Directive Language in Cultural Context: A Discourse Analysis of Al-Ahsa Traditional Proverbs

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Abstract

This study examines the role of directive language in Al-Ahsa traditional proverbs, investigating how imperatives and prohibitives encode cultural values, regulate social behavior, and reflect the collective ethos of this Saudi Arabian region. Combining Speech Act Theory (SAT), Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), and Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), the research analyzes 29 proverbs to uncover their sociolinguistic functions. Findings reveal a cultural equilibrium: 58.6% of proverbs employ imperatives advocating prudence, patience, rationality, and communal ethics, while 41.4% use prohibitives to enforce moderation, social boundaries, and epistemic humility. Metaphors rooted in Al-Ahsa's environmental and material realities—such as journeys, clay, and furnaces—render abstract values tangible, naturalizing a worldview where individual agency is inseparable from collective welfare. The analysis demonstrates how directive language perpetuates hierarchical structures, critiques individualism, and negotiates evolving norms, as seen in proverbs challenging gender stigmatization. Methodologically, the integration of SAT, CDA, and CMT offers a novel framework for analyzing oral traditions, emphasizing the cultural specificity of metaphorical reasoning. This research contributes to cultural linguistics by illustrating how proverbs function as dynamic tools of social governance, balancing autonomy and restraint. It also highlights implications for cross-cultural communication, language education, and heritage preservation, advocating for the documentation of proverbs as vital repositories of cultural identity.

Keywords: Directive language, Al-Ahsa traditional proverbs, Speech Act Theory, Critical Discourse Analysis, Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Cultural values, Imperatives and prohibitives, Communal harmony, Power dynamics.

اللغة التوجيهية في السياق الثقافي: دراسة تحليلية خطابية للأمثال الشعبية في الأحساء

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ملخص البحث:

تتناول هذه الدراسة دور اللغة التوجيهية في الأمثال الشعبية الأحسائية، وتبحث في كيفية تجسيد الأوامر والنواهي للقيم الثقافية، وتنظيمها للسلوك الاجتماعي، وانعكاسها على الأخلاقيات الجمعية في الأحساء. وتستند الدراسة إلى مزيج من نظرية أفعال الكلام، والتحليل النقدي للخطاب، ونظرية الاستعارة المفهومية لتحليل 29 مثلاً شعبياً بهدف الكشف عن وظائفها السوسيولسانية. وتُظهر النتائج وجود توازن ثقافي؛ حيث تستخدم 58.6% من الأمثال الأوامر للحث على الحذر، والصبر، والعقلانية، والقيم الجماعية، في حين تعتمد 41.4% على النواهي لفرض الاعتدال، ورسم الحدود الاجتماعية، وترسيخ التواضع المعرفي. وتُسهم الاستعارات المستمدة من البيئة المادية والاجتماعية للأحساء——مثل الرحلات، والطين، والأفران——في تجسيد القيم المجردة وجعلها ملموسة، بما يعزز رؤيةً للعالم يكون فيها الفعل الفردي متداخلاً مع الصالح الجماعي. وتوضح الدراسة كيف تساهم اللغة التوجيهية في تكريس البنى الهرمية، ونقد الفردانية، والتفاوض حول الأعراف المتغيرة، كما يظهر في الأمثال التي تتحدى وصم نوع الجنس الاجتماعي. وعلى الصعيد المنهجي، تقدم الدراسة من خلال دمج نظريات أفعال الكلام، والتحليل النقدي للخطاب، والاستعارة المفهومية إطاراً جديداً لتحليل التراث الشفهي، مع التركيز على خصوصية التفكير الاستعاري الثقافي. وتُسهم هذه الدراسة في علم اللغة الثقافي من خلال إبراز دور الأمثال كأدوات ديناميكية للحكم الاجتماعي، تُحقق توازناً بين الاستقلال الذاتي والتقييد. كما تبرز نتائج الدراسة انعكاسات مهمة على التواصل بين الثقافات، وتعليم اللغة، وصون التراث، داعية إلى توثيق الأمثال باعتبارها مستودعات حيوية للهوية الثقافية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: اللغة التوجيهية، الأمثال الشعبية الأحسائية، نظرية أفعال الكلام، التحليل النقدي للخطاب، نظرية الاستعارة المفهومية، القيم الثقافية، الأوامر والنواهي، الانسجام المجتمعي، ديناميكيات السلطة.

1. Introduction

Proverbs serve as a rich repository of cultural wisdom, encapsulating the values, norms, and beliefs of a society in concise, memorable expressions. These linguistic artifacts often employ directive language to convey moral lessons, social expectations, and behavioral guidelines. In the context of Al-Ahsa, a region in Saudi Arabia with a distinct cultural identity, traditional proverbs offer a unique window into the community's collective mindset and social dynamics.

The study of proverbs as a form of figurative language has garnered significant attention in linguistic and cultural research. As demonstrated by Fox's comprehensive commentary on the book of Proverbs, these sayings often require careful interpretation to uncover their deeper meanings and cultural significance (Fox, 2009). Similarly, the analysis of Al-Ahsa traditional proverbs necessitates a nuanced understanding of the local context and linguistic features.

Directive language, particularly in the form of imperative and prohibitive speech acts, plays a crucial role in shaping social behavior and reinforcing cultural norms. This is evident in the way Russian and Chinese national personalities view traditional family values through their respective proverbs and phraseological units (Sun & Chzhan, 2023). The use of such directive forms in Al-Ahsa proverbs may reveal similar insights into the community's attitudes towards various aspects of social life.

The interpretation of proverbs often requires abstract thinking and the ability to go beyond literal meanings. Research has shown that this skill develops with age and education, as demonstrated by the study on schoolchildren's command of proverbs (Berman & Ravid, 2010). In the context of Al-Ahsa, understanding how directive language in proverbs is constructed and interpreted may shed light on the community's cognitive processes and cultural learning mechanisms.
Furthermore, the concept of concreteness in language, as explored in

the study of schizophrenia patients' interpretation of figurative language (Bambini et al., 2025), may offer valuable insights into how Al-Ahsa residents process and internalize the directive messages embedded in their traditional proverbs. The interplay between concrete and abstract language in these sayings could reveal important aspects of the community's cognitive and cultural frameworks.

This study aims to conduct a discourse analysis of Al-Ahsa traditional proverbs, focusing on the construction and function of directive language within this specific cultural context. By examining how imperative and prohibitive speech acts are formulated in these proverbs, we can gain a deeper understanding of the linguistic strategies employed to convey social values and behavioral norms.

Moreover, this research seeks to uncover the underlying social values and behavioral expectations promoted through these directive forms. By analyzing the content and structure of the proverbs, we can identify recurring themes and priorities that reflect the community's cultural ethos and moral compass.

Lastly, this study will explore how the unique cultural context of Al-Ahsa influences the use and interpretation of directive discourse in proverbs. By considering historical, social, and linguistic factors specific to the region, we can better understand the nuances and implications of these traditional sayings.

Through this comprehensive analysis, we aim to contribute to the broader field of cultural linguistics and provide valuable insights into the role of directive language in preserving and transmitting cultural knowledge. The findings of this study may have implications for understanding cross-cultural communication, language education, and the preservation of linguistic heritage in Al-Ahsa and similar cultural contexts. Also, we aim to contribute to the field of discourse analysis by examining the construction of directive language in Al-Ahsa traditional proverbs and exploring how these linguistic forms reflect and reinforce

social values and behavioral norms. By investigating the cultural context that influences the use and interpretation of directive discourse in these proverbs, we hope to gain a deeper understanding of Al-Ahsa's cultural identity and the role of language in shaping social behavior. The findings of this research may have implications for cross-cultural communication, language education, and the preservation of cultural heritage in the region.

This research is guided by the following questions:

- How are imperative and prohibitive speech acts constructed in Al-Ahsa traditional proverbs?
- What social values and behavioral norms are promoted through these directive forms?
- How does the cultural context of Al-Ahsa influence the use and interpretation of directive discourse in proverbs?

These questions are situated within a broader aim to explore the intersection of language, culture, and social regulation in a regional Arab context. Drawing from discourse analysis and speech act theory, the study examines how linguistic structure and pragmatic intent coalesce in proverbs to perform directive functions. In doing so, it reveals how language serves as a vehicle for transmitting collective wisdom, enforcing moral codes, and maintaining cultural continuity.

Ultimately, this research contributes to the growing field of cultural linguistics and ethnographic discourse analysis, offering insights into the rich oral traditions of Al-Ahsa and underscoring the value of traditional proverbs as both communicative acts and cultural artifacts.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Speech Act Theory (SAT) provides a valuable framework for analyzing the illocutionary force of traditional proverbs in Al-Ahsa culture. As

noted by Searle, utterances can be classified based on their intended effect, such as assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations (Wilson & Sperber, 2012). In the context of proverbs, directives are particularly relevant, as they aim to influence behavior or beliefs. The analysis of directive proverbs can reveal how cultural norms and values are transmitted through language.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) offers a lens to examine the power dynamics and social structures embedded in Al-Ahsa proverbs. CDA explores how discourse structures constitute social inequality and negotiate meanings in public discourse (Hidalgo Downing & Kraljevic Mujic, 2011; Hart, 2008). By applying CDA to traditional proverbs, we can uncover the underlying ideologies, authority structures, and social hierarchies that are reinforced through these linguistic expressions. This approach allows us to investigate how imperatives and prohibitions in proverbs reflect and perpetuate cultural norms and power relations within the Al-Ahsa community.

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) provides insights into the cognitive processes behind metaphorical constructions in directive proverbs. CMT posits that metaphors are not merely linguistic devices but fundamental cognitive mechanisms that shape our understanding of abstract concepts through more concrete domains (Brown, 2020; Hidalgo Downing & Kraljevic Mujic, 2011). In the context of Al-Ahsa proverbs, metaphors may serve as powerful tools for conveying complex cultural ideas and moral lessons in accessible and memorable forms.

The integration of these theoretical frameworks allows for a comprehensive analysis of Al-Ahsa traditional proverbs. Speech Act Theory (SAT) helps categorize proverbs based on their illocutionary force, particularly focusing on directives. CDA provides the tools to interpret the social and power dynamics encoded in these proverbs, while CMT offers insights into the cognitive processes underlying metaphorical expressions.

An interesting aspect to consider is the potential cultural specificity of metaphors used in Al-Ahsa proverbs. As highlighted in (Onysko, 2017), there can be variation in conceptual metaphors across different cultural and linguistic contexts. This suggests that the metaphorical constructions in Al-Ahsa proverbs may reflect unique cultural conceptualizations that differ from those in other Arabic-speaking regions or cultures.

The analysis of proverbs through these theoretical lenses can reveal how cultural meanings are embedded in material culture, as suggested in (Ortman, 2000). While that study focused on pottery designs, the principle can be extended to verbal artifacts like proverbs, which serve as repositories of cultural wisdom and worldviews.

Furthermore, the study of Al-Ahsa proverbs can benefit from the multimodal approach to metaphor analysis proposed in (Hidalgo Downing & Kraljevic Mujic, 2011). Although proverbs are primarily verbal, their use in social contexts may involve non-verbal elements that contribute to their overall meaning and impact.

In conclusion, the proposed theoretical framework combining Speech Act Theory (SAT), Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), and Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) provides a robust foundation for analyzing Al-Ahsa traditional proverbs. This interdisciplinary approach allows for a nuanced examination of the linguistic, social, and cognitive aspects of these cultural expressions. By investigating the illocutionary force, power dynamics, and metaphorical constructions in directive proverbs, we can gain valuable insights into the cultural values, social structures, and cognitive patterns of the Al-Ahsa community. This research contributes to our understanding of how language, particularly in the form of proverbs, serves as a vehicle for cultural transmission and social organization.

3. Research Methodology

To investigate how imperative and prohibitive speech acts are constructed in Al-Ahsa Traditional Proverbs (ATP) and examine the social values and behavioral norms promoted through these directive forms, a qualitative research design will be employed. The study will incorporate Speech Act Theory (SAT), Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), and Conceptual Metaphor Theory to analyze a purposive sample of 29 traditional proverbs from Al-Ahsa, sourced from local oral histories and published collections such as Al-Maglouth (1999).

The methodology will involve a multi-layered analysis approach:

3.1. Speech Act Analysis

Each proverb will be examined to identify and categorize the speech acts, focusing on imperative and prohibitive forms. This analysis will reveal how directives are linguistically constructed and what illocutionary forces they carry (Hart, 2008). The perlocutionary effects of these speech acts will also be considered in relation to the cultural context of Al-Ahsa.

3.2. Critical Discourse Analysis

CDA will be applied to uncover the underlying power structures, ideologies, and social values embedded in the proverbs (Hart, 2008; Zinken, 2003). This step will involve examining how language use in ATP reflects and reinforces cultural norms and expectations. The analysis will pay particular attention to how directive forms in proverbs contribute to the construction and maintenance of social hierarchies and behavioral standards in Al-Ahsa society.

3.3. Conceptual Metaphor Analysis

Building on the work of cognitive linguists, the study will identify and analyze conceptual metaphors present in the proverbs (Bearman et al.,

2021; Xu et al., 2022). This analysis will help reveal how abstract concepts related to social values and norms are understood and communicated through more concrete domains of experience. The cultural specificity of these metaphors will be examined to understand how they reflect and shape the worldview of Al-Ahsa community members.

3.4. Intertextual Analysis

The study will explore how the proverbs relate to other cultural texts and discourses within Al-Ahsa society (Zinken, 2003). This step will help situate the proverbs within their broader cultural context and reveal how they draw on and contribute to shared cultural knowledge and values.

Throughout the analysis, attention will be paid to the potential emotional and persuasive impact of the proverbs, particularly how they may evoke affective responses through their figurative language (Citron et al., 2020; Soares Da Silva, 2016). The study will also consider how the cultural context of Al-Ahsa influences the interpretation and effectiveness of these directive forms.

By integrating these analytical approaches, the methodology aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how imperative and prohibitive speech acts in ATP construct and reinforce social values and behavioral norms within the specific cultural context of Al-Ahsa. This multi-faceted approach will allow for a nuanced exploration of the complex interplay between language, culture, and social norms in the use and interpretation of directive discourse in proverbs.

4. Results

The proverbs employ directive language to prescribe or proscribe behavior, with imperatives (58.6%, n=17) slightly outnumbering

prohibitives (41.4%, n=12). This distribution reflects a cultural balance between actionable advice and social restraint. Drawing on Speech Act Theory (SAT), Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), and Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), we analyze these directives thematically, integrating all 29 proverbs into the narrative to elucidate their sociocultural functions.

4.1. Imperative Proverbs: Prescriptive Directives

Imperative proverbs in Al-Ahsa culture advocate prudence, patience, rationality, social ethics, and communal harmony. Each directive encodes cultural priorities through metaphors and pragmatic force.

4.1.1. Theme 1: Prudence and Risk Avoidance

Proverbs in this theme emphasize caution and long-term security over immediate gains, often using metaphors of travel, protection, or resource management (Table 1).

Table 1: Proverbs Advocating Prudence

Proverb	Transliteration	Translation
1	*ʔiqðˤib madʒnu:nik la: ji dʒi:k adʒan minnih.*	"Hold onto your madman, lest one madder than him comes to you"
5	*ʔimʃ d-dahar wa la: tigtˤaʕ n-nahar.*	"Walk the long road but don't cut through the river."
10	*raħ bʕi:d w taʕa:l sa:lim.*	"Go far away and return safely."
15	*gaffil da:rik wa la: tittihim dʒa:rik.*	"Lock your house so you won't suspect your neighbor."

- **Proverb 1** (*"Hold onto your madman..."*) employs hyperbolic imagery (CMT) to frame retaining flawed possessions as preferable to worse alternatives. As a directive speech **act** (Searle, 1979), it naturalizes risk aversion, discouraging impulsive change (SAT) and reflecting CDA's emphasis on stability over individualism (Hart, 2008).
- **Proverb 5** (*"Walk the long road..."*) metaphorizes life as a journey (CMT), where the "river" symbolizes reckless shortcuts. This imperative reinforces hierarchical trust in communal wisdom, critiquing individualism through CDA (Zinken, 2003).
- **Proverb 10** (*"Go far away..."*) advocates distancing oneself from harm, framing mobility as contingent on communal responsibility. Its directive force (SAT) underscores cultural prioritization of collective welfare.
- **Proverb 15** (*"Lock your house..."*) uses domestic security as a metaphor (CMT) to codify precaution as a moral duty, naturalizing self-reliance to avoid social discord (CDA).

Synthesis: These proverbs institutionalize prudence as a cultural virtue, using metaphors of perilous journeys and domestic security to naturalize risk aversion. They reflect Al-Ahsa's collectivist ethos, prioritizing stability over individual autonomy.

4.1.2. Theme 2: Patience and Endurance

Proverbs here advocate perseverance, often using metaphors of agriculture, craftsmanship, or temporal processes (Table 2).

Table 2: Proverbs Advocating Patience

Proverb	Transliteration	Translation
2	*ʔigʕid ʕala tˤ-tˤiːn leːn jiliːn.*	"Sit on the clay until it softens."

Proverb	Transliteration	Translation
9	*xallah ʕala: tˤma:m l-marħu:m.*	"Leave it buried with the deceased."

- **Proverb 2** (*"Sit on the clay..."*) conceptualizes patience as a transformative act (CMT), aligning with Fox's (2009) observation that proverbs encode temporal wisdom. As a directive, it commands endurance, framing tedium as a path to mastery (SAT).
- **Proverb 9** (*"Leave it buried..."*) metaphorizes unresolved conflicts as corporeal remains (CMT), urging emotional restraint. Through CDA, it reinforces social harmony by discouraging dredging of past grievances (Zinken, 2003).

Synthesis: These imperatives frame patience as a communal responsibility, naturalizing endurance through metaphors of material transformation. They reflect a cultural epistemology that valorizes delayed gratification.

4.1.3. Theme 3: Rationality and Self-Reliance

This theme stresses logical autonomy, often contrasting reason with emotion or impulsivity (Table 3).

Table 3: Proverbs Advocating Rationality

Proverb	Transliteration	Translation
7	*ħitˤ ʕaglik fi: ra:sik taʕrif xala:sˤik.*	"Put your mind in your head to find your salvation."
14	*ʕatˤ l-xabba:z xubzik law*	"Give the baker your bread,

Proverb	Transliteration	Translation
	ba:g nisˤsˤah.	even if he steals half."
16	*kidd w midd.*	"Use it endlessly without complaint."

- **Proverb 7** (*"Put your mind..."*) metaphorizes rationality as a salvific force (CMT), positioning logic above emotion. As a directive (SAT), it legitimizes expert authority, critiquing emotional impulsivity through CDA (Hart, 2008).
- **Proverb 14** (*"Give the baker..."*) advocates trust in expertise despite costs. The metaphor of transactional trust (CMT) reinforces hierarchical social structures, naturalizing deference to skilled roles (CDA).
- **Proverb 16** (*"Use it endlessly..."*) valorizes durability, framing resourcefulness as a moral imperative. Its directive force (SAT) critiques wastefulness, reflecting cultural frugality.

Synthesis: These proverbs reflect a cultural epistemology that valorizes empirical reasoning and self-reliance, marginalizing non-rational decision-making as socially destabilizing.

4.1.4. Theme 4: Social Ethics and Communal Trust

Proverbs here promote transparency, altruism, and ethical conduct (Table 4).

Table 4: Proverbs Advocating Social Ethics

Proverb	Transliteration	Translation
3	*ʔilħag l-kaðða:b le:n be:t*	"Follow the liar to his

Proverb	Transliteration	Translation
	ahalih.	family's doorstep."
4	*ʔilħag wi-tˤw.*	"Catch up and forget the past."
6	*tiʕazzizaj ja: mṭalliqah.*	"Hold your head high, oh divorced woman."
11	*saw l-xe:r w qitˤtˤah baħar.*	"Do good and throw it in the sea."
12	*ʃif ɣju:mah.*	"Look at his clouds."
13	*ʃif wadʒh l-ʕanz w ħlib liban.*	"Look at the goat's face, then milk it."
17	*kil ma: jaʕdʒibik wa ʔilbas ma: jaʕdʒib n-na:s.*	"Eat what you like, but dress to please others."

- **Proverb 3** (*"Follow the liar..."*) advocates thorough verification, metaphorizing truth-seeking as a physical pursuit (CMT). As a directive (SAT), it institutionalizes skepticism, reinforcing communal accountability (CDA).
- **Proverb 4** (*"Catch up..."*) urges decisiveness, framing progress as a rupture from history (CMT). Through CDA, it critiques stagnation, valorizing forward momentum.
- **Proverb 6** (*"Hold your head high..."*) uses bodily posture (CMT) to prescribe dignity in adversity. Its directive force (SAT) challenges stigmatization, reflecting evolving gender norms (CDA).

- **Proverb 11** (*"Do good..."*) metaphorizes altruism as a selfless act (CMT), naturalizing communal ethics. As a commissive (SAT), it binds individuals to moral duty.
- **Proverbs 12–13** (*"Look at his clouds"* and *"Look at the goat..."*) frame investigation (CMT) as a prerequisite for trust, critiquing naivety through CDA.
- **Proverb 17** (*"Eat what you like..."*) balances personal and social desires, metaphorizing self-presentation as a communal obligation (CMT).

Synthesis: These imperatives institutionalize trust and reciprocity as cultural cornerstones, using metaphors of natural phenomena and bodily acts to render abstract ethics tangible.

4.2. Prohibitive Proverbs: Social Restraint

Prohibitives regulate social boundaries, moderation, and judgment, curbing behaviors deemed disruptive.

4.2.1. Theme 1: Social Boundaries and Hierarchy

Proverbs here demarcate interpersonal limits (Table 5).

Table 5: Proverbs Enforcing Boundaries

Proverb	Transliteration	Translation
21	*la: tidaxxil ʕisʕsʕik fi: ʃaj ma: jaxsʕsʕik.*	"Don't stick your tailbone into what doesn't concern you."
22	*la: tza:ħim z-zamil w-ant ħwe:ʃi:.*	"Don't jostle with camels when you're a calf."
24	*la: tiʃidd ʕala: d-dibaʃ.*	"Don't overburden strong

Proverb	Transliteration	Translation
		animals."
29	*la: twalli: ħala:lik ʔilla: ʔilli: ʕindah ħala:l, wa la: twalli: ʕja:lik ʔilla: ʔilli: ʕindah: ʕja:l.*	"Entrust wealth only to the wealthy, and children only to parents."

- **Proverb 21** (*"Don't meddle..."*) employs a grotesque body metaphor (CMT) to frame meddling as physically disruptive. As a prohibitive (SAT), it reinforces patriarchal authority by naturalizing social stratification (CDA).
- **Proverb 22** (*"Don't jostle..."*) metaphorizes social hierarchy as interspecies competition (CMT), critiquing ambition beyond one's status.
- **Proverb 24** (*"Don't overburden..."*) critiques exploitation, framing kindness as obligatory. Its prohibitive force (SAT) reflects communal ethics of equitable labor (Hart, 2008).
- **Proverb 29** (*"Do not entrust..."*) naturalizes class-based pragmatism (CMT), codifying resource allocation as contingent on social standing (CDA).

Synthesis: These prohibitives codify Al-Ahsa's collectivist ethos, subordinating individual agency to communal cohesion through metaphors of bodily and spatial boundaries.

4.2.2. Theme 2: Moderation and Pragmatic Realism

Proverbs here critique excess and idealism (Table 6).

Table 6: Proverbs Advocating Moderation

Proverb	Transliteration	Translation
18	*la: ta:xði:n ʕaʃi:dʒiʃ, wa la tˤili:giʃ, ma: laʃ ʔilla: mara:rat ri:dʒiʃ.*	"Take neither a lover nor a divorcer; all you'll get is the bitterness of your spit."
19	*la: tbu:g wa la: txa:f.*	"Don't steal, and you won't fear."
20	*la: tbi:ʕ birxi:sˤ wa la: twasˤsˤi: ħari:sˤ.*	"Don't sell cheaply, and don't advise the cautious."
23	*la: taʃki: li: wa ʔabki: lak.*	"Don't complain to me while I cry for you."
27	*la: tkaθθir d-do:s tara: l-ʔaħba:b jimllu:nak.*	"Don't visit too much, lest loved ones grow weary of you."
28	*la: tinfax fi: ko:r tˤa:fi:.*	"Don't blow into a cold furnace."

- **Proverb 18** (*"Take neither..."*) uses visceral imagery (CMT) to frame futile hopes as self-harm. As a prohibitive (SAT), it naturalizes resignation to harsh reality (CDA).
- **Proverb 19** (*"Don't steal..."*) links morality to emotional security, metaphorizing wrongdoing as anxiety (CMT).
- **Proverb 20** (*"Don't sell..."*) critiques undervaluation, legitimizing self-worth through CDA.
- **Proverb 23** (*"Don't complain..."*) metaphorizes emotional labor as finite (CMT), reinforcing relational pragmatism.

- **Proverb 27** (*"Don't visit..."*) frames social bonds as fragile resources (CMT), critiquing over-familiarity.
- **Proverb 28** (*"Don't blow..."*) metaphorizes futility as wasted breath (CMT), discouraging hopeless efforts.

Synthesis: These proverbs institutionalize moderation, using metaphors of emotional and physical limits to naturalize measured interaction as a cultural ideal.

4.2.3. Theme 3: Restraint in Judgment

Proverbs here delay or qualify evaluations (Table 7).

Table 7: Proverbs Restraining Judgment

Proverb	Transliteration	Translation
25	*la: titˤaːlˤuːnha: fi: dʒiddatha leːn tħuːl sintha wa tidandil dabbatha.*	"Don't judge a bride until her first year passes and her belly swells."
26	*la: tquːl liʃʃaj ja: ħleːlah, ʔillaː min taˤab wa heːlah.*	"Don't call something 'lovely' until you've toiled or tricked for it."

- **Proverb 25** (*"Don't judge..."*) uses agricultural metaphors (CMT) to frame judgment as a biological process, naturalizing epistemic humility (CDA).
- **Proverb 26** (*"Don't call...lovely..."*) metaphorizes value as earned through labor (CMT), legitimizing experiential verification (SAT).

Synthesis: These directives position patience as a moral safeguard, privileging communal harmony over individual opinions.

4.3. Synthesis of Directive Functions

The interplay of imperatives and prohibitives in Al-Ahsa proverbs reflects a cultural equilibrium between agency and restraint. Imperatives (58.6%) advance proactive virtues (prudence, patience, rationality, social ethics), while prohibitives (41.4%) mitigate discord through moderation and boundary enforcement. Through SAT, these directives emerge as illocutionary acts shaping moral subjectivity; via CDA, they naturalize hierarchical structures; and through CMT, they render abstract values tangible via embodied metaphors (e.g., journeys, clay, furnaces). Collectively, they articulate a worldview where individual conduct is inseparable from communal welfare, materializing Al-Ahsa's cultural ideologies as asserted by Ortman (2000).

5. Discussion

The discourse analysis of Al-Ahsa traditional proverbs reveals how directive language operates as a mechanism for cultural transmission, social regulation, and cognitive framing within this distinct Saudi Arabian context. By integrating Speech Act Theory (SAT), Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), and Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), this study uncovers the intricate ways in which imperatives and prohibitives encode cultural priorities, mediate power dynamics, and materialize abstract values through embodied metaphors. The findings not only deepen our understanding of Al-Ahsa's sociolinguistic landscape but also contribute to broader debates in cultural linguistics, discourse analysis, and cross-cultural communication.

5.1. Cultural Equilibrium Between Agency and Restraint

The distribution of imperatives (58.6%) and prohibitives (41.4%) reflects a cultural equilibrium in Al-Ahsa's worldview, where proactive virtues (e.g., prudence, patience, rationality) are balanced by social

restraints (e.g., moderation, boundary enforcement). This balance mirrors the collectivist ethos observed in other traditional societies (Sun & Chzhan, 2023), yet it is uniquely articulated through metaphors rooted in Al-Ahsa's environmental and historical context. For instance, imperatives like *"Walk the long road but don't cut through the river"* (Proverb 5) metaphorize life as a perilous journey (CMT), naturalizing communal wisdom over individualism. Similarly, prohibitives such as *"Don't stick your tailbone into what doesn't concern you"* (Proverb 21) employ grotesque bodily imagery to demarcate social boundaries, reinforcing hierarchical authority (CDA). This duality—encouraging agency while curbing excess—aligns with Fox's (2009) assertion that proverbs encode temporal wisdom, yet it diverges in its emphasis on communal welfare as the ultimate moral arbiter.

5.2. Metaphors as Cultural Cognitive Frameworks

The proverbs' directive force is amplified through conceptual metaphors that render abstract values tangible. Agricultural metaphors (e.g., *"Sit on the clay until it softens,"* Proverb 2) frame patience as a transformative process, while domestic security metaphors (e.g., *"Lock your house,"*Proverb 15) equate prudence with moral duty. These metaphors reflect Al-Ahsa's material culture and environmental realities, illustrating Ortman's (2000) argument that cultural meanings are embedded in tangible domains. Notably, the study advances Onysko's (2017) work on cultural specificity in metaphors by demonstrating how Al-Ahsa's metaphors—such as camels symbolizing social hierarchy (Proverb 22) or furnaces representing futility (Proverb 28)—are deeply localized, offering insights into the community's historical reliance on agriculture and pastoralism. This finding underscores the value of ethnographic context in metaphor analysis, particularly in understudied Arabic dialects.

5.3. Directives as Tools of Social Regulation

Through SAT, the proverbs emerge as illocutionary acts that shape moral subjectivity. Imperatives like *"Put your mind in your head"* (Proverb 7) legitimize rationality as a salvific force, while prohibitives such as *"Don't judge a bride until her first year passes"* (Proverb 25) enforce epistemic humility. CDA reveals how these directives naturalize power structures: for example, Proverb 14 (*"Give the baker your bread"*) critiques individualism by framing trust in expertise as a social obligation, thereby reinforcing hierarchical roles. This aligns with Hart's (2008) observation that directive discourse often perpetuates social stratification, yet it also highlights the dynamic negotiation of norms, as seen in Proverb 6 (*"Hold your head high, oh divorced woman"*), which challenges gender stigmatization. Such findings contribute to debates on how traditional discourses both conserve and adapt cultural values in response to social change.

5.4. Contributions to Cultural Linguistics and Beyond

This study makes three key contributions:

1. **Methodological Innovation**: By integrating SAT, CDA, and CMT, the analysis demonstrates how interdisciplinary frameworks can unravel the linguistic, cognitive, and social dimensions of proverbs. This approach offers a model for studying directive discourse in other oral traditions.
2. **Cultural Specificity in Conceptual Metaphors**: The identification of environment-rooted metaphors (e.g., journeys, clay, furnaces) expands the scope of CMT by illustrating how cultural context shapes metaphorical reasoning.
3. **Agency-Restraint Dynamics**: The balance between imperatives and prohibitives provides a lens to examine how cultures negotiate individual autonomy and collective responsibility—a theme underexplored in Arab sociolinguistic research.

5.5. Implications and Future Directions

The findings hold implications for cross-cultural communication, particularly in navigating Al-Ahsa's emphasis on communal harmony and pragmatic realism. For language educators, preserving these proverbs could aid in maintaining linguistic heritage while fostering critical engagement with cultural norms. Future research could explore generational shifts in proverb interpretation, compare Al-Ahsa's directives with those of other Gulf cultures, or investigate the role of proverbs in contemporary media. Additionally, experimental studies could build on Bambini et al.'s (2025) work to examine how concreteness in proverbs affects cognitive processing across cultures.

Al-Ahsa's traditional proverbs are more than linguistic artifacts; they are dynamic tools of cultural governance. By codifying virtues like prudence, patience, and moderation through directive language, they perpetuate a worldview where individual conduct is inseparable from communal welfare. This study not only illuminates the discursive mechanisms of a specific cultural context but also advances theoretical and methodological frameworks for analyzing the interplay of language, cognition, and society. In doing so, it affirms the enduring relevance of proverbs as both mirrors and molders of cultural identity.

6. Conclusion

Al-Ahsa traditional proverbs, as this study demonstrates, are potent vehicles of cultural transmission, intricately weaving directive language with socio-cognitive frameworks to regulate behavior and sustain communal harmony. The predominance of imperatives advocating proactive virtues (e.g., prudence, patience) alongside prohibitives curbing excess reflects a cultural equilibrium unique to Al-Ahsa's collectivist ethos. Through metaphors grounded in local ecology—such as agricultural processes, bodily acts, and natural phenomena—these proverbs materialize abstract values, rendering them accessible and

actionable. Speech Act Theory illuminates their illocutionary force, Critical Discourse Analysis exposes their role in naturalizing hierarchies, and Conceptual Metaphor Theory reveals how cultural context shapes metaphorical reasoning.

Notably, the proverbs' dual function as conservators and adaptors of norms is evident in directives that reinforce patriarchal authority while subtly challenging stigmatization, as seen in the empowerment of divorced women. This duality underscores the dynamic interplay between tradition and social change. Methodologically, the interdisciplinary approach advances discourse analysis by modeling how linguistic, cognitive, and social dimensions of proverbs can be systematically unpacked.

The study's findings urge renewed attention to oral traditions as sites of cultural resilience, particularly in rapidly modernizing contexts. For Al-Ahsa, preserving these proverbs is not merely an academic endeavor but a means of safeguarding a worldview that prioritizes communal welfare and pragmatic realism. Future research could explore generational shifts in proverb interpretation, comparative studies across Gulf cultures, or the role of proverbs in digital media. By affirming the enduring relevance of directive language in shaping cultural identity, this research underscores the need to view proverbs not as relics of the past but as living discourses that continue to mold social consciousness.

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Appendix A: Corpus of Analyzed Proverbs

This appendix presents the corpus of 29 traditional proverbs from Al-Ahsa used in the study, including their Arabic script, phonetic transliteration, English translation, and cultural interpretation. These proverbs exemplify the use of directive language (imperatives and prohibitives) and reflect the community's cultural values, pragmatic norms, and metaphorical cognition.

1. اقْضِب مَجْنُونِك لا يجيك أجن منه.

Transliteration: *ʔiqðˤib madʒnu:nik la: jidʒi:k adʒan minnih.*
Translation: "Hold onto your madman, lest one madder than him comes to you"
Meaning: Keep what you have to avoid something worse. Encourages retaining possessions or relationships out of fear of worse alternatives.

2. اقْعِدْ على الطِّين لين يِلِين.

Transliteration: *ʔigʕid ʕala tˤ-tˤi:n le:n jili:n.*
Translation: "Sit on the clay until it softens."
Meaning: Advocates enduring tedious patience to achieve results, even if it takes time.

3. الِحق الكذاب لين بيت أهله.

Transliteration: *ʔilħag l-kaððaːb le:n be:t ahalih.*
Translation: "Follow the liar to his family's doorstep."
Meaning: Pursue verification of someone's claims to the end, ensuring no excuses remain.

4. اِلحق واِطو.

Transliteration: *ʔilħag wi-tˤw.*

Translation: "Catch up and forget the past."

Meaning: Urges moving forward swiftly and leaving behind what's resolved or irrelevant.

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5. اِمش الدهر ولا تقطع النهر.

Transliteration: *ʔimʃ d-dahar wa la: tigtˤaʕ n-nahar.*

Translation: "Walk the long road but don't cut through the river."

Meaning: Prioritize safe, steady paths over risky shortcuts. Warns against recklessness.

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6. تِعززي يا مطلّقة.

Transliteration: *tiʕazzizaj ja: mṭalliqah.*

Translation: "Hold your head high, oh divorced woman!"

Meaning: Maintain dignity and self-respect in adversity.

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7. حِط عَقْلِكْ في راسك تِعَرفْ خلاصِك.

Transliteration: *ħitˤ ʕaglik fi: ra:sik taʕrif xala:sˤik.*

Translation: "Put your mind in your head to find your salvation."

Meaning: Use logic over emotion to solve problems. Stresses rational thinking.

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8. خِذْ من كيسِه وعَايْدَه.

Transliteration: *xið min ki:sih w ʕa:jdah.*

Translation: "Take from his pocket and gift it back."

Meaning: Criticizes illogical actions, like taking and returning the same thing as a "gift."

9. خَلَّهْ عَلَى طُمَامْ المرْحُومْ.

Transliteration: *xallah ʕala: tˤma:m l-marħu:m.*

Translation: "Leave it buried with the deceased."

Meaning: Let the past rest; avoid dredging up buried secrets or grudges.

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10. رَحْ بعيد وتعال سالِمْ.

Transliteration: *raħ bʕi:d w taʕa:l sa:lim.*

Translation: "Go far away and return safely."

Meaning: Distance yourself from harm to ensure peace and safety.

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11. سو الخير وقِطَّه بحر.

Transliteration: *saw l-xe:r w qitˤtˤah baħar.*

Translation: "Do good and throw it in the sea."

Meaning: Perform good deeds selflessly, without expecting rewards or recognition.

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12. شف غيومه.

Transliteration: *ʃif ɣju:mah.*

Translation: "Look at his clouds."

Meaning: Investigate and verify things before believing or acting.

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13. شف وجه العنز واحلب لبن.

Transliteration: *ʃif wadʒh l-ʕanz w ħlib liban.*

Translation: "Look at the goat's face, then milk it."

Meaning: Judge people's intentions by their demeanor; kindness invites trust.

14.   **عَطْ الخبّاز خبزك لو بَاقْ نِصّه.**

Transliteration: *ʕatˤ l-xabba:z xubzik law ba:g nisˤsˤah.*

Translation: "Give the baker your bread, even if he steals half!"

Meaning: Trust experts despite costs; their skill ensures quality results.

15.   **قَفُلْ دارك ولا تِتِّهم جارك.**

Transliteration: *gaffil da:rik wa la: tittihim dʒa:rik.*

Translation: "Lock your house so you won't suspect your neighbor."

Meaning: Take precautions to avoid unwarranted blame on others.

16.   **كِد ومِد.**

Transliteration: *kidd w midd.*

Translation: "Use it endlessly without complaint."

Meaning: Value durable, high-quality items despite their cost.

17.   **كِلْ ما يعجبك وإلبس ما يعجب الناس.**

Transliteration: *kil ma: jaʕdʒibik wa ʔilbas ma: jaʕdʒib n-na:s.*

Translation: "Eat what you like, but dress to please others."

Meaning: Balance personal desires with social respectability.

18.   **لا تاخذين عشيجش، ولا طِلَيقش، مالش الا مرارة ريجش.**

Transliteration: *la: ta:xði:n ʕaʃi:dʒiʃ, wa la tˤili:giʃ, ma: laʃ ʔilla: mara:rat ri:dʒiʃ.*

Translation: "Take neither a lover nor a divorcer; all you'll get is the bitterness of your spit."

Meaning: Accept harsh reality; avoid futile hopes.

19. **لا تبوق ولا تخاف.**

Transliteration: *la: tbu:g wa la: txa:f.*

Translation: "Don't steal, and you won't fear."

Meaning: Avoid wrongdoing to live without fear of consequences.

20. **لا تبيع برخيص ولا توصّي حريص.**

Transliteration: *la: tbi:ʕ birxi:sˤ wa la: twasˤsˤi: ħari:sˤ.*

Translation: "Don't sell cheaply, and don't advise the cautious"

Meaning: Trust that prudent people don't need extra advice, and don't undervalue your worth.

21. **لا تِدَخِّل عِصّك في شي ما يخصّك.**

Transliteration: *la: tidaxxil ʕisˤsˤik fi: ʃaj ma: jaxsˤsˤik.*

Translation: "Don't stick your tailbone into what doesn't concern you."

Meaning: Avoid meddling in others' affairs.

22. **لا تَزَاحِمْ الزَّمِلْ وأنت حويشي.**

Transliteration: *la: tza:ħim z-zamil w-ant ħwe:ʃi:.*

Translation: "Don't jostle with camels when you're a calf."

Meaning: Don't compete with those above your status or skill.

23. **لا تشكي لي وأبكي لك.**

Transliteration: *la: taʃki: li: wa ʔabki: lak.*

Translation: "Don't complain to me while I cry for you."

Meaning: Don't seek help from those equally or more troubled.

24. **لا تِشِدْ على الدِّبِشْ.**

Transliteration: *la: tiʃidd ʕala: d-dibaʃ.*

Translation: "Don't overburden strong animals."

Meaning: Avoid exploiting even the resilient; kindness is obligatory.

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25. **لا تطَالْعُونِها في جِدَّتْها لين تحول سِنَتْها وتِدَنْدَل دَبَّتْها.**

Transliteration: *la: titʕa:lʕu:nha: fi: dʒiddatha le:n tħu:l sintha wa tidandil dabbatha.*

Translation: "Don't judge a bride until her first year passes and her belly swells."

Meaning: Wait for outcomes before judging; patience reveals truth.

26. **لا تقول للشي يا حليله، إلا من تعب أو هيله.**

Transliteration: *la: tqu:l liʃʃaj ja: ħle:lah, ʔilla: min taʕab wa he:lah.*

Translation: "Don't call something 'lovely' until you've toiled or tricked for it."

Meaning: Verify value through experience, not superficial judgment.

27. **لا تكثر الدوس ترى الأحباب يملونك.**

Transliteration: *la: tkaθθir d-do:s tara: l-ʔaħba:b jimllu:nak.*

Translation: "Don't visit too much, lest loved ones grow weary of you."

Meaning: Respect boundaries; overstaying welcomes breeds resentment.

28. **لا تنفخ في كور طافي.**

Transliteration: *la: tinfax fi: ko:r tʕa:fi:.*

Translation: "Don't blow into a cold furnace."

Meaning: Avoid wasting effort on the unresponsive or hopeless.

29. **لا تولِّي حلالك إلا اللي عنده حلال، ولا تولي عيالك إلا اللِّي عنده عيال.**

Transliteration: *la: twalli: ħala:lik ʔilla: ʔilli: ʕindah ħala:l, wa la: twalli: ʕja:lik ʔilla: ʔilli: ʕindah: ʕja:l.*

Translation: "Entrust wealth only to the wealthy, and children only to parents."

Meaning: Assign responsibilities to those experienced and qualified.