

# **A Linguistic Study of Socio-Cultural Values in Jordanian Spoken Proverbial Expressions**

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## **Abstract**

*Proverbial expressions have their linguistic connotative, literary and social importance as they summarize a lot of speech to indicate a specific situation, to judge a situation, or to clarify it. The proverb enables people to understand and comprehend the intended meaning without the need for further speech and explanation in many times. This study aims to explore socio-cultural values in a number of Jordanian proverbs. The study showed that these values were expressed with different proverbial expressions which were formulated in different linguistic forms and which use different tools and products to confirm their social functions.*

**Keywords:** *Jordan; Values; Proverbs; Culture and Society; National Folklore*

## **1 Introduction**

The values are one of the topics that are of interest to many disciplines such as philosophy, religion, education, economics, sociology, psychology and linguistics. Values are one of the most important pillars upon which societies and nations are built. Social values are related to morals and principles which are general and controlling standards for correcting, directing and adjusting the human behaviors. Social values are the characteristics or the qualities that are desired by the members of the society. Social values include different ones such as tolerance, courage, hospitality, generosity, loyalty, respect, honor, solidarity and cooperation. Social values are one of the basic components of personality, as their impact on the behaviors, attitudes and relationships of individuals with each other and with others within their own community and other ones. Thus, they provide an important framework for guiding and regulating the behaviors of individuals and groups, as they play the role of an internal monitor that observes the actions and behaviors of the individual. The values are what the individual considers important and valuable in his life, as it represents his beliefs about his abilities to have meaning for his life, and accordingly, values are considered essential concepts in all life fields such as economic, political, social, educational and religious ones. Proverbial expressions are an integral part of the Jordanian folklore, where their importance lies in strengthening social values, such as confirming social relations between neighbors by saying ‘the neighbor is before the house’, promoting economic values by saying for example ‘keep your white piaster for your black day’, and in establishing moral values such as avoiding lying by saying ‘the rope of lies is short’ etc. The relationship between proverbial expressions and social values in Jordanian society is so strong which makes these expressions becoming essential part of the national cultural, social and linguistic daily repertoire of individuals and groups.

## **2 Data Collection and Methodology**

As an exploratory study, the present research will depend on the descriptive and analytical methodology in exploring the social values in the Jordanian proverbial expressions from a sociolinguistic view. The corpus of the study is elicited from different related online and printed sources. Local media ‘TV and radio programs’ in addition to the personal observation of the researcher as a native member of the targeted society were another valuable source for the required data. For the limited scale of the present study, the five social-cultural values ‘companionship, cooperation, family bonding, caution, and activity’ will be covered with three proverbial expressions for each one of them as a representative sample. The data were investigated thoroughly in order to explore their linguistic structure and social functions.

## **3 Review of Related Literature**

Language is essential and important part of culture and so the impact of culture upon language is intrinsic. Because language is an indispensable carrier of culture, the culture finds a better representation through language use (Chen & Ao, 2015:36). Cultural values play a significant role in society as they determine what actions are best to do (Ibrahim & Usman, 2021:364). According to Ebrahimi (2020:1) ‘language is formed in the context of culture; on the other hand, the culture of a society is reflected in the language's mirror. Language has a cultural backbone as a communication tool. As stated by (Dawaghreh & Tengku-Sepora, 2020:281; Al-Azzam,2018:56) proverbs are considered as the mirror of a culture as they encompass many ethical values, traditions, and conventions and they occupy a significant element in people’s social life as they are semantically pithy, and holding metaphor, and direct and indirect informative content through which people express their long experience through resort to proverbs. Stephenson (2008:129) defined cultural values as those ones which are shared by a group or community, or are given legitimacy through a socially accepted way of assigning value. Proverbs in Jordanian Arabic make a basic for social interaction and genuine part of the socio-cultural image as they are used to express different functions such as gratitude, thanking, and advice, and to serve various purposes (Hazaymeh, 2021:2628; 2021:76; 2023:79).

## **4 Discussion and Analysis**

The following section will discuss and analyze the five socio-cultural values of companionship, cooperation, family bonding, caution, and activity in a number of Jordanian proverbial expressions.

### ***4.1 Companionship***

Companionship is a good and bad social relationship that a person establishes with others. Companionship is important element in life particularly the strong and honest companionship

because it is one of the most important reasons for success in society. The following is a number of proverbial expressions about companionship in Jordanian society.

الرفيق قبل الطريق

Alrafeeq qabil altareeq

The companion before the road

Linguistically, this proverbial expression is a nominal and an assonance phrase that begins with a singular definite noun. It consists of three words. From a socio-cultural view, companionship is a valuable value that people admire and respect because sometimes the honest and loyal companion is closer than the biological sibling as the Arabic standard proverb says رب أخ لك لم تلده أمك rubba akhin laka lam talidhu ummuk a best brother 'i.e., companion' that might not be begotten by your mother. The proverbial expression Alrafeeq qabil altareeq affirms the importance of choosing a loyal and good companion before starting commuting or doing something.

جنة من غير ناس ما بتنداس

Jannih min ghear nas ma ibtindas

A heaven without people cannot be dwelled

From a linguistic point of view, this expression is a nominal phrase that begins with a singular indefinite noun and consists of six words where the two words nas and ibtindas are assonance. Religiously, it is not accepted because the expression is blasphemy because it contradicts with the Quranic and hadith texts that show the great bliss of paradise as an abode of eternal joy and happiness. From a socio-cultural perception. The expression is a metaphor for the importance of the presence of people in life, as although it is paradise, but without people it has no value. This phrase expresses the value of companionship, affection and interdependence between individuals and indicates that the value of life and the importance of living in it, is in the presence of individuals because the human being is a social being by nature.

الصاحب صاحب

Alsahib sahib

The companion withdraws

This short nominal assonance phrase which is made of two words where the first word is a singular definite noun strongly confirms the importance of the companion and his impact on his friends. This expression shows that the good companion affects his companions positively, whereas the bad one affects them negatively. These three proverbs confirm the importance of companionship. In analyzing Jordanian spoken proverbial expressions about companionship, sociolinguistic aspects reveal how these sayings reflect and reinforce cultural values related to social relationships and community life. Jordanian proverbs about companionship often emphasize the importance of loyalty, mutual support, and the value of close-knit relationships. These expressions confirm the cultural significance of companionship in Jordanian society, where social bonds and communal harmony are highly prized. The proverbs serve as a vehicle for transmitting cultural norms and expectations regarding companionship, illustrating the deep-rooted cultural emphasis on solidarity, hospitality, and interdependence within the community. Through the lens of sociolinguistics, it becomes evident how language acts as a repository of cultural wisdom, shaping and reflecting the social fabric of Jordanian life.

## 4.2 Cooperation

Cooperation is one of the good and desired socio-cultural values that religion and society encourage. Consequently, this value has been expressed through a number of proverbial expressions in Jordanian Arabic as shown in the following examples.

الناس لبعضها

Alnas laba'idhh

People are for each other

This two-word nominal expression begins with a plural definite noun and has a deep socio-cultural meaning as it enhances the principles of cooperation and solidarity between people in life particularly in hard moments and situations.

إيد لحالها ما بتصفقش

Iid lahalha ma bitsafqish

A lone hand does not clap

Linguistically, the expression is made of four words and begins with a singular indefinite noun. The literal meaning of this proverb is that one hand cannot clap, but if both hands are united together, they can clap easily. Figuratively, it uses the body part 'the hand' and the movement 'clapping' in order to express its socio-cultural connotation of the importance of cooperation between people.

من قدم السبت لاقى الحد قدامه ومن خدم الناس لاقى الناس خدامه

Man qaddam alsabit laqa alhad quddamuh wman khadam alnas hsqa alnas khuddamuh

Whoever forwards Saturday will meet Sunday in front of him, and whoever serves the people, the people will be his servants

This long proverbial expression is a relative clause which consists of thirteen words and it begins with a relative article that matches between two parts where the first one uses the two days 'Saturday' and 'Sunday', whereas the second part includes the word 'people' and 'serve' where these words are used to express the value of cooperation. One a person forwards something to others, he will get the result of it which is expressed in the proverb with the two days Saturday and Sunday. The second part of the expression express the value of cooperation through matching the words people and serve because when a person serves others, he will find someone who will serve him when he needs something. In the analysis of Jordanian spoken proverbial expressions about cooperation, sociolinguistic aspects highlight how these proverbs encapsulate and convey cultural values related to collective effort and mutual assistance. Jordanian proverbs about cooperation often stress the importance of working together, sharing responsibilities, and supporting one another to achieve common goals. These sayings reflect the cultural significance of cooperation in Jordanian society, where communal effort and interdependence are essential for social cohesion and survival. The proverbs serve as a medium for transmitting cultural norms and expectations regarding cooperative behavior, illustrating the deep-rooted cultural emphasis on solidarity, teamwork, and communal harmony. Through the sociolinguistic lens, it becomes clear how language functions as a repository of cultural wisdom, shaping and mirroring the social dynamics and cooperative spirit inherent in Jordanian culture.

### 4.3 Family Bonding

The value of family bonding is one of the important socio-cultural values in the Jordanian society that reflects the manifestations of cohesion, affection, compassion, solidarity, tolerance, altruism, guidance, assistance, protection and cooperation that unite the members of the family or the clan.

أنا وأخوي على ابن عمي وأنا وابن عمي على الغريب

Ana wiakhui a'ala ibn a'ammi wana wibin a'ammi a'ala alghareeb

My brother and I are against my cousin and my cousin and I are against the stranger

The proverb is a nominal phrase that consists of thirteen words starting with the singular subject pronoun 'ana i.e., I'. It uses the kinship terms 'brother' and 'cousin which here refers to the paternal uncle and his son' to express the value of family bonding. The proverb reflects the strong family bonding and the deep solidarity between the close relatives of the one family or tribe. The proverb shows the willingness of the person to stand with his brother against his paternal uncle's son in all circumstances and that this person is ready to support his paternal uncle's son against the stranger even if he is from the same tribe but not a close relative.

الظفر ما بطلع من اللحم

Aldhifir ma bitlaa' min allahim

The nail does not come out of the flesh

Linguistically, the proverb is a nominal sentence which is made of five words and begins with a singular definite noun. It uses the body parts 'the nail' and 'the flesh' in order to confirm the socio-cultural value of family bonding. The proverb shows that no matter how much animosity, differences, misunderstanding or disagreement arise between the members of the same family, they would not abandon each other.

الدم ما بصير مي

Aldam ma biseer mai

Blood does not become water 'blood is thicker than water'

This nominal proverbial sentence consists of four words starting with a singular definite noun. It uses two liquids 'the blood' and 'the water' to show the socio-cultural value of family bonding. The proverb shows that blood which is a metaphorical symbol of family bonding and solidarity cannot be water which means that blood is very valuable than anything else even water which is necessary for living. The analysis of Jordanian spoken proverbial expressions about family bonding reveals how these proverbs confirm and convey cultural values related to familial relationships and unity. Sociolinguistic aspects highlight how language reflects and reinforces the importance of family in Jordanian society. Proverbs about family bonding often emphasize the significance of loyalty, respect, and mutual support within the family unit. These expressions underscore cultural norms that prioritize strong familial ties, intergenerational respect, and the collective welfare of the family. Through the lens of sociolinguistics, it becomes evident that these proverbs serve as a vehicle for transmitting and preserving cultural values related to family bonding, illustrating how language acts as a repository of cultural wisdom and social expectations. This analysis highlights the cultural emphasis on family as a central pillar of social structure and individual identity in Jordanian culture.

#### 4.4 Caution

Caution and attention in relations with others are very important socio-cultural values which are embodied in a number of Jordanian proverbial expressions as the following example show.

الباب اللي بييجيك منه ريح سده واستريح

Albab illi bijeek minnuh reeh sidduh wistareeh

The door from which the wind comes to you, close it and rest

The expression is a nominal proverbial sentence consists of eight words begins with a singular definite noun. It uses the man-made tool ‘the door’ and the natural phenomenon ‘the wind’ to express the importance of the socio-cultural value of caution in relation with people. This proverb indicates that a person must be careful of things that open the door of confrontation, problems, negative changes, and disputes for him, so that the door from which the winds come that cause problems, a person must close it. By wind, he means the undesirable things that cause harm to a person, so he must keep them out of his way and continue his life forward with caution and attention.

ابعد عن الشر وغنيله

Ibi'd a'an alshar wi ghaniluh

Stay a way of the evil and sing for it

Linguistically, this proverbial expression is imperative sentence that is made of five words. The proverb is a clear call and warning for caution and attention in having relations with other especially those who may cause problems. It is also a caution to avoid confrontation with a notorious person or organization, etc. if such person or organization would bother the person who may have contact with them. Avoiding evil is a bless and happiness for people. So, the person would sing to evil because it is far away, not bothering him because if the evil is there bothering him, he wouldn't be inclined to sing to it as singing is something typically performed when the person is in good mood.

امشي جنب الحيط وقول يا رب السترة

Imshi janb alheat wi qool ya rab alsutrah

Walk beside the wall, and say, O Lord, protect me

The proverb is an imperative phrase consists of eight words. It shows the socio-cultural value of caution and avoiding problems. Walking beside the wall would protect from dangers, so it is used in this proverb as a metaphorical symbol of preserving which is accompanied by supplication to the lord for protection. The analysis of Jordanian spoken proverbial expressions about caution reveals how these proverbs encapsulate and communicate cultural values related to prudence and vigilance. Sociolinguistic aspects highlight how language reflects and perpetuates the importance of careful and thoughtful behavior in Jordanian society. Proverbs about caution often emphasize the need to be wary of potential dangers, think before acting, and learn from past experiences. These expressions encapsulate cultural norms that prioritize foresight, wisdom, and the avoidance of unnecessary risks. Through the sociolinguistic lens, it becomes clear that these proverbs serve as a medium for transmitting and preserving cultural values related to caution, illustrating how language functions as a repository of collective wisdom and social expectations. This analysis underscores the cultural emphasis on cautious behavior as a means of ensuring personal safety and social harmony in Jordanian culture.

#### 4.5 Activity

Being active and productive is a good norm and a highly appreciated socio-cultural value that people admire and respect because the person should be active in achieving his livelihood to take care of himself and his family. This value of activity is expressed in various Jordanian proverbial expressions as the following examples show.

بجيب اللقمة من ثم الطير

Bijeeb alluqma min thum altear

He takes the morsel from the bird's mouth

The proverb is a simple present sentence that is made of five words. It is used to describe the person who is active in earning his livelihood. Although the bird is high and difficult to be hunt, but the skillful and active person can hunt it. Hence, this proverb used the bird to denote the skill, activity and ability of the person to obtain his needs and livelihood, even if it is far from him.

الحركة بركة

Alharakah barakah

Movement is a blessing

This is a two-word nominal proverbial expression that begins with a singular definite noun. It enhances the socio-cultural value of activity by showing that movement to seek livelihood is a blessing.

ربنا قال إسعى يا عبدي وأنا بسعى معاك

Rabna qal isa'a ya a'abdi wi ana basa'a maa'ak

Our Lord said, strive, O my servant, and I will strive with you

The proverb is a nominal expression consists of nine words and begins with a singular indefinite noun. The proverb promotes the socio-cultural value of activity and seeking livelihood by showing that God will be and support the one who strives seeking for his livelihood. The analysis of Jordanian spoken proverbial expressions about activity shows how these proverbs confirm and convey cultural values related to industriousness and diligence. Sociolinguistic aspects highlight how language reflects and perpetuates the importance of active engagement and hard work in Jordanian society. Proverbs about activity often emphasize the virtues of perseverance, initiative, and the positive outcomes of sustained effort. These expressions reflect cultural norms that value productivity, resourcefulness, and the proactive pursuit of goals. Through the lens of sociolinguistics, it becomes evident that these proverbs serve as a vehicle for transmitting and preserving cultural values related to activity, illustrating how language acts as a repository of collective wisdom and social expectations. This analysis underscores the cultural emphasis on active and industrious behavior as essential for personal success and communal well-being in Jordanian culture.

#### 5 Conclusion

For many peoples and nations, the intangible cultural heritage is a rich source that is passed on by societies from one generation to generation as it reflects their social, cultural, linguistic and religious specificities and the level of their interaction with the surrounding environment, people and events. Jordanian proverbial expressions are one of the most important pillars of the Jordanian

folklore because they express the various experiences of the society, its culture, ways of living, and the various values and morals that govern the relationship of people with each other. The types of experiences that are taken from life on which the popular proverb is often based have an impact on the behavior of people, depending on the fact that the proverb is the result of previous experience of past generations. Proverbial expressions did not emerge randomly in the society, but rather they play a fundamental role in its cultural life, and contribute to revealing many important aspects in the socio-cultural values of a people or a society. The Jordanian proverbial expressions have their own distinct linguistic form, although their source is the same as the sources of the proverbs of the Arab nation. But when looking at the texts of these proverbs, it is noted that some of them are directly related to the Arabic standard linguistic heritage in terms of meaning, image and word, with some slight linguistic distortion where the Jordanian colloquial dialect appears in it. The Jordanian proverbial expressions are connected with different socio-cultural values which have prominent role in promoting, directing and shaping the individual and collective behavior in the society. The present study aimed to target the proverbial expressions which are used in the Jordanian society to express a number of its socio-cultural values. It hopes to shed a glimpse of light at this socio-cultural and linguistic aspect in Jordanian Arabic with the hope too to open the door for similar related studies.

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