



## Environmental Risk Representations in Al-Ahsa Traditional Proverbs: An Eco-linguistic Analysis

Moayyad Al-Bohnayyah<sup>(\*)</sup>

### ABSTRACT

This study investigates environmental risks as represented in traditional proverbs from the Al-Ahsa region of eastern Saudi Arabia, utilizing a qualitative content analysis (QCA) approach within an eco-linguistic framework. Ten culturally significant proverbs were purposively selected based on their relevance to ecological themes such as biodiversity, water management, agriculture, and climate. By integrating cognitive linguistic theories—particularly conceptual metaphor and metonymy—this research decodes the figurative language embedded in these expressions to uncover localized environmental knowledge and values. The analytical process combines discourse analysis with an ethnographic lens to reveal how these expressions encode practical environmental wisdom while reflecting social norms and cultural identity. Results show that the proverbs function not only as linguistic artifacts but also as ecological narratives warning against overexploitation, advocating caution in volatile conditions, and emphasizing the importance of environmental stewardship. By highlighting metaphorical constructions such as “danger as animal” or “risk as terrain,” this study demonstrates the role of traditional discourse in shaping ecological consciousness. The findings contribute to the fields of eco-linguistics, sustainability education, and cultural heritage preservation, and propose that proverbs can serve as effective communicative tools in environmental awareness campaigns and community-based conservation efforts.

**KEYWORDS:** CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR, ECO-LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS, COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS, ENVIRONMENTAL RISK REPRESENTATION, TRADITIONAL ECOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE, AL-AHSA TRADITIONAL PROVERBS, LANGUAGE AND SUSTAINABILITY, DISCOURSE ANALYSIS.

### ملخص البحث:

تستكشف هذه الدراسة تمثيلات المخاطر البيئية كما تظهر في الأمثال الشعبية المتداولة في محافظة الأحساء شرق المملكة العربية السعودية، وذلك من خلال منهج تحليل المحتوى النوعي ضمن إطار إيكولساني (لغوي بيئي). تم اختيار عشرة أمثال ذات أهمية ثقافية بصورة قصدية، بناءً على صلتها بموضوعات بيئية مثل التنوع الحيوي، وإدارة المياه، والزراعة، والمناخ. ومن خلال توظيف نظريات اللسانيات الإدراكية – ولا سيما الاستعارة المفاهيمية والمجاز التصوري. تسعى هذه الدراسة إلى تفكيك اللغة المجازية الكامنة في تلك التعبيرات لكشف المعرفة والقيم البيئية المحلية المتضمنة فيها.

<sup>(\*)</sup> Arabic Language and Literature Department, College of Arts, King Faisal University, Al-Ahsa, Saudi Arabia [malbohnayyah@kfu.edu.sa](mailto:malbohnayyah@kfu.edu.sa)

يُمزج في التحليل بين تحليل الخطاب والنظرة الإثنوغرافية لكشف كيف تُجسّد هذه الأمثال حكمة بيئية عملية، وتعكس في الوقت ذاته القواعد الاجتماعية والهوية الثقافية. وتشير النتائج إلى أن الأمثال لا تُعدّ مجرد أدوات لغوية، بل تعمل كذلك كسرديات بيئية تحذر من الاستغلال المفرط، وتدعو إلى الحذر في الظروف المتقلّبة، وتؤكد أهمية الحفاظ على البيئة. ومن خلال إبراز البناءات المجازية مثل "الخطر كحيوان" أو "المخاطرة كأرض وعرة"، تُظهر الدراسة دور الخطاب التقليدي في تشكيل الوعي البيئي.

تُسهّم هذه النتائج في مجالات اللغويات البيئية، وتعليم الاستدامة، وصون التراث الثقافي، كما تقترح أن الأمثال يمكن أن تُستخدم كوسائل تواصل فعّالة في حملات التوعية البيئية والمبادرات المجتمعية للحفاظ على البيئة.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الاستعارة المفاهيمية، المجاز التصوري، التحليل اللغوي البيئي، اللغويات الإدراكية، تمثيل المخاطر البيئية، المعرفة البيئية التقليدية، أمثال الأحساء الشعبية، اللغة والاستدامة، تحليل الخطاب.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Proverbs are vital to cultural heritage, reflecting ecological knowledge and social norms. In Al-Ahsa, they reveal insights into human-nature relationships. This study explores selected proverbs to uncover environmental risks and ecological awareness, contributing to eco-linguistics, which links language with ecological sustainability. The significance of proverbs in preserving traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) and fostering adaptation to environmental changes has been well-documented (Mcmillen et al., 2016). In the context of Al-Ahsa, these proverbs serve as linguistic artifacts that encapsulate generations of wisdom about the local ecosystem, climate patterns, and sustainable practices. By analyzing these proverbs through the lens of discourse analysis, we can gain valuable insights into the community's historical and contemporary understanding of environmental risks and their strategies for resilience. The study of proverbs as a facet of figurative language is particularly relevant in understanding how communities conceptualize and communicate complex environmental ideas (Berman & Ravid, 2010). Proverbs often require interpretation beyond their literal meaning, making them powerful tools for conveying ecological knowledge in culturally resonant ways. This aspect of proverb analysis aligns with the broader field of critical discourse studies, which examines how language constructs and reflects social realities (Hart, 2016). In the context of Al-Ahsa, a region known for its unique agricultural landscape and rich cultural heritage, proverbs offer a window into the

community's relationship with its environment. This study's focus on environmental risks in Al-Ahsa proverbs is particularly timely, given the growing global concern for environmental conservation and sustainable tourism practices (Alali et al., 2024). By examining these linguistic artifacts, we can better understand how local knowledge systems contribute to biodiversity protection and rational resource use. The methodological approach of this study draws on the principles of integrated discourse analysis, combining linguistic and intertextual analysis to provide a comprehensive understanding of the proverbs' meanings and contexts (Fairclough, 1992). This approach allows for a nuanced examination of how environmental risks are conceptualized and communicated within the Al-Ahsa community, taking into account both the linguistic features of the proverbs and their broader cultural and historical contexts. Furthermore, this research contributes to the field of applied linguistics by presenting a case study that bridges language, culture, and environmental awareness (Duff, 2014). By focusing on the Al-Ahsa region, we explore how local linguistic practices intersect with global environmental concerns, offering insights that may be relevant to other communities facing similar ecological challenges. The study of environmental risks in Al-Ahsa proverbs also touches upon the broader issue of language endangerment and the preservation of linguistic diversity (Himmelman, 2008). As global environmental changes accelerate, there is an urgent need to document and analyze traditional ecological knowledge embedded in local languages and oral traditions. This research thus contributes to the ongoing efforts to preserve and understand the rich linguistic and cultural heritage of communities like Al-Ahsa. In conclusion, this study aims to demonstrate the value of proverbs as repositories of ecological wisdom and indicators of environmental risks. By applying discourse analysis techniques to these linguistic artifacts, we seek to uncover the deep-rooted environmental awareness within the Al-Ahsa community and contribute to the growing field of eco-linguistics. The insights gained from this research may inform sustainable practices and environmental education efforts, both locally and in similar contexts worldwide.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of proverbs has long been recognized as a valuable tool for understanding cultural values, beliefs, and traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) systems. In the context of environmental conservation and sustainable practices, proverbs can offer unique insights into a community's relationship with its surroundings. While research on Al-Ahsa proverbs specifically is limited, broader studies on Arabic proverbs and their environmental themes provide a foundation for our investigation. Machine translation (MT) has played a significant role in

facilitating cross-cultural understanding of proverbs. A study by (Jibreel, 2023) examined the effectiveness of various MT tools in translating proverbs between English and Arabic. The research found that literal translations were most common, followed by semantic and communicative translations. This highlights the challenge of capturing the nuanced meanings embedded in proverbs across languages, which is crucial when analyzing environmental themes in Al-Ahsa proverbs. The importance of traditional ecological knowledge in fostering adaptation and resilience to environmental change has been emphasized in recent literature. (McMillen et al., 2016) presents a longitudinal study from Hawaii, demonstrating how TEK, cultural identity, and environmental stewardship contribute to social resilience. The study reveals that while some coping strategies have diminished over time, others have adapted and maintained their relevance. This underscores the potential value of examining Al-Ahsa proverbs as repositories of traditional environmental wisdom that may inform current adaptation strategies. In the African context, (Sinthumule, 2023) provides a comprehensive review of TEK's role in biodiversity conservation. The study identified various forms of TEK, including taboos, customs, rules, and notably, metaphors and proverbs. However, it found that proverbs were among the least addressed components of TEK in conservation research. This gap in the literature highlights the need for more focused studies on proverbs' environmental implications, such as our research on Al-Ahsa proverbs. The potential of cultural tools like stories, proverbs, and anecdotes in science education has been explored by (Mutonyi, 2015). The study argues that these cultural elements can serve as effective scaffolds for learning scientific concepts, particularly in indigenous communities. This suggests that Al-Ahsa proverbs could play a valuable role in environmental education and awareness within the local community. Recent research has also examined the dynamic interplay between traditionality and modernity in proverb usage. (Weng et al., 2020) analyzed proverbs listed by Chinese college students, revealing a complex hybridization of traditional values, modernization, and Western individualism. While this study focused on a different cultural context, it provides a methodological framework for examining how Al-Ahsa proverbs might reflect both traditional environmental wisdom and contemporary ecological concerns. In conclusion, while specific studies on Al-Ahsa proverbs and their environmental themes are scarce, the existing literature on proverbs, traditional ecological knowledge, and environmental conservation provides a robust foundation for our research. By analyzing Al-Ahsa proverbs through the lens of environmental risks, this study aims to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on the role of cultural wisdom in addressing contemporary ecological challenges.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This study employs qualitative content analysis (QCA) within the framework of eco-linguistics to investigate environmental risks embedded in traditional proverbs from the Al-Ahsa region. QCA offers a systematic and context-sensitive approach to the interpretation of qualitative data, allowing for the exploration of culturally grounded meanings and values (Selvi, 2019). This methodological approach aligns with the study's objectives by facilitating an in-depth analysis of how local expressions encode traditional ecological knowledge and perceptions of environmental issues.

#### 3.1. Theoretical Framework

The analysis is informed by a conceptual-based approach to proverb interpretation, grounded in the understanding that proverbs represent abstract linguistic forms that convey culturally shared knowledge (Honeck et al., 1975). Insights from cognitive linguistics, particularly the theories of conceptual metaphor and metonymy, further inform the interpretation of figurative language (Charteris-Black, 2002). Additionally, the role of context in shaping the comprehension of proverbs is considered, drawing on findings from cognitive studies on figurative language processing (Katz & Ferretti, 2001).

#### 3.2. Data Sample

A purposive sample of ten traditional proverbs from Al-Ahsa was selected for analysis. The selection criteria included ecological relevance, frequency of use in oral discourse, and the potential of the proverbs to reveal embedded environmental values. The selected proverbs reflect a range of environmental domains, including biodiversity, agriculture, water management, land use, and climate. Focusing on a specific regional corpus allows for a concentrated examination of localized environmental knowledge and values, consistent with prior research on proverbs as carriers of cultural and ecological wisdom (Arewa & Dundes, 1964; Berman & Ravid, 2010).

The elected 10 proverbs for this study:

Proverb 1: /*Pitrik idda:b wifd'zartih*/ (Leave the snake and its tree.)

Proverb 2: /*ilba:b illi: jidzi:k minh irri:h siddah wistiri:h*/ (Shut the door from which the wind blows at you and rest.)

Proverb 3: /dʒara:di:n ja:kil hai: mai:jit/ (A locust that devours both the living and the dead.)

Proverb 4: /ʃif yu:mah/ (Look at his clouds.)

Proverb 5: /ʃru:gah filma:ʔ/ (His roots are in the water.)

Proverb 6: /lau kil min dʒa: wnidʒar, ma: ʔall fi: lwa:di: ʃidʒar/ (If everyone who came started chopping wood, no trees would be left in the valley.)

Proverb 7: /ma: ʔahad jiʃi:r mirza:mah giʃi:rah jo:m ilmiʔar/ (No one lends his rain gutter to his neighbor on a rainy day.)

Proverb 8: /miʔar ʃe:f/ (Summer rain.)

Proverb 9: /ja: za:riʃ fi: ʔarð<sup>s</sup> ye:rak git<sup>s</sup>nah, ma: lak ʃagil wa la: fiʔnah/ (O you who plant cotton in someone else's land, you have neither sense nor wisdom.)

Proverb 10: /ja: ma:ʃi: darb izzalag la: ta:man iʔte:hah/ (O you who walk the slippery path, don't be too sure you won't fall.)

### 3.3. Data Collection

Each proverb was documented with its original Arabic form, along with an English translation, cultural explanation, figurative interpretation, classification of the environmental hazard, and a corresponding eco-linguistic analysis. This multifaceted documentation strategy draws on established methodologies in proverb research (Fox, 2009) and integrates components of environmental and linguistic analysis, reflecting the study's focus on the intersection between cultural expression and sustainable rural development (Hassan et al., 2022).

### 3.4. Analytical Procedure

The analysis adopts a three-tiered approach, combining (meta)discourse analysis with the ethnography of cultural conceptualizations (Sharifian & Tayebi, 2017). The procedure involved several sequential steps:

1. An initial close reading of the proverbs to gain familiarity with their content and context.
2. The development of a coding framework grounded in eco-linguistic principles and the specific environmental domains represented in the data.

3. The application of the coding framework to systematically identify key themes, metaphors, and cultural conceptualizations within each proverb.

Special attention was given to the representation of animals and nature, drawing on the typology proposed by Koop-Monteiro et al. (2023), which identifies four dominant frames in climate discourse: animals as metaphors, citizens, biodiversity components, and resources.

To enhance analytical rigor and credibility, the study employed investigator triangulation. Multiple experts independently coded the proverbs, followed by collective discussions to resolve discrepancies and refine the coding framework, in line with best practices for qualitative reliability (Selvi, 2019).

### 3.5. Validity and Limitations

The validity of the study is reinforced by its grounding in established theoretical and methodological traditions from proverb and eco-linguistic research. Nevertheless, certain limitations must be acknowledged. The small sample size restricts the generalizability of findings, and the absence of participant-based interpretation data—as employed in some contemporary studies (Bhattacharjee & Sinha, 2023)—limits the analysis of current local perceptions.

### 3.6. Contribution

By applying an eco-linguistic lens to traditional Al-Ahsa proverbs, this study elucidates the ways in which cultural expressions encapsulate environmental knowledge, values, and risk perceptions. The findings offer insights into the role of traditional discourse in environmental communication, climate adaptation, and sustainable tourism development (Alali et al., 2024), while also highlighting the potential of proverbs as culturally resonant tools for science and environmental education (Mutonyi, 2015).

## 4. RESULTS

This section presents the findings of the qualitative content analysis (QCA) of ten traditional proverbs from the Al-Ahsa, interpreted through an eco-linguistic framework. The analysis identifies the ecological wisdom embedded in each proverb by categorizing the proverbs, environmental domains, metaphorical meaning, key metaphors, and eco-linguistic insights they represent (Table 1).



Table 1. Overview of Eco-Linguistic Analysis of Al-Ahsa Proverbs

No.	Proverb	Environmental Domain	Metaphorical Meaning	Key Metaphor / Image	Eco-linguistic Insight
1	<i>/ʔitrik idda:b wi/dʒartih/</i> (Leave the snake and its tree)	Biodiversity / Human-Wildlife Interaction	Danger = Proximity to Wild Animals	Snake under a tree	Advocates for avoidance of ecological risks and respecting wildlife habitats
2	<i>/ilba:b illi: jidʒi:k minh irri:h siddah wistiri:h/</i> (Shut the door from which the wind blows at you and rest)	Climate / Shelter	Trouble = Harsh Natural Forces	Wind as a source of harm	Advocates protective behavior from harsh environmental exposure
3	<i>/dʒara:din ja:kil hai: mai:jit/</i> (A locust that devours both the living and the dead)	Biodiversity / Pest Infestation	Greed = Locust Devastation	Locust consuming all	Highlights ecological degradation from unchecked exploitation
4	<i>/ʃif yu:mah/</i> (Look at his clouds.)	Weather Patterns / Uncertainty	News/Character = Clouds	Clouds as omens	Promotes environmental awareness through observation
5	<i>/ʃru:gah ʃilma:ʔ/</i> (His roots are in the water)	Water Resource Access	Privilege = Access to Water	Roots in water	Suggests social/ecological privilege through sustained access to vital resources
6	<i>/lau kil min dʒa: wnidʒar, ma: ɔall fi: lwa:di: ʃidʒar/</i> (If everyone who came started chopping wood, no trees would be left in the valley)	Deforestation / Land Use	Overuse = Loss of Forests	Chopping all the trees	Warns against unsustainable exploitation of natural resources

7	<i>/ma: ʔaħad jiʃi:r mirza:mah giʃi:rah jo:m ilmiħar/</i>  (No one lends his rain gutter to his neighbor on a rainy day)	Water Management / Infrastructure	Urgency = Rainfall	Rain gutter in need	Cautions about giving up critical resources during crisis
8	<i>/miħar ʃe:f/</i> (Summer rain)	Climate / Agricultural Timing	Fleeting Events = Unseasonal Rain	Rainfall out of season	Highlights ephemeral benefit or misplaced timing in natural cycles
9	<i>/ja: za:riʃ fi: ʔarð<sup>ʕ</sup> ye:rak git<sup>ʕ</sup>nah, ma: lak ʃagil wa la: fiħnah/</i>  (O you who plant cotton in someone else's land, you have neither sense nor wisdom)	Agriculture / Ownership	Misplaced Effort = Planting in Foreign Soil	Cotton in another's land	Warns against ecological waste and unsustainable land investment
10	<i>/ja: ma:fi: darb izzalag la: ta:man iħte:hah/</i>  (O you who walk the slippery path, don't be too sure you won't fall)	Environmental Risk / Terrain	Risky Path = Slippery Ground	Slippery path and fall	Emphasizes caution in uncertain or degraded environmental conditions

#### 4.1. Biodiversity and Ecological Risk Awareness

Several proverbs from Al-Ahsa encapsulate environmental hazards and reflect a culturally embedded ambivalence toward biodiversity, which is perceived simultaneously as a source of reverence and danger.

**Proverb 1:** */ʔitrik idda:b wiħdʒartih/* (Leave the snake and its tree.)

This proverb references the *dāb*, a specific type of venomous snake known for its thick body and pale, milky coloration. Highly feared due to its potentially lethal bite, the *dāb* symbolizes immediate and irreversible danger. The origin of the expression is tied to a narrative in which a man, despite warnings from companions, strikes a tree beneath which a *dāb* resides. He is bitten and suffers fatal consequences, prompting the proverb's use to caution against disturbing known threats.

The saying functions analogously to /ʔibʕid ʕan iʃʃar w yanni: lah/ (Stay away from trouble and sing to it), emphasizing a broader ethos of risk avoidance. Conceptually, this proverb exemplifies the Danger-as-Animal frame (Koop-Monteiro et al., 2023), wherein wildlife represents an environmental hazard to be respected and avoided, thereby advocating ecological prudence.

**Proverb 3:** /dʒara:di:n ja:kil hai: mai:jit/ (A locust that devours both the living and the dead.)

Also echoed in the expression (Umm 'Ābis eats both the fresh and the dry,) this proverb employs the locust—an enduring symbol of agricultural devastation in arid ecologies—as a metaphor for insatiable greed and moral bankruptcy. It refers to individuals who consume indiscriminately and without ethical consideration, regardless of the legality or consequences of their actions.

This metaphor aligns with the image schema of unchecked ecological consumption. The proverb thus conveys the dangers of unsustainable resource exploitation, where metaphor and metonymy converge to construct the locust as a figure of destructive excess (Charteris-Black, 2002).

#### 4.2. Climate, Shelter, and Environmental Conditions

Proverbs from the region also reflect traditional environmental knowledge and the necessity of adaptive responses to climatic challenges.

**Proverb 2:** /ilba:b illi: jidʒi:k minh irri:h siddah wistiri:h/ (Shut the door from which the wind blows at you and rest.)

This expression offers pragmatic wisdom: when confronted by persistent sources of distress or harm, one should take preventive measures to eliminate exposure and preserve peace of mind. The metaphorical wind represents both environmental and psychological disruption, aligning with the Climate-as-Opponent frame (Charteris-Black, 2002), where nature acts in opposition to human comfort.

The proverb underscores an adaptive philosophy consistent with architectural and agricultural practices in desert climates, emphasizing proactive resilience over confrontation.

**Proverb 8:** /miṭar ʃe:f/ (Summer rain.)

This proverb, akin to the related phrase /saḥa:bat ʃe:f/ (a summer cloud), refers to events that are untimely, fleeting, and ultimately ineffectual. Summer rain, though momentarily refreshing, is typically brief and evaporates quickly, rendering it symbolically insignificant in terms of ecological contribution.

Depending on the context, the phrase may express skepticism—highlighting the futility of transient phenomena—or optimism, suggesting that even fleeting relief can be meaningful. The proverb embodies the Water-as-Ephemeral frame (Charteris-Black, 2002), drawing attention to the importance of environmental timing and seasonal congruity in traditional ecological understanding.

**4.3. Water Management and Resource Scarcity**

Given the centrality of water in Al-Ahsa's arid ecosystem, proverbs addressing water access and management reveal deeply ingrained environmental ethics.

**Proverb 5:** /ʃru:gah filma:ʔ/ (His roots are in the water.)

This proverb conveys the idea of stability, privilege, and unimpeded growth, drawing a metaphor from the image of well-watered roots. It typically describes individuals who possess influential connections or institutional backing, enabling them to navigate obstacles with ease.

Metaphorically, the proverb aligns with the idea that consistent access to essential resources—such as water—facilitates socio-political and ecological advantage, reflecting the cultural interlinkage between resource abundance and societal status.

**Proverb 7:** /ma: ʔaḥad jiʃi:r mirza:mah giʃi:rah jo:m ilmiṭar/ (No one lends his rain gutter to his neighbor on a rainy day.)

Here, the *mirzām* (rain gutter) serves as a critical tool for capturing scarce water. The proverb illustrates the concept of self-preservation during times of environmental stress, emphasizing that one cannot offer assistance to others at the cost of their own survival.

This expression exemplifies the Resource-as-Survival frame, wherein even communal or altruistic values are suspended in the face of urgent ecological needs (Sharifian & Tayebi, 2017).

**4.4. Land Use and Sustainable Exploitation**

Traditional proverbs also articulate concerns over environmental degradation and advocate for sustainable land use.

**Proverb 6:** /lau kil min dʒa: wnidzar, ma: ɔall fi: lwa:di: ʃidzar/ (If everyone who came started chopping wood, no trees would be left in the valley.)

The act of *nidzar* (woodcutting) is used metaphorically to caution against unqualified imitation and unregulated exploitation of natural resources. The proverb criticizes individuals who pursue a trend or profession without expertise, implying that such behaviors lead to ecological imbalance and social dysfunction. It reflects a cultural understanding of the importance of diverse roles and sustainable engagement with the environment, cautioning against monocultural extraction or homogenous practices that harm ecosystem resilience.

**Proverb 9:** /ja: za:riʃ fi: ʔarðʕ ye:rak gitʕnah, ma: lak ʕagil wa la: fiʔnah/ (O you who plant cotton in someone else's land, you have neither sense nor wisdom.)

This proverb criticizes misplaced effort, particularly when invested in contexts lacking rightful ownership or mutual reciprocity. Cotton, a water-intensive crop, serves as a poignant metaphor for resource-intensive endeavors that are poorly planned or directed toward undeserving recipients.

The expression emphasizes principles of land stewardship and highlights the importance of intentional, long-term investment in ecologically and socially appropriate domains.

#### 4.5. Environmental Observation and Risk Literacy

Finally, a subset of proverbs promotes environmental awareness and risk assessment, underscoring the integration of ecological observation into everyday cognition.

**Proverb 4:** /ʃif yu:mah/ (Look at his clouds.)

This proverb employs the metaphor of cloud cover to suggest concealed information or upcoming developments, advising careful observation before forming judgments. In doing so, it mirrors traditional weather forecasting practices, where visual cues from the sky inform human action.

Aligned with the Sky-as-Signal frame (Katz & Ferretti, 2001), the proverb encourages environmental literacy and measured response, underscoring the role of ecological indicators in social navigation.

**Proverb 10:** /ja: ma:ʃi: darb izzalag la: ta:man iʔte:hah/ (O you who walk the slippery path, don't be too sure you won't fall.)

This expression warns against overconfidence when navigating precarious situations, whether literal or metaphorical. The slippery path represents instability, and the inevitable fall signifies the consequences of ignoring evident risks.

The proverb fosters an attitude of humility and foresight, reflecting a broader cultural framework in which risk awareness and caution are integral to personal and communal survival strategies.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The eco-linguistic analysis of Al-Ahsa proverbs reveals a deeply embedded ecological consciousness within the region's oral tradition, affirming the value of traditional knowledge as a reservoir of environmental insight. Through metaphorical language and culturally situated frames, the selected proverbs articulate environmental principles, risk management strategies, and sustainable practices that are highly relevant to contemporary ecological discourse.

### 5.1. Proverbs as Carriers of Ecological Ethics

The proverbs reflect a tacit ecological literacy, with metaphors rooted in the physical and environmental realities of the Al-Ahsa region. Phrases like */ʔitrik idda:b wiʔdʒartih/* (Leave the snake and its tree) encapsulate a worldview that advocates for coexistence and cautious disengagement with ecological threats (Koop-Monteiro et al., 2023), resonating with the Danger-as-Animal conceptual metaphor. Similarly, */dʒara:ɗin ja:kil hai: mai:jit/* (A locust that devours both the living and the dead) expresses anxiety over environmental overconsumption and unchecked greed, revealing a culturally embedded ethic of restraint. These expressions suggest that environmental awareness is not a modern imposition, but an indigenous epistemology encoded within daily language and metaphor.

### 5.2. Climate and Shelter as Metaphorical Frameworks

Proverbs such as */ilba:b illi: jidʒi:k minh irri:h siddah wistiri:h/* (Shut the door from which the wind blows at you and rest) reflect a form of environmental pragmatism, wherein nature is both an active agent and a cue for behavioral adaptation. This mirrors the Climate-as-Opponent frame, offering insight into how Al-Ahsa communities conceptualize their interactions with the desert environment not through domination but through avoidance, shielding, and anticipation. The proverb */miṭar ʃe:f/* (Summer rain) adds nuance by recognizing the temporal variability of nature, highlighting an awareness of ecological timing and the limitations of short-lived environmental events.

### 5.3. Embedded Water Ethics and Resource Scarcity

Water, a critical resource in the arid Arabian Peninsula, emerges as a dominant theme. Proverbs like */ma: ʔaḥad jiʃi:r mirza:mah giʃi:rah jo:m ilmiṭar/* (No one lends his rain gutter to his neighbor on a rainy day) reflect the centrality of water access to socio-political power, privilege, and survival. These metaphors correspond with the Resource-as-Survival frame, reinforcing the idea that environmental stewardship and self-preservation are culturally validated priorities. They also signal that ethical responses to scarcity are historically mediated by an awareness of the limits of generosity under ecological duress.

#### 5.4. Sustainable Land Use and Agricultural Morality

Land use and agricultural sustainability are also prominent in the metaphorical landscape of Al-Ahsa proverbs. The proverb */lau kil min dza: wnidzar, ma: ðall fi: lwa:di: fidzar/* (If everyone who came started chopping wood, no trees would be left in the valley) critiques unchecked extraction, paralleling concerns about the degradation of communal resources. In this context, the proverb becomes a vehicle for expressing a community-based conservation ethic. Meanwhile, */ja: za:riʕ fi: ʔarð<sup>s</sup> ye:rak git<sup>s</sup>nah, ma: lak ʕagil wa la: fiʔnah/* (O you who plant cotton in someone else's land, you have neither sense nor wisdom) critiques misallocated environmental labor, illustrating how ownership and responsibility are intertwined in traditional environmental thought.

#### 5.5. Risk Literacy and Environmental Observation

The proverbs */ʃif yu:mah/* (Look at his clouds) and */ja: ma:fi: darb izzalag la: ta:man iʔte:ħah/* (O you who walk the slippery path, don't be too sure you won't fall) demonstrate how environmental observation functions as a form of risk assessment. These expressions invoke Sky-as-Signal and Terrain-as-Risk metaphors, encouraging attentiveness to environmental cues and the exercise of caution in unpredictable conditions. Such proverbs foreground ecological indicators as tools for social navigation, suggesting that environmental awareness is not passive but an active, interpretive practice encoded in local discourse.

### 6. CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that the proverbs of the Al-Ahsa region function not only as cultural expressions but also as significant eco-linguistic instruments that encapsulate traditional ecological knowledge. Through content analysis, it became evident that these proverbs convey environmental values, cautionary principles, and sustainable practices, thereby playing a critical role in preserving and transmitting ecological awareness across generations.

By highlighting the interconnectedness of language, culture, and the environment, this research underscores the potential of local linguistic traditions to influence environmental attitudes and behaviors. In particular, the findings point to the value of vernacular knowledge systems in addressing contemporary sustainability challenges, especially within arid and agriculturally dependent societies.

Future studies are encouraged to adopt a broader comparative approach by examining eco-linguistic features in proverbs across other Arabic-speaking regions. Such work would offer deeper insights into the diversity of environmental expressions in Arabic dialects and further elucidate the role of language in shaping ecological consciousness.

## 7. REFERENCES

- Alali, A. M., Hassan, T. H., & Abdelmoaty, M. A. (2024). Tourist values and well-being in rural tourism: Insights from biodiversity protection and rational automobile use in Al-Ahsa Oasis, Saudi Arabia. *Sustainability*, 16(11), 4746. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su16114746>
- Arewa, E. O., & Dundes, A. (1964). Proverbs and the ethnography of speaking folklore1. *American Anthropologist*, 66(6\_PART2), 70–85. [https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.1964.66.suppl\\_3.02a00040](https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.1964.66.suppl_3.02a00040)
- Berman, R. A., & Ravid, D. (2010). Interpretation and recall of proverbs in three school-age populations. *First Language*, 30(2), 155–173. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0142723709359246>
- Bhattacharjee, M. & Sinha, S. (2023). Sustainability lessons in traditional Bengali proverbs. *Ecocycles*, 9(3), 78–89. <https://doi.org/10.19040/ecocycles.v9i3.352>
- Charteris-Black, J. (2002). Second language figurative proficiency: A comparative study of Malay and English. *Applied Linguistics*, 23(1), 104–133. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/23.1.104>
- Duff, P. A. (2014). Case study research on language learning and use. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 34, 233–255. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0267190514000051>
- Fairclough, N. (1992). Discourse and text: Linguistic and intertextual analysis within discourse analysis. *Discourse & Society*, 3(2), 193–217. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926592003002004>
- Fox, M. V. (2009). *Proverbs 10–31*. Yale University. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9780300262124>
- Hart, C. (2016). The visual basis of linguistic meaning and its implications for critical discourse studies: Integrating cognitive linguistic and multimodal methods. *Discourse & Society*, 27(3), 335–350. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926516630896>
- Hassan, T. H., Abdelmoaty, M. A., & Salem, A. E. (2022). Impact of rural tourism development on residents' satisfaction with the local environment, socio-economy and quality of life in Al-Ahsa Region, Saudi Arabia. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(7), 4410. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19074410>
- Himmelmann, N. P. (2008). Reproduction and preservation of linguistic knowledge: Linguistics' response to language endangerment. *Annual Review of*



*Anthropology*, 37(1), 337–350.  
<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.37.081407.085226>

Honeck, R. P., Riechmann, P., & Hoffman, R. R. (1975). Semantic memory for metaphor: The conceptual base hypothesis. *Memory & Cognition*, 3(4), 409–415.  
<https://doi.org/10.3758/bf03212934>

Jibreel, I. (2023). Online machine translation efficiency in translating fixed expressions between English and Arabic (proverbs as a case-in-point). *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 13(5), 1148–1158.  
<https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1305.07>

Katz, A. N., & Ferretti, T. R. (2001). Moment-by-moment reading of proverbs in literal and nonliteral contexts. *Metaphor and Symbol*, 16(3–4), 193–221.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10926488.2001.9678895>

Koop-Monteiro, Y., Stoddart, M. C. J., & Tindall, D. B. (2023). Animals and climate change: A visual and discourse network analysis of Instagram posts. *Environmental Sociology*, 9(4), 409–426.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/23251042.2023.2216371>

McMillen, H., Ticktin, T., & Springer, H. K. (2016). The future is behind us: Traditional ecological knowledge and resilience over time on Hawai'i Island. *Regional Environmental Change*, 17(2), 579–592. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10113-016-1032-1>

Mutonyi, H. (2015). Stories, proverbs, and anecdotes as scaffolds for learning science concepts. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*, 53(6), 943–971.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/tea.21255>

Selvi, A. F. (2019). Qualitative content analysis (pp. 440–452). *Routledge*.  
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367824471-37>

Sharifian, F., & Tayebi, T. (2017). Perceptions of impoliteness from a cultural linguistics perspective (pp. 389–409). *Springer Singapore*.  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-4056-6\\_18](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-4056-6_18)

Sinthumule, N. I. (2023). Traditional ecological knowledge and its role in biodiversity conservation: A systematic review. *Frontiers in Environmental Science*, 11. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fenvs.2023.1164900>

Weng, L., Kulich, S. J., Zuo, C., & Zhang, Y. B. (2020). Cultural values in Chinese proverbs reported by Chinese college students. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, 24(2), 232–243. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajsp.12415>