, that "marriage" is like a "lottery," depending on chance whether it succeeds or fails. This kind of semantic deviation involves combining disparate concepts or ideas, like "marriage and lottery," to produce implicit analogies and comparisons that

strengthen the persuasiveness and the logemes (Chesnokova, Savenkova) conveyed via proverbs. The data also revealed a unique category of metaphorical utterances, which in the conventional study of tropes is generally referred to as personification.

Example (2): *Love is a journey.*

In this example, the conceptual metaphor consists of lover = travelers and the love relationship = vehicles, and the lover's goal = destination.

Example (3): *Love is blind.*

In example (3): where love, an inanimate object, has an animate feature, especially for humans who are able to see clearly demonstrates the usage of personification. Implicit comparisons that have strong persuasive effects can result from the usage of such personifications. Or, When someone falls in love, they are unable to perceive their beloved's flaws, which is why the term "blind" is used to compare love to blindness. In order to convey a particular interpretation of love, the proverb semantically depart from their literal meaning.

7.2 Simile

Similar to metaphors, similes are built on combining two things to show an analogy or relationship; however, the use of terms like "as" or "like" makes this connection clear. Take a look at the following examples.

Example (4): *Inconstant as a woman's love.*

Using the word "as," in example above makes a clear analogy between a woman's love and an inconsistent individual. It indicates that he or she has a logical perspective, much like a lady with a variable heart.

Example (5): *Love is like a rose; it's beautiful but it can sting you.*

In this case, love is compared to a rose using a simile, which emphasizes both its beauty and its ability to bring about pain. The saying "Insight" reminds us that love is not always simple or clear, and that it needs thoughtful effort and careful handling to deal with its difficulties. This saying uses the rose as a strong symbol to show love has both good and bad sides, encouraging us to feel excited about love but also stay careful and thoughtful.

7.3 Metonymy (synecdoche)

Example (6): *Everybody loves a lord.*

In example (6), the term 'lord' is used as a symbol of wealth and power, which in turn draws love and respect. Therefore, it represents both affluence and influence. Additionally, a specific form of metonymy known as synecdoche is observed in the data. In classical rhetoric, synecdoche refers to a figure of speech where a part represents the whole.

Example (7): *When the wolf comes in at the door, love creeps out of the window.*

In example (7) provided demonstrates how synecdoche appears in both datasets, where elements like 'door' and 'window' are used to represent the entire concept of 'home'. Furthermore, this example also includes a metonymic statement in which the word "wolf" is used to represent poverty or difficulty, emphasizing the idea that a couple's love could decline if they are impoverished or experience other difficulties in their lives.

Example (8): *General Motors is on strike.*

Metonymy is mainly considered a "referential phenomenon where the name of a referent is used to stand for another referent" (Panther and Thornburg, 2003: 2). Moreover, the 'stand for' relation feature of metonymy shows that metonymy is a "substitution relation," which can be seen in this example. Here, the name of the company (*General Motors*) is used to refer to its workers who are on strike. Panther and Thornburg (2003: 7) show some point of convergence between metonymy research and pragmatic analysis, wherein the common goal for research in pragmatics and cognitive linguistics revolves around making inferences to pick up the referents of metonymic expressions.

7.4 Tautology

Another semantic deviation used in love proverbs is tautology, which occurs when the same thing is stated twice. It is when words are repeated or duplicated. Take a look at this English saying about love

Example (9): *Love begets love.*

In example (9), the word "love" is repeated, conveying the same meaning without providing the listener with any more context. The proverb is unclear because of this kind of semantic quirk. The idea that "to win someone's heart, we must treat him or her with love" is conveyed here through the repetition of the word "love."

Example (10): *Love me, love my dog.*

If you truly love someone, you should also accept and love the things (or people) that are important to them. This proverb highlights the idea that love is about embracing all aspects of a person, including their relationships, interests, and passions.

7.5 Hyperbole

Another form of semantic distortion seen in love proverbs is hyperbole, which involves making an exaggerated statement.

Example (11): *Love will go through stone walls.*

Where the ability of love to overcome stone walls is greatly exaggerated. This saying uses exaggeration to show how strongly two people are connected and how difficult it would be to separate them. Some proverbs employ exaggerated language to express powerful feelings or thoughts regarding love, as in:

Example (12): *Love knows no bounds.*

This particular saying suggests that love has the ability to overcome even the biggest obstacles or differences. Hyperbole in love proverbs is used to highlight the strong feelings and intricate emotions that are part of being in a romantic relationship.

7.6 Oxymoron

Another form of semantic deviation found in love proverbs is the use of oxymoron, where two opposing terms or ideas are combined within a single sentence. (Sadat, 2002: 341)

Example (13): *Love makes a wit of the fool.*

Two contradictory words: wit and fool are placed side by side. Although these terms are semantically incompatible, their combination conveys the message that even a wise person can act foolishly when in love. This kind of semantic oxymoron, which contains conflicting elements within itself, adds both humor and depth to the proverb, making it engaging and reflective.

Example (14): *Bittersweet love.*

This phrase combines two opposing words: *bitter* (unpleasant or painful), and *sweet* (pleasant or joyful). This oxymoron describes a love that is both painful and pleasurable at the same time. It acknowledges the complexities and challenges that can come with loving someone. Oxymoron like "*bittersweet love*" highlight the nuanced and multifaceted nature of emotions in romantic relationships.

8. Conclusion

This research has thoroughly explored the language used in English proverbs about love, applying a numerical approach to understand the meaning and depth of these expressions. The study examines fourteen different proverbs using semantic deviation as a framework, demonstrating that these sayings are not simply common cultural expressions, but rather complex rhetorical devices that use particular language techniques to express profound insights into human relationships. The analysis shows that the impact of love proverbs depends largely on six main kinds of semantic deviation.

-Metaphor and simile act as the basis for understanding, connecting the abstract idea of love with real, sensory experiences, such as comparing love to a "lottery" or a "rose."

-Personification and hyperbole are used to increase the emotional intensity, portraying love as a dynamic and frequently uncontrollable power that "knows no bounds."

-Metonymy and synecdoche are techniques that enable clear and concise expression by using particular symbols, such as "the wolf" or "the door," to stand for larger social or domestic situations.

-Tautology and oxymoron emphasize the contradictions and obviousness of affection, reflecting the "bittersweet" truth that love frequently goes against straightforward reasoning.

The study shows that English love proverbs go beyond their literal meanings to provide a more comprehensive understanding of love, including its various forms such as romantic, friendship, and family relationships. By moving away from direct wording, these proverbs form logemes—units of thought that are both convincing and pleasing to the senses. The way these deviations are measured shows that speakers use these creative logical errors to make the abstract concept of love easier to understand and more memorable. This research highlights that the lasting impact of proverbs comes from their capacity to use language in a non-literal way, reflecting the deep and varied emotions of the human experience.

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التحليل الدلالي للأمثال الإنجليزية عن الحب

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مستخلص البحث:

تفحص هذه الدراسة الأنظمة اللغوية والدلالية للأمثال الإنجليزية المتعلقة بالحب، مع التركيز على كيفية تعزيز الاختلافات الدلالية لتأثيرها الإقناعي وجمالها. الحب هو شعور شائع يشاركه الناس في كل مكان، ولكن في القصص والأقوال، غالبًا ما يتم وصفه باستخدام عبارات لا تعني بالضبط ما تقوله. يتم ذلك للتعبير بصراحة عن أفكار اجتماعية وعاطفية عميقة. تركز الدراسة على مسألة عدم كفاية التحليل الكمي الدلالي لكيفية عمل سمات لغوية معينة - مثل الاستعارة والتناقض والمبالغة - لتحقيق أدوار دلالية فريدة ضمن فئة الأمثال المتعلقة بالحب. الدراسة لها هدفان رئيسيان: أولاً، التعرف على وتصنيف أكثر أنواع الانحرافات الدلالية شيوعًا الموجودة في الأمثال الإنجليزية المتعلقة بالحب؛ وثانيًا، تحليل كيفية نقل هذه الانحرافات إلى الجمهور. شملت العملية فحصًا كميًا لمجموعة بيانات مختارة بعناية تحتوي على أربعة عشر مثلًا إنجليزيًا. تم جمع هذه البيانات من قواميس وأعمال أدبية مختلفة، مع اختيار المعلومات التي تتعلق بفهم عام للحب، مثل الحب الرومانسي والعائلي والصدائي. بناءً على الأطر التحليلية التي اقترحها Leech (1969) و Gibbons و Whiteley (2018)، صنف الباحث الأمثال إلى ست فئات رئيسية: الاستعارة (التي تشمل التجسيد)، التشبيه، الميتوني (الذي يشمل السينكدوكي)، التكرار، المبالغة، والتناقض. تظهر النتائج أن هذه التغييرات في المعنى تمكن الأمثال من تجاوز تفسيراتها المباشرة، مما يوفر طريقة أعمق لفهم والتعبير عن جوانب الحب المختلفة، بما في ذلك تعقيداته وتناقضاته وعواطفه القوية، مما يجعلها أسهل على المتحدث والمستمع فهمها وتذكرها.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الأمثال الإنجليزية، الانحراف الدلالي، التحليل الكمي، الحب، الاستعارة، الأسلوبية.