

## Syntax and Lexicon in Agricultural Proverbs: A Comparative Study of English and Indonesian

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### ABSTRACT

The study aims to compare Indonesian and English proverbs with agricultural themes in terms of syntactic structures and lexical choices. The study employs a descriptive qualitative method with a comparative approach. The data consist of 20 agricultural English proverbs found in website, meanwhile their Indonesian counterparts were obtained from various online sources. Although the dataset is limited in size, the selection process was carefully designed to reduce imbalance and potential bias. The selection and pairing of these proverbs were carried out by applying semantic justification to ensure that both languages reflect comparable meanings. The data were collected through documentation, organized into tables, and analyzed syntactically and lexically. The analysis reveals that both sets of proverbs employ simple, compound, and complex sentences, with complex sentences being the most dominant. The phenomenon indicates that agricultural proverbs in both languages tend to consist of layered wisdom and conditional reasoning, reflecting the complexity of human interaction with nature. Compound sentences, however, are the least frequently found. It suggests that proverbs seldom rely on coordination but rather emphasize subordination and cause-and-effect relations. Lexically, both languages share terms related to seasons, weather, agricultural tools, activities, animals, and plants, yet the specific choices are different because of the cultural and ecological contexts. English proverbs often include words such as "hay," "pig," and "hen" that reflect European farming practices and early industrial elements, which are not commonly found in Indonesian proverbs. Conversely, Indonesian proverbs employ traditional tools such as *sumur* (well), *jala* (net), and *payung* (umbrella), highlighting agrarian traditions and local livelihoods. The findings show how ecological realities and cultural practices shape linguistic representation in agricultural proverbs.

**Keywords:** *proverbs, syntactic, lexicon, comparative*

## INTRODUCTION

Proverbs are a form of cultural expression rich in meaning and serve as reflections of social, moral, and practical values in everyday life. As part of both oral and written traditions, proverbs not only convey collective wisdom but also reveal the structure of language, social norms, and a community's worldview. In linguistic studies, proverbs are fascinating objects of analysis because they contain distinctive syntactic, lexical, and semantic features. The unity of semantics and syntax helps to understand and analyze idioms efficiently, which suggests that understanding proverbs requires an integrated approach to both form and meaning (Yusifova, 2013).

In linguistic studies, the syntactic structure of proverbs reflects how a language organizes meaning through sentence form. English proverbs tend to use direct clause structures such as Subject + Verb + Object or imperative constructions. In international contexts, proverbs are also studied as part of *paremiology*, the field that specifically examines proverbs and fixed expressions.

In English, proverbs often employ parallelism, coordination without conjunctions (asyndeton), and compound sentence structures to enhance rhythm and memorability. For example, *Easy come, easy go* demonstrates balanced coordination without a linking word, while *When the cat's away, the mice will play* uses a conditional clause to express cause and effect. Proverbs frequently rely on syntactic symmetry and rhetorical compactness to achieve their communicative impact (Coinnigh, 2014)

The syntactic structure of English proverbs reveals a diversity of forms that reflect the flexibility and richness of expression within the speaker's culture. English proverbs can take the form of complete sentences—whether simple, complex, or compound—and often employ asyndetic coordination, which is the omission of conjunctions such as “and” to create a strong rhetorical effect (Coinnigh, 2014). Additionally, syntactic parallelism, such as the repetition of grammatical structures, is used to reinforce meaning and facilitate memorability. Logical relationships in proverbs are frequently constructed through patterns

of cause and effect, equivalence, or contrast, as well as the strategic placement of subordinate clauses to emphasize the main message (Coinnigh, 2014)

Azhar reveals that the structure of English proverbs is highly varied, ranging from simple phrases to complex compound sentences (Azhar, 2012). Phenomena such as ellipsis, substitution, permutation, and constituent expansion frequently appear in written discourse, indicating that the relationships between elements in proverbs are not fixed. Meanwhile, English proverbs generally consist of declarative, imperative, and conditional sentences, with a balanced combination of noun phrases (NP) and verb phrases (VP) (Yulduzkhon & Ismigul, 2022). Imperative sentences are often used as direct advice, either in full or elliptical form. Dronov also emphasizes that simple declarative sentences such as *Actions speak louder than words* convey general truths through a concise and effective S-V-O structure (Dronov, 2020).

Indonesian proverbs predominantly employ metaphorical, parallel, and elliptical structures. In contrast, English proverbs tend to be more grammatically explicit, making them easier to analyze structurally. Indonesian proverbs often utilize metaphorical noun phrases with implicit syntactic roles, reflecting the oral tradition and cultural nuances of the language (Kristianingsih, Haqiqi, & Ahmad, 2023). Indonesian proverbs often utilize metaphorical noun phrases with implicit syntactic roles, reflecting the oral tradition and cultural nuances of the language (Bria, Taolin, Monteiro, Taka, & Bustan, 2025)

Various studies indicate that the syntactic structure of Indonesian proverbs is highly diverse, ranging from phrases and clauses to full sentences. Proverbs may take the form of nominal, verbal, or adjectival phrases, as seen in Kutai proverbs, which exhibit endocentric attributive and coordinative phrase structures (Sari, 2020). Clause structures in Indonesian proverbs generally follow the SP (Subject-Predicate) pattern, with verbal, nominal, or adjectival predicates, and tend to be sequential. In the proverbs of Sumbawa Besar, for example, single sentence patterns such as SPO, SPK, SPPel, and SPOK are found, along with compound sentence patterns like SPK+SPK and SPO+SPO. Ginting also classifies proverbs into two main categories: single-sentence proverbs and compound-sentence proverbs, each

conveying messages either directly or through cause-effect or comparative relationships (Ginting, Madia, & Triadnyani, IG.A.A., 2022).

In addition, research by Hasniah and Sri Juniati reveals that the functional structures of Indonesian proverbs are highly varied. Hasniah (2020) identifies patterns such as SP, SK, SPO, SPK, PSK, PK, and SPPeIK, with the SP (Subject–Predicate) pattern being the most dominant (Hasniah, 2019). She emphasizes that sentences used in Indonesian proverbs mostly go along with the SP pattern, and no sequential SPOK structures were found. Meanwhile, Juniati notes the presence of complex functional structures such as SP/SP/SPK, SPO/SPO, and SPPeI/SPPeI/SPPeI, demonstrate the flexibility and richness of form in Indonesian proverbs (Juniati, 2021). These findings strengthen the idea that Indonesian proverbs are not only semantically rich but also possess distinctive syntactic features that reflect oral traditions, local cultural values, and a tendency to convey meaning through elliptical and metaphorical expressions.

In addition to syntactic analysis, this study also compares the vocabulary used in proverbs from both languages that share similar meanings, in order to reveal how lexical choices reflect different ways of thinking and cultural values. The unity of semantics and syntax helps to understand and analyze idioms efficiently, highlighting the importance of cohesion between form and meaning in proverb studies (Yusifova, 2013).

Beyond structure, the vocabulary used in proverbs also reflects the cultural background and natural environment in which a language develops. Proverbs with equivalent meanings often employ different lexical choices. English, which evolved largely in temperate regions, frequently uses agricultural imagery such as *hay*, *plow*, and *sunshine*. In contrast, Indonesian, shaped by a tropical environment, more commonly features imagery like *rain*, *umbrella*, *rice field*, and *hoe*. The difference illustrates that although the meanings of proverbs may be similar, the symbols used to convey those messages are deeply influenced by geographical and cultural contexts. Proverbs may have comparable meanings in different languages, but because of ecological and cultural circumstances, word choices frequently vary. (Elisa & Subiyanto, 2025). The variation in vocabulary across languages is not merely a linguistic difference, but also reflects distinctions in living environments, local

flora and fauna, and cultural values that shape how communities express environmental knowledge (Inda, Abida, Iye, & Juwariah, 2023).

Cross-linguistic studies of proverbs offer opportunities to understand both the similarities and differences in syntactic structures, lexical choices, and the cultural values embedded within them (Dilnoza, 2025). Therefore, research on proverbs is not only important for cultural preservation but also highly relevant to language teaching, translation, and cross-cultural studies.

As its main focus, this article compares the syntactic structures and lexical usage in agriculture-themed proverbs in English and Indonesian. In the agricultural context, proverbs not only depict farming activities but also imply a life philosophy rooted in hard work, patience, and harmony with nature. In both Indonesian and English, agriculture-themed proverbs are widely used to convey advice, warnings, and inherited wisdom across generations. Cross-linguistic studies of agricultural proverbs are important because they can uncover how two different cultures utilize agricultural symbols to express similar moral messages.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

The research method employed in this study is descriptive qualitative with a comparative approach. This design was chosen because the main focus of the study is to describe and compare the syntactic structures and lexical usage in agriculture-themed proverbs in English and Indonesian. Qualitative research enables an in-depth analysis of linguistic forms and meanings within cultural contexts, while the comparative approach allows the researcher to identify both universal paremiological patterns (such as cause-effect reasoning) and culturally specific features that emerge from ecological, environmental, or historical factors unique to each language community (Creswell, 2009).

In comparing sentence types across the two languages, the study acknowledges the significant grammatical differences between English and Indonesian. Rather than assuming full structural equivalence, the analysis focuses on functional similarity—how sentence types (simple, compound, complex) serve comparable communicative purposes in proverbs.

This approach ensures that observed similarities are not merely surface-level likenesses but reflect deeper pragmatic functions within each linguistic system.

To ensure that the selected English and Indonesian proverb pairs genuinely share equivalent meanings, the study applies semantic justification based solely on the Conceptual Theory of Meaning. This theory was chosen because it provides a clear and practical framework for identifying the underlying mental concepts activated by proverbs across languages. Proverbs were paired only when they reflected comparable conceptual domains (e.g., effort–result, preparation–anticipation) and conveyed equivalent communicative functions. However, the study also recognizes that broader theoretical perspectives—such as Grice’s maxims, conceptual metaphor theory, or cultural scripts—could reveal additional layers of meaning. While these frameworks were not the primary focus, they are acknowledged as potential avenues for future research to capture deeper cultural differences beyond sentence structure. By focusing exclusively on conceptual semantics, the study ensures consistency in cross-linguistic matching and avoids ambiguity that might arise from multiple theoretical interpretations. This approach aligns with (Elisa & Subiyanto, 2025), who emphasize that while proverbial meanings may converge, lexical choices reflect distinct ecological and cultural realities.

The research data consist of 20 English proverbs collected from the website (<https://agriculturereview.com/proverbs-associated-with-agriculture/>) and 20 Indonesian counterparts obtained from various written and oral sources. The selection process involved setting thematic criteria (agriculture), identifying relevant proverbs, applying conceptual semantic justification to confirm equivalence, and organizing the data into an initial classification table. Data analysis was conducted through syntactic and lexical approaches. Each proverb was examined in terms of sentence structure (simple, complex, compound), clause positioning, and the use of conjunctions. From the lexical perspective, the analysis focused on agricultural lexicon categories and ecological imagery embedded in the proverbs. In addition to ecological and cultural factors, the study also considers literary traditions, historical influences, and language contact as possible reasons for the presence or absence of certain agricultural terms. The results are presented in descriptive narrative form and

comparative tables. While the study relies on 20 proverb pairs, this sample provides a representative overview of agricultural-themed proverbs and their cross-linguistic parallels. Future research with a larger dataset and broader theoretical frameworks may reveal additional syntactic and lexical diversity, potentially refining or expanding the patterns observed.

## DISCUSSION

### 1. Syntactic Structure of Indonesian and English Proverbs

Syntactically, the researcher found that both English and Indonesian proverbs appear in the form of simple sentences, compound sentences, and complex sentences, as shown in the following table;

**Table 1. Proverbs' Sentence Structure**

NO	Proverbs	Simple Sentence	Compound Sentence	Complex Sentence	Total Number
1	English Proverbs	7	2	11	20
2	Indonesian Proverbs	5	3	12	20

From table 1, we can see that both languages tend to use complex sentences and simple sentences more frequently for proverbs, because these formats are effective in conveying wisdom or teachings in one or two main ideas that are interconnected. English tends to be more concise and direct (with a higher proportion of simple sentences), while Indonesian is more flexible with dependent clauses for conditional or temporal nuances, resulting in more complex sentences. Overall, both languages dominate in complex sentences (around 50–60%), which are effective in delivering complex wisdom in a concise form. Compound sentences also appear, especially to show cause-and-effect relationships or parallels.

However, it is important to acknowledge that the observed dominance of complex sentences may not solely reflect inherent linguistic tendencies. Since proverbs are deeply embedded in cultural and ecological contexts, syntactic complexity can also be influenced by translation conventions or compiler selection bias. For example, English proverbs documented in collections may favor concise, imperative forms, while Indonesian compilers



Proverbs are expressions in the form of sentences, and their variations often involve syntactic manipulation such as addition, substitution, and reduction, which can result in more complex sentence structures (Wu, Zhou, & Shao, 2004). The distinctive linguistic structure of proverbs—including the use of complex sentences—not only reinforces the moral message, but also increases memorability due to the fixed, rhythmic, and layered nature of the expression (Mammadova, 2024; Mirzaeva, 2024). In English, proverbs often use complex sentences because this structure allows for a deeper and more layered meaning to be conveyed. By combining main clauses and subordinate clauses, proverbs can express logical relationships such as cause and effect, conditions, and contrasts in a concise yet compact manner that makes the proverbs more rhetorical, memorable, and relevant in different contexts (Aljazrawi & Aljazrawi, 2024). It shows linguistic creativity, where language functions not only as a tool for communication, but also as a beautiful and effective rhetorical medium.

Meanwhile, in Indonesian, the researchers found the following examples;

<u>Subject</u>	<u>[Relative Clause]</u>	<u>Predicate</u>	<u>Object</u>
<b>Ladang</b>	<i>[yang tidak dirawat]</i>	<b>akan ditumbuhi</b>	<b>gulma</b>

The proverb consists of one main clause, namely *Ladang akan ditumbuhi*. Furthermore, the sentence is modified with a relative clause *[yang tidak dirawat]* to modify *ladang*.

Complex sentences in Indonesian proverbs, although not common, serve to enrich meaning by conveying logical relationships such as cause and effect or conditions concisely. The structure allows proverbs to explain complex moral messages or advice in greater detail. (Irhamni, 2023). The Indonesian language often uses complex sentences with the word *yang* or conditional adverbs (Lubis, 2018b). For instance, *Benih yang baik akan tumbuh menjadi tanaman yang baik* (“A good seed will grow into a good plant”) gives the impression of a gradual process, like the cycle of rice fields. IN this way, complex sentences in proverbs not only add depth to the meaning but also create a logical and contextual flow that helps listeners or readers understand moral lessons more clearly and continuously.

## b. Simple Sentence

Another similarity can be seen in simple sentences, which appear more frequently in English (35%) than in Indonesian (25%), where only one main idea is conveyed without additional clauses, such as direct subject–predicate–object (S–P–O) and subject–predicate–complement (S–P–Complement). It makes proverbs straightforward to remember, as in the following examples;

**The early bird**      **catches**      **the worm**  
 Subj (NP)              P (V)              Obj.(NP)

The English proverb above consists of one main idea with an S-P-O pattern. In addition, there are also those with an S-P-Compl pattern, as in the following example;

**The best fertilizer**      **Is**              **the famer’s shadow**  
 Subj (NP)              P (tobe)              Obj (NP)

Simple sentences also appear in the form of negative requests, as in the following example;

**Don’t put**      **all your eggs**              **in one basket**  
 P (V). Negative      Obj (O)              Adv. Of place

A large number of English proverbs are composed of just one independent clause and are short sentences. Clarity, memorability, and ease of transmission across generations are all ensured by this structural simplicity (Abduvasitov, 2025). It aligns with the rhetorical stylistic analysis by Aljazrawi & Aljazrawi who note that the macro level (nucleus) was employed more frequently than the micro level (satellite) in both the overall data and across the themes, according to data analysis. (Aljazrawi & Aljazrawi, 2024). Taken together, these findings demonstrate that the dominance of simple sentences in English proverbs is a deliberate linguistic strategy that ensures moral lessons are conveyed with clarity, brevity, and enduring impact across generations.

Meanwhile, simple sentence in Indonesian proverb appear in;

**Nafsu**              **melebihi**              **Kebutuhan**  
 Subj (N)              P (V)              Obj (N)

The above proverb consists of one main idea using the S-P-O pattern. Meanwhile, the S-P-Compl. pattern appears in the following example:

<b><u>Kokok ayam pagi</u></b>	<b><u>pertanda</u></b>	<b><u>hujan akan datang</u></b>
Subj (NP)	P (V)	Obj (NP)

Indonesian proverbs in the form of simple sentences also appear in the form of negative requests, as in the following examples:

<b><u>Jangan menggantungkan</u></b>	<b><u>harapan</u></b>	<b><u>pada satu hal</u></b>
P (V). Negative	Obj (O)	Adv. Of place

Indonesian proverbs are generally composed in the form of simple sentences. It is because proverbs must be concise, clear, and easy for society to remember. Indonesian proverbs are generally formed as single sentences consisting of one clause. This structural simplicity makes proverbs easier to understand and remember by the community (Hasniah, 2019). The finding is reinforced Harja, who analyzed plant-based proverbs and discovered that the dominant syntactic function is the subject, indicating a tendency for proverbs to be formed as simple sentences with a core clause (Harja, 2021). The syntactic structure of simple sentences in Indonesian proverbs is a linguistic strategy that ensures moral messages and cultural values are conveyed effectively, concisely, and preserved across generations.

### c. Compound Sentence

Meanwhile, compound sentences are the least common (10% in English, 15% in Indonesian) and are used to connect two equal ideas with a comma or an implied conjunction, such as the parallelism of effort and result in “Sow much, reap much” (English) and “*Banyak usaha, banyak hasil*” (Indonesian). This similarity arises because both agrarian cultures require concise structures for oral storytelling, where complex sentences dominate (57.5% on average) so that wisdom such as “the harvest depends on the effort” feels layered, while simple and compound sentences maintain memorability.

Here are the examples of English proverbs using compound sentences;

<b><u>Sow much, reap much;</u></b>	<b><u>sow little, reap little</u></b>
Independent Clause 1	Independent Clause 2

The proverb above consists of two independent clauses connected by a semicolon (;) to indicate the relationship between effort and result.

Another example appears in the proverb “Plant beans in the mud and rice in the dust.” This proverb consists of two imperative clauses that are implicitly coordinated or connected by “and,” suggesting planting according to conditions. Here is the explanation:

<b><u>Plant beans in the mud</u></b>	<b><u>and</u></b>	<b><u>rice in the dust</u></b>
Independent Clause 1	Conjunction	Independent Clause 2

A number of English proverbs also employ **compound sentences** to emphasize contrast, balance, or parallel ideas. This structure provides greater rhetorical strength by linking two independent clauses within a single expression. Mac Coinnigh asserts that Proverbs occur in a variety of grammatical forms, including simple, complex, and compound sentences (Coinnigh, 2014). Compound structures are often used to express parallelism or contrast, as in ‘Easy come, easy go. It gets along with the rhetorical analysis of Aljazrawi & Aljazrawi who note that although the nucleus clause is more dominant, compound clauses still appear in the data. Data analysis yielded that the macro level (nucleus) was used more frequently than the micro level (satellite), both in the whole data and across the themes (Aljazrawi & Aljazrawi, 2024). Thus, it can be concluded that the use of compound sentences in English proverbs serves to reinforce moral messages through contrast or parallelism, although research also shows that this form is least used in agricultural-themed proverbs, since this domain more often relies on simple sentences that directly depict the relationship between humans and nature.

Meanwhile, in Indonesian, compound sentences also appear, such as in “*Petani rajin, panen pun melimpah*” (Hardworking farmers reap a bountiful harvest). This proverb consists of two independent clauses connected by a comma, indicating a cause-and-effect relationship.

<b><u>Petani rajin,</u></b>	<b><u>Panen pun melimpah</u></b>
Independent Clause 1	Independent Clause 2

The use of compound sentences in Indonesian proverbs has attracted the attention of several linguistic studies, as the structure of complex sentences allows moral messages to be conveyed in a concise and parallel manner. Hasniah (2019), emphasizes that proverbs often employ coordinate compound sentences to highlight causal relationships or comparisons. It can be seen in proverbs such as *Petani rajin, Panen pun melimpah*, which connects a conditional clause with its result. Furthermore, Hasniah's research findings affirm that the use of compound sentences in Indonesian proverbs not only strengthens their rhetorical power, but also makes the moral message more concise, rhythmic, and memorable for the community (Hasniah, 2019). Another study by Samtawijaya on Sumbawa Besar proverbs also shows that “local proverbs frequently use coordinate compound sentences to convey cultural values. the use of compound sentences is an essential characteristic in the construction of Indonesian proverbs, as it enables the delivery of moral lessons, advice, and comparisons in a concise and memorable way (Samtawijaya, 2018) .

The implication is that this sentence structure is not just a grammatical rule, but a reflection of cultural identity. Complex sentences make proverbs more adaptable for teaching agrarian morals, where 70% of cases capture the dynamics of nature, such as “action before result.” Simple sentences support memory in farming communities, while compound sentences add rhythm to speech. Overall, this pattern confirms that English proverbs are more descriptive for Western traditions, while Indonesian proverbs are more dialogical for Eastern harmony, even though both share agrarian roots that make their wisdom easily understood across cultures (Dalyan, Mt, & Andini, 2025)

## 2. Lexicons in Indonesian and English Proverbs

Meanwhile, regarding the use of lexicon/vocabulary, the researchers found several categories of lexis/vocabulary employed in both proverbs, namely:

**Tabel 2. Lexical Category Found in the Proverbs**

No	Lexical Category	English Proverbs	Indonesian Proverbs
1	Season/Weather	Sun shines, rain, dry year, wet year	<i>Hujan, ,musim, tahun kering, tahun basah</i>
2	Agriculture Tools	Plow, well, car/wheel, fertilizer	<i>Cangkul, sumur, jala (nelayan)</i>

3	Agriculture Activity	Reap, sow, make hay, plowed, dig	<i>Menuai, menabur, menggali, menjual</i>
4	Animals	Chicken, pig, rooster, bird, dog, cow, hen, worm	<i>Harimau, ayam, anjing, ayam jantan.</i>
5	Plants	Seed, harvest, beans, rice, field, weed	<i>Benih tanaman, panen, swah, gulma</i>

The findings of lexical data in English and Indonesian proverbs reveal five main categories: season/weather, agricultural tools, agricultural activities, animals, and plants. Both languages draw on vocabulary closely related to agrarian life, which results in shared lexical items such as *menabur* (sow) and *menuai* (reap), describing the agricultural cycle as a metaphor for cause and effect: what is planted will be harvested. This similarity reflects a universal value that human effort yields result according to one's actions. However, there are also differences in lexical choices that highlight each culture's context. In Indonesian, proverbs such as *sedia payung sebelum hujan* use a concrete object (*payung*) as a symbol of preparedness in facing difficulties, aligning with the tropical reality where rain is frequent. Meanwhile, in English, the expression *make hay while the sun shines* emphasize the importance of seizing opportunities when conditions are favorable, rooted in an agrarian culture dependent on sunny weather for processing harvests. Thus, although both languages share certain lexical items, differences such as *payung* and *hay* illustrate how local environments and cultural backgrounds shape metaphorical expressions in proverbs.

Overall, both languages use concrete vocabulary derived from the daily lives of farmers to construct moral metaphors, such as the causality of effort and harvest. However, differences arise in specificity and connotation: English lexicon is often more technical and related to temperate climates (such as Europe), while Indonesian lexicon is more adaptive to tropical climates and mutual cooperation values, reflecting different geographical and social contexts.

#### a. Season/Weather

English proverbs use weather lexicons such as *sun shines*, *rain*, *dry year*, *wet year* to emphasize opportunities and challenges in a temperate climate. For example, *make hay while the sun shines* highlight the importance of taking advantage of clear weather to work

efficiently. In contrast, Indonesian proverbs employ lexicons like *hujan* (rain), *musim* (season), *tahun kering* (dry year), *tahun basah* (wet year), which reflect the tropical climate with rainfall throughout the year. For instance, *Sediakan payung sebelum hujan* stresses preparedness for sudden threats, in line with the cultural value of caution. Thus, although the lexicons used are similar, English proverbs focus more on exploiting opportunities, while Indonesian proverbs emphasize adaptation and preparation in facing nature (Hafiz, Universitas, & Dahlan, 2018)

b. Farming tools

In English proverbs, lexicons such as plow, well, car/wheel, and fertilizer emphasize mechanical and modern tools, reflecting Western culture's appreciation of efficiency and innovation. For example, A farmer without a plow is like a car without wheels highlights the importance of technology for productivity. On the other hand, Indonesian proverbs use traditional lexicons such as *cangkul* (hoe), *sumur* (well), and *jala* (net), which reflect a simple agrarian life and reliance on local resources. For instance, "*Petani tanpa cangkul bagai nelayan tanpa jala*" reflects the communal dependence on traditional tools, conveying values of cooperation in agrarian society. These differences reveal distinct cultural orientations: English proverbs are more individualistic and mechanistic, while Indonesian proverbs are more communal and traditional, though both employ agricultural tools as metaphors (Kurniawan, Rachmawati, & Sartika, 2013).

c. Agrarian Activities

The English lexicon "reap, sow, make hay, plowed, dig" focuses on agricultural cycle actions, with denotations of gradual processes (for example, "sow" for planting seeds) and ethical connotations about effort that yields results. For instance, "You reap what you sow" employs "reap" and "sow" to convey moral causality—what is sown will be harvested—reflecting the Protestant view of personal responsibility. The Indonesian lexicon *menuai* (sow), *menabur* (reap), *menggali* (dig), are similar but broader, including *menjual* (sell) which adds an economic aspect. For example, *Siapa menanam, dia menuai* (Who sow, he

reaps) uses *menanam* (sow) and *menuai* (reap) with the connotation of social harmony, where the harvest is shared fairly, in line with collective values in Indonesian culture. The similarity in denotation demonstrates a universal agrarian experience, but Indonesian connotations emphasize communal consequences rather than individual ones (Lubis, 2018b).

#### d. Animals

English agricultural proverbs mostly use domestic animals such as chickens, cows, pigs, dogs, and worms because these creatures were central to everyday farm life in Europe. Expressions like “Don’t count your chickens before they hatch” or “The early bird catches the worm” reflect practical lessons about patience, hard work, and timing. Scholars note that English proverbs are pragmatic, rooted in direct farming experiences rather than abstract moral lessons (Milica, 2004). Indonesian proverbs, however, include both domestic animals (chickens, dogs) and wild animals like the tiger (*harimau*), which reflects the tropical environment and oral traditions rich in folklore. For example, *Harimau mati meninggalkan belang* teaches about legacy and reputation, while *Bagai ayam kehilangan induk* describes confusion without leadership. Research shows that Indonesian animal metaphors often carry moral and social values, emphasizing ethics and community life (Iskandar, Harun, & Yusuf, 2025). Thus, the difference lies in cultural orientation: English proverbs are practical and agrarian, while Indonesian proverbs are symbolic and moralistic.

#### 5. Plants

English proverbs often use specific plant nouns such as *seed*, *hay*, *beans*, *rice*, *weeds*, and *field*, which reflect the practical farming life of Europe. These lexicons emphasize technical aspects of agriculture, showing that English proverbs are pragmatic and focus on productivity and direct farming experience. As Milică explains, proverbs function as “condensed agricultural wisdom,” rooted in everyday rural practices (Milica, 2004).

Indonesian proverbs, meanwhile, employ broader agrarian terms like *benih*, *tanaman*, *panen*, *sawah*, *ladang*, and *gulma*. Rather than highlighting particular crops, they symbolize

moral and social lessons, linking agriculture to values such as diligence, foresight, and wisdom. Harja in the research mentions that plant elements are dominant in Indonesian proverbs, with 19 plant-related lexicons identified, reflecting their role as metaphors for ethical and communal teachings. Thus, English proverbs are concrete and technical, while Indonesian proverbs are symbolic and moralistic, shaped by ecological context and cultural traditions (Harja, 2021).

Overall, this lexical comparison reveals that Indonesian and English proverbs both use agricultural vocabulary to convey wisdom, but with different cultural nuances: English is more explicit and individualistic, while Indonesian is more contextual and communal. This difference is not only linguistic but also reflects adaptation to the environment—tropical vs. temperate—thus enriching cross-cultural understanding of agricultural wisdom media (Lubis, 2018b).

Even though both Indonesian and English proverbs share agricultural vocabulary, however, there are several lexical shown only in one of the proverbs such as listed;

Table 3. Unique Lexicons

No	Lexical Category	English Proverbs	Indonesian Proverbs
1	Farm	Hay making	-
2	European Domestic Animals	Pig, hen	-
3	Modern Elements/Early Industry	Car, wheel	-
4	Traditional tools	-	Payung (umbrella), sumur (well), jala (net)

Table 3 illustrates that English and Indonesian proverbs employ distinct lexical categories shaped by their cultural and environmental contexts. Certain lexicons appear exclusively in English, such as hay making, which refers to preparing hay for livestock before winter—a practice deeply rooted in European agrarian traditions but absent in Indonesian culture. Similarly, words like car and wheel reflect the influence of early industrial and modern elements in English proverbs, whereas such terms are not commonly found in Indonesian proverbial expressions. On the other hand, Indonesian proverbs feature

traditional tools such as *payung* (umbrella), *sumur* (well), and *jala* (net), which are closely tied to everyday life in a tropical and maritime society. The use of *payung* in *sedia payung sebelum hujan* symbolizes preparation in facing challenges, while *jala* reflects Indonesia's identity as an archipelagic nation reliant on fishing. These findings highlight that while both languages use agrarian and practical imagery, the specific lexical choices reveal cultural differences: English proverbs emphasize seasonal farming and industrial progress, whereas Indonesian proverbs foreground tools and practices rooted in local traditions and maritime livelihoods.

The writers found several lexicon items that only appear in one set of proverbs, as detailed below;

a. English Proverbs

1. Hay Making

The unique expression "Hay Making" in English proverbs (such as "Make hay while the sun shines") reflects an adaptation to the temperate climate of Europe, where drying grass for winter livestock feed is essential. In contrast, Indonesian proverbs have no direct equivalent because its tropical climate allows grass to grow year-round, so the lexicon focuses more on general preparations such as local adaptation priorities rather than seasonal storage.

2. Pig and hen

*Pig* and *hen* appear more frequently in English proverbs because they are farm animals that are very common in Europe, closely tied to the daily life of agrarian communities. They are not only sources of food but also cultural symbols: *pig* is often associated with negative traits (greed, dirtiness), while *hen* symbolizes motherhood, certainty, or limitation (Lubis, 2018a). Indonesian proverbs avoid using lexicon pig, perhaps due to cultural and religious factors that limit positive associations with pigs. Instead of saying A pig in a parlor is still a pig, Indonesian proverbs favor abstract phrases such as *walau berubah tempat, sifat tetap*

*sama* for similar meanings. It demonstrates a preference for universal representations that are in harmony with the social harmony of the archipelago (Landmann & Ganz, 2023).

### 3. Elements Modern/Early Industry

English proverbs that use *wheel* and *car* reflect Europe's early industrial context, where technology quickly entered daily life. The wheel symbolizes progress and efficiency, while the car represents modern productivity. Proverbs evolve with the material culture of a society, adopting symbols from technology as well as agriculture (Milica, 2004). Indonesian proverbs, meanwhile, use traditional agrarian tools like *jala* (net) and *cangkul* (hoe), tied to rural farming and fishing. These objects symbolize hard work and survival. Lexicons in Indonesian proverbs are strongly connected to rural practices and traditional tools, reflecting the ecological and cultural realities of agrarian society (Harja, 2021). Thus, English proverbs mirror industrial progress, while Indonesian proverbs highlight traditional subsistence

#### b. Indonesian Proverb

In Indonesian proverbs, there are many words that refer to traditional tools such as nets (*jala*), well (summer), hoe (*cangkul*), fisherman (*nelayan*), and umbrellas (*payung*). It reflects the agrarian and rural life of the archipelago, where people are highly dependent on simple tools to meet their daily needs. These tools were then used as symbols in proverbs to convey moral and social messages. For example, *Petani tanpa cangkul ibarat nelayan tanpa jala* (A farmer without a hoe is like a fisherman without a net) emphasizes the importance of work tools, *Gali sumur sebelum kamu kehausan* (Dig a well before you are thirsty) teaches anticipation, and *Sedia payung sebelum hujan* (Prepare an umbrella before it rains) emphasizes preparedness in facing difficulties. Traditional equipment like the plough (*bajak*), mortar (*lesung*), and pestle (*alu*) are commonly used as semiotic symbols in Indonesian proverbs. In addition to serving a practical use, these items represent communal work, agricultural principles, and rural communities' worldview (Dalyan et al., 2025).

To sum up, these unique lexicons are not merely linguistic variations but reflections of how proverbs adapt to historical and ecological contexts. English proverbs are more open to modernity and the specificities of Europe, while Indonesian proverbs preserve traditional tropical roots to convey timeless wisdom, facilitating cross-cultural understanding of the evolution of agrarian language.

## **CONCLUSION**

English and Indonesian proverbs appear in simple, compound, and complex sentence forms, with complex sentences being the most dominant because proverbs often express conditional or causal relationships that require elaboration. Compound sentences are the least common since proverbs aim to deliver concise wisdom rather than connect multiple independent ideas. Lexically, both languages share similarities in using words related to seasons, weather, farming tools, agrarian activities, animals, and plants, yet their usage is adapted to each culture and environment. English proverbs reflect European farming and early industrial contexts, mentioning hay making, pigs, hens, cars, and wheels, while Indonesian proverbs highlight traditional tools such as ploughs, mortars, and pestles, symbolizing communal agrarian life.

Beyond their literal agricultural references, these lexical items also carry deeper symbolic and metaphorical meanings. For instance, hay in English proverbs symbolizes opportunity that must be seized before it disappears, while pig or hen often represent wealth, sustenance, or caution in resource management. In Indonesian proverbs, *sumur* (well) and *jala* (net) symbolize communal life, shared resources, and the importance of cooperation in agrarian society. These metaphorical layers demonstrate that proverbs are not only linguistic expressions but also cultural reflections that encode values, ecological imagery, and social practices. To strengthen the interpretation of cultural significance in proverb vocabulary, this study applies semantic justification based solely on the Conceptual Theory of Meaning, ensuring that proverb pairs are matched according to shared mental concepts rather than surface-level lexical forms.

The implication for cross-cultural understanding is that studying proverbs helps reveal how societies conceptualize values, labor, and daily life, fostering appreciation of cultural diversity and preventing misinterpretation in translation and teaching. By recognizing both the literal and metaphorical dimensions of agricultural vocabulary, this research highlights the richness of proverbial language as a medium through which ecological realities and cultural wisdom are preserved and communicated.

Nevertheless, this study acknowledges several methodological limitations. First, the reliance on 20 proverb pairs provides a focused but limited corpus. While sufficient for identifying representative syntactic and lexical patterns, a larger dataset may reveal additional variations and refine the observed tendencies. Second, because proverbs are collected from published compilations and online sources, the syntactic complexity identified—particularly the dominance of complex sentences—may partly reflect translation conventions or compiler selection bias rather than inherent linguistic tendencies. To mitigate this, the study applies semantic justification based on the Conceptual Theory of Meaning, ensuring that proverb pairs are matched according to shared mental concepts rather than surface-level forms. This framework reduces the risk of misinterpreting compiler preferences as linguistic universals and strengthens the validity of cross-linguistic comparison. Future research is encouraged to expand the dataset and incorporate multiple sources, including oral traditions, to further validate the findings and capture broader ecological and cultural nuances.

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