

## THE INTREPETATION OF "FIRE" WORD IN INDONESIAN AND ENGLISH PROVERBS: A COGNITIVE SEMANTICS ANALYSIS

Nur Lailatul Aqromi

STMIK ASIA Malang

*lyla@asia.ac.id*

### *Abstract*

It is believed that proverbs from each nation reflect the nation's thoughts and characters. Based on the relationship between human conceptualization and language reflected in proverbs, then this study attempts to examine Indonesian proverb and English proverb by using a cognitive semantics approach. The data are taken from Indonesian proverb and English proverb containing *api* or "fire" word as it is one of the natural symbols of human life. Furthermore, based on the comparison of 7 Indonesian proverbs and 8 English proverbs containing *api* or "fire" word, the results of the study show that there are two categories created: first, proverbs in the same form and meaning including the risk mapping, anger and work; second, proverbs from the same form but different meanings.

**Keywords:** Fire, Cognitive Semantics, Proverb

### INTRODUCTION

A proverb is a genre of discourse used as a tool to express something that comes to mind, which contains much knowledge about experiences to conceptualizing the world. Essentially, proverbs are language products with certain peculiarities. As it is supported by Sibarani (2004: p. 61) that every formation of words and even sentences in a language can determine the natures or types of literary works existed in culture because proverbs never fade even though it has existed for long times. Almost all nations have their proverbial forms so that proverbs are defined as treasures of knowledge reflecting the way of thinking, character, and activities of a nation.

Proverbs, generally, reflect how a community thinks about their surroundings, by observing and experiencing the surrounding events. As a medium to convey the value of local wisdom to the wider community, it is not surprising that almost all nations in the world have proverbs in their grammar. Then, proverbs in one nation and other nations might have similarities or differences, since proverbs are the result of the community's thoughts and experiences.

Each proverb in every language describes different events needed to understand. By understanding one specific situation in the underlying meaning of proverbs, then, humans can understand other situations. In other words, humans can describe one scene about an event or other facts. The process of moving and mapping in mind between one scene and another can provide interpretations of the proverb meaning so that it cannot be separated from human cognitive processes. From a cognitive point of view, proverbs are indeed full of mental processes by understanding one specific situation and followed by understanding other situations. In other words, human can describe one scene about an event by considering many other facts.

The cognitive process itself provides an appropriate space for proverbs analysis by using a cognitive semantic framework based on cognitive mechanisms of metaphor and metonymy. This approach can outline the principle ways of how humans understand the meaning of proverbs as it is under the main subject of cognitive semantics namely the conceptual structure and conceptualization process. As the conceptual system is revealed in the language, we can examine the language in proverbs to obtain the arrangement of conceptual systems.

Proverbs, eventually, describe human life by using certain words, one of which is the word "fire". This word is easily found in proverbs of any language, especially both in English "fire" and in Bahasa Indonesia "api". Fire or *api* is commonly used in proverbs in these two languages as it is known as a basic natural symbol in human life. As this word found often in proverbs, certainly this word is also complete with the concept of meaning by the speakers of each community. This study, therefore, tries to shed a light on the cognitive semantics of the word fire in English' or *api* in Bahasa Indonesia's proverbs.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Cognitive Semantics is primarily focused on conceptual structure and conceptualization process, not only analyzing on linguistic of meaning but also more about what could be implied by language itself (Evans & Green, 2006, p. 170). Saeed (1999, p. 299) adds that Cognitive Semantics is an approach viewing the meaning of a word as a part of mental issues. Furthermore, as proverbs do not provide literal meaning in its words, then the real meaning could be found by understanding the vehicle, tenor, and ground of the cognitive semantics (Honeck, 1997, p. 71-73). In line with this statement, Prihatmi (1993, p. 755) defines proverbs as concise phrases or sentences consist of comparisons, parables, advice, principles of life or rules of behavior becoming one of the sources of local wisdom for a community.

Omar (2008, p. 162) also reveals that proverbs are manifestations of several factors: how humans look at their surroundings, what experiences they get in their daily lives, and also the accumulation of many experiences heredited from their ancestors. Considering these factors, proverbs could be concluded as the rules of life integrated with religious and cultural life. Through proverbs, therefore, humans are able to understand the style of thought, philosophy, beliefs, and norms of a nation. As supported by Danandjaja (1994,

p.21-28) that proverbs involve the essence of the experience of a language-speaking community. As the cognitive semantic framework is based on cognitive mechanisms of metaphor and metonymy, then the analysis is based on The Great Chain Metaphor Theory. This theory divides the proverbs into two domains of the conceptual meaning field: source domain and target domain; one domain clarifies other domains.

According to Lakoff and Jhonson (2003), the conceptualization of figuring out the deep meaning, the mapping process must be done. In an example of "Time is Money", "time" is mapped as a target domain and "money" is mapped as a source domain. Moreover, the real meaning of proverbs could be found by understanding the vehicle, tenor, and ground (Honeck, 1997; p. 71-73). In order to reach a deep understanding of proverbs, The Extended Conceptual Base Theory proposed by Honeck (1994) could be the best alternative. This theory states that there are six steps to process the figurative language in proverbs; they are literal meaning, problem recognition, literal transformation, figurative meaning, and revised meaning phase.

## METHOD

The method used in this research is a descriptive qualitative analysis as it emphasizes the description of linguistic phenomena naturally based on the corpus. The data are in the form of words, phrases and sentences of proverbs both in Bahasa Indonesia and English containing "api" or "fire" word. The data are taken from 3700 *Peribahasa Indonesia* and [www.peribahasa.net](http://www.peribahasa.net) for Indonesian proverbs; and from [www.special-dictionary.com](http://www.special-dictionary.com) for English proverbs. They are collected by selecting the proverbs contain "api" word in Indonesian proverbs and "fire" word in English proverbs.

After the data are collected, they are classified. Then, the data are analyzed by using the cognitive semantics approach of The Extended Conceptual Base Theory and The Great Chain Metaphor Theory to interpret the meaning, function and semantics concept in both proverbs. After that, the meanings in the two languages are compared to find the semantics equivalency.

## DISCUSSION

### *Indonesian and English Proverbs in the Same Form and Meaning*

Among the proverbs in Bahasa Indonesia and English, there are four same formations and meaning of "api" or "fire" word. Both in Indonesian and English proverbs, the word "api" or "fire" are used in the form of metaphor. They are mapped as risk, anger, occupations, and reasons.

### *Mapped as Risk*

Indonesian Proverb : Bermain air basah, bermain api letup, bermain pisau luka  
(*Playing water gets wet, playing fire gets burnt, playing knife gets hurt*)

Source Domain

Play

Target Domain

Action / Activities

Water, gets wet	Risk
Fire, gets burnt	Risk
Knife, gets hurt	Risk
English Proverb	: <i>If you play with fire, you get burnt</i>
Source Domain	Target Domain
Play	Pleasure
Fire	Effect / Risk
Get burnt	Danger

“*Api*” or “fire” is mapped as risks and it exists both in Indonesian and English proverbs. In Indonesian and English proverbs, “*api*” or “fire” is seen as something risky and it proves that both eastern and western society understand if this word refers to an entity having a risk as it can explode and it is dangerous. Therefore, the word is used as a metaphor for describing a risky situation. It can be said that the speakers in Bahasa Indonesia and English use the natural symbol in proverbs to give a warning or advice.

### *Mapped as Anger*

Indonesian Proverbs:

a. Hendak memadam api yang tengah menyala, disiramkan pula minyak ke atasnya.

(*Willing to quench the fire, pouring the oil*)

Source Domain	Target Domain
Fire	Someone who gets angry
Pouring oil	Provoking act

b. Hanya air dingin yang dapat memadamkan api. (*Only cold water that can calm the fire*)

Source Domain	Target Domain
Cold water	Lovely advice
Calm	Calm
Fire	Angry

English Proverbs:

a. *Pouring oil on the fire is not the way to quench it*

Source Domain	Target Domain
Pouring oil	Provoke someone
On the fire	Anger
The way to quench	The way how to calm it down

b. *Fire is a good servant but a bad master*

Source Domain	Target Domain
Fire	Anger
Good servant	Under control
Bad master	Out of control

c. *Do not fan the flame that supports the fire*

Source Domain	Target Domain
---------------	---------------

Fan the flame	Giving a comment
flame	Provocative comment
Supports the fire	Make someone getting more angry

The word "api" or "fire" both in Indonesian and English proverbs is mapped as anger. In the Indonesian proverb, (a) shows a relationship between oil and fire to illustrate someone's provocation and angry opinions. It is also found in English proverb, where (a) shows that if you intend to calm one's anger, never give a provoking opinion as it can raise their anger. These two proverbs could be related to the real world when there is a fire then it is added with oil, the flame will be bigger. It describes someone's anger who will get bigger if he gets a provoking opinion.

The same fact found in (b) of Indonesian and English proverb, where "api" or "fire" is mapped as anger, but in a form of advice or solutions to reduce one's anger. In the Indonesian proverb, the best way to extinguish a fire is by flushing it with cold water. If "api" or "fire" is anger then cold water is soft words that can blow it down. This perspective puts forward the principle of peace or the nature of succumbing when dealing with angry people, this is following the eastern community who try to be more quiet and calm when involved in inconducive situations. To some extends, the English proverb, the situation is described in the roles of servants and master. Being a servant means being controlled and being able to control while being a master means taking control. The description is indeed reasonable in western societies, where historically there are servants and masters.

### *Mapped as Occupations*

Indonesian Proverb : Seperti meniup api di atas air. (*Like blowing fire on the top of water*)

Source Domain	Target Domain
Blowing fire	Having a job
Top of water	Useless

English Proverb : *Kindle not a fire that you cannot extinguish*

Source Domain	Target Domain
Kindle	Starting
Fire	A job
Cannot extinguish	Inexpert

The word "api" in Indonesian proverb is mapped as a useless work and it describes a useless thing to do. It is a nature that fire and water can never be united because they are anti-thetical, so if someone wants to kindle a fire on water, it will be useless. While the English proverb represents a job that you could not do it well. Because if someone kindles the "fire" and but then he cannot extinguish it off, it will be very dangerous. It can be concluded that the deep meaning of those proverbs is about responsibility. It is well known that for both eastern and western societies, being responsible for their job is

applied in their life. And in this case, the word “*api*” or “word” is used as a metaphor to illustrate the importance of these responsibilities. On the other hand, the meaning of these two proverbs works the other way around. While the Indonesian proverb refers to a work that must be stopped because it is useless, the English proverb refers to a work that must be completed.

### ***Mapped as Reasons***

Indonesian Proverb : Kalau ada asap tentu ada api. (*If there is a smoke, there is a fire*)

Source Domain	Target Domain
There is smoke	There is a problem
There is a fire	There is a reason

English Proverb: *There is no smoke without fire*

Source Domain	Target Domain
No smoke	There is no rumor or issue
Without fire	Without a truth

“*Api*” in the Indonesian proverb is a form of cause and effect relationship, that is, it causes its immediate existence. It is mapped as one of the causes and immediately mapped as an event or problem where there is always reason or cause in each problem. Unlike in the view of western societies who see “fire” as a form of lighting in the midst of steaming, the perspective of the Indonesian community is more focused on “fire” causes smoke. It can be seen that in terms of the metaphorical form, it is related to the real “fire” and smoke could spread over quickly.

In addition, the meaning in English proverb is identical to the causal relationship as well, which is related to the spread rumors. “*Fire*” here is seen as a light so it has positive meaning or could be interpreted that the information is a good thing. It is impossible that there are spread news or rumors without causes or reasons.

### ***Indonesian and English Proverbs in the Same Form but Different Meaning***

In this case, the use of “*api*” or “fire” is as a metaphor but it has differences in terms of mapping. It is found that “*api*” or “fire” is used to describe something big and used as a method.

### ***Mapped as Something Big***

Indonesian Proverb : Kecil api menjadi kawan besar menjadi lawan. (*Little fire is a friend, big fire is an enemy*)

Source Domain	Target Domain
Little fire is a friend	Small crime
Big fire is an enemy	Big crime (more dangerous )

English Proverb: *Better a little fire to warm us than a big one to burn us*

Source Domain	Target Domain
Little Fire	Something small
Warm	Benefit
Big fire	Something big
Burn	Dangerous (Risky)

In the two proverbs above, the metaphors used are about the scale of "api" or "fire", little and a big fire. In the Indonesian proverb, the word "api" is mapped as a form of crime, the scale here attributes the scale of the crime. Little fire is mapped as small crimes and the big fire is mapped as big crimes. Even though it is small, the fire still must be eliminated before it becomes a big crime because it will be more dangerous. Since it is mapped as a crime, Indonesian considers it as something negative.

On the other hand, in English proverb, little fire is better than a big fire because it could warm up. Here, "fire" is mapped as a neutral value from the perspective of western society, while the value is possibly changed positively or negatively depends on scale attributes, namely little and big. Little fire provides warmth so that mapped into something small is useful, a big fire could burn that is mapped into something that may e dangerous or risky.

Even having similar patterns, the word "api" or "fire" in the two proverbs has different mapping. It can be concluded that there are different perspectives regarding the word.

### ***Mapped as a method***

Indonesian Proverb : Hanya air dingin yang dapat memadamkan api. (*Only cold water that could extinguish fire*)

Source Domain	Target Domain
Cold water	Lovely advice
Extinguish	Calming down
Fire	Anger

English Proverb: *Fight fire with fire*

Source Domain	Target Domain
Fight	Fight
Fire	Method

Here, the Indonesian proverb states that the best way to fight the "api" is to use cold water, so the understanding that is gained is to fight with something in contrast. Indonesian consider that fighting angry people with anger is not good and should be avoided. It would be better that anger is handled with cold water (which is mapped as soft words).

In contrast, the English proverb says that if you want to fight the “fire”, you must use the fire as well. It can be understood that the way to fight something must be in the same way. It can be seen that a form of perspective of the speaker community who has the notion that to fight or face something must be with the same strength, so the element of equality of power is put forward, for example, if someone hits with wood, then the best way is also against the person using wood.

## CONCLUSION

Based on 7 Indonesian proverbs and 8 English proverbs use the word “api” or “fire”, there are similarities in terms of mapping meaning as risk, anger, occupations, and reasons. On the other hand, the differences are in the meaning mapping, where the word is mapped as something big and the way or method.

It can be concluded that there are differences and similarities in terms of looking at an event that is reflected in the choice of elements forming the proverbs. From this perspective, finally, we can cover one of the ways of thinking or speakers' point of view in each proverb. While Indonesian are considered as calm people and they like to avoid problems, Westerns are identical with their struggle, hard-working, and vote for equality.

## REFERENCES

- Asmah Haji Omar. 2008. *Ensiklopedia Bahasa Melayu*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
- Aqromi, Nur Lailatul. 2015. *Penggunaan Kata Api Dalam Peribahasa Bahasa Inggris Dan Bahasa Indonesia : Analisis Semantik Kognitif*. Tesis tidak Diterbitkan. Yogyakarta : Fakultas Ilmu Budaya Universitas Gadjah Mada Yogyakarta
- Danandjaja, James. 1990. “Metode Penelitian Kualitatif dalam Penelitian Folklor” dalam *Pengembangan Penelitian Kualitatif dalam Bidang Bahasa dan Sastra*. Malang :Hiski.
- Evans, Vyvyan, and Melanie Green.2006.*Cognitive Linguistics; An Introduction*. Edinburgh ; Edinburgh University Press
- Geeraerts,Dirk.2010.*Theories of Lexical Semantics*.Ne York'Oxford University Preess
- Honeck,Richard P.1997.*A Proverbin Mind the Cogntive Scienceof Proverbial Wit and Wisdom*.Lawrence Eirlbaum Associates;New Jersey.
- Lakoff, George dan Mark Jhonson. 1980. *Metaphor We Live By*. Chicago: The University of Chicago.
- Lakoff, George dan Mark Turner. 1989. *More Than Cool Reason A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Pateda, Mansoer. 2001. *Semantik Leksikal*. Edisi Kedua. Jakarta : PT Rineka Cipta.
- Prihatmi, Th Sri Rahayu. 1993. *Peribahasa Jawa Sebagai Cerminan Watak, Sifat, dan Perilaku Manusia Jawa*. Jakarta :Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Indonesia
- Saeed, John.I. 1999.*Semantics*. Massachussets;Blacwell Publisher.
- Sibarani, Robert. 2004. *Antropologi Linguistik*. Medan: Penerbit Poda.