



African Proverbs and Patriarchal Discourse: A Cross-Cultural Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of the Normalisation of Gendered Violence

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Abstract

Proverbs are concise, conventionalised expressions through which societies transmit inherited knowledge, moral values, and normative expectations across generations. They function not merely as linguistic artefacts but as culturally authoritative forms of social judgement. As Jon R. Stone observes, proverbs constitute “bits of ancient wisdom” grounded in collective experience (*The Routledge Book of World Proverbs* xiii). In this sense, proverbial discourse participates in the production and maintenance of ideology, shaping perceptions of legitimacy, authority, and social order. This study undertakes a cross-cultural linguistic analysis of 40 African and non-African proverbs purposively drawn from the Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, Amharic, Bukusu, and Frafra traditions, as well as from Euro-American and Asian contexts. The proverbs were extracted from published collections and peer-reviewed articles. The study adopts a qualitative, comparative research design grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA). Following Norman Fairclough’s account of discourse as a site of social power and ideological reproduction (*Critical Discourse Analysis* 71–75) and the discourse-historical orientation outlined by Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer (3–5, 15), the study examines how language encodes and sustains relations of dominance. With regard to FCDA, the study foregrounds the discursive construction of gender and the reproduction of patriarchal power (Lazar 1–3, 11–14). The analysis identifies recurrent discursive patterns that position women within hierarchies of discipline, control, and subordination. Particular attention is paid to modality, transitivity, metaphor, and presupposition as linguistic mechanisms through which violence is framed as corrective, inevitable, or socially sanctioned. The findings indicate that certain proverbial formulations contribute to the discursive normalisation of male domination and the moral legitimisation of coercion. By embedding hierarchical gender relations within culturally authoritative expressions, such proverbs may subtly shape social attitudes and behavioural expectations, thereby reinforcing broader structures associated with gender-based violence.

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Introduction

Scholars have long observed that societies tend to underestimate women's power, often construing it as either absent or inferior to that of men (Connell 77). This assumption is not only reproduced through social institutions but is also embedded in cultural forms such as proverbs. As traditional verbal expressions used to regulate behaviour and transmit values, proverbs play a significant role in shaping social attitudes towards gender. They offer guidance on appropriate conduct for men and women, project societal expectations, and continue to exert influence in contemporary contexts. As Mieder notes, proverbs pass judgement and prescribe acceptable behaviour, thereby shaping future social action (18). Similarly, Mulaudzi argues that proverbs function as cultural constructs that define and regulate social norms and values (154).

Language, as Hussein observes, is a symbolic system through which ideas are represented and evaluated. Social attitudes towards gender are therefore inseparable from the linguistic forms through which they are expressed (60-63). In many African societies, gendered power relations are encoded in proverbs that legitimise male dominance and reinforce the subordination of women. Such proverbs operate in both private and public spheres, sustaining patriarchal ideologies and naturalising unequal gender relations. Consequently, African proverbs often function as discursive vehicles through which gender hierarchy is normalised and reproduced.

For analytical precision, this study engages three interrelated concepts: proverb, patriarchy, and gender-based violence (GBV). In paremiological scholarship, a proverb is generally defined as a concise, fixed, and metaphorical utterance that conveys socially sanctioned knowledge and normative judgement. Wolfgang Mieder defines the proverb as “a short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorable form” (*Proverbs: A Handbook* 3). This definition foregrounds two central features for the present analysis: memorability and moral authority. Proverbs do not merely describe social reality; they evaluate and regulate it. Their aphoristic structure, rhythmic compression, and figurative density facilitate transmission across generations, thereby stabilising particular moral positions as common sense (Mieder 3-5).

Within African oral traditions, proverbs function not as decorative embellishments to speech but as authoritative discursive resources embedded in social performance. Ruth Finnegan emphasises that oral forms, including proverbs, derive their force from recognised cultural conventions governing their use in specific speech events (393-97). Authority thus resides not solely in semantic content but in the institutional and communal contexts in which proverbs are performed. In this sense, proverbs operate as instruments of

social regulation: they instruct, admonish, justify, and evaluate. As recurrent formulae of communal judgement, they encode and transmit ideological orientations, including those relating to gender hierarchy (Finnegan 394-96). Patriarchy, as understood in this study, refers to a historically embedded system of social organisation in which men disproportionately control authority, property, and symbolic capital, and in which gender hierarchy is naturalised through cultural narratives. When proverbs circulate within patriarchal settings, they may function as vehicles for legitimating gendered asymmetries. Their brevity and apparent antiquity confer an aura of inevitability, rendering normative claims resistant to contestation. The moral generality characteristic of proverbial discourse – often expressed through the generic present tense and universalising syntax – further reinforces its prescriptive force (Mieder 10–12).

In many African contexts, elders are widely recognised as custodians of proverbial knowledge. Because elderhood frequently intersects with masculine authority, the performance and interpretation of proverbs may become aligned with male epistemic power. The persuasive function of proverbs is famously captured by Chinua Achebe’s observation that “proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten” (*Things Fall Apart* 7). The metaphor signals not ornamentation but facilitation: proverbs enable speech to achieve acceptance and legitimacy within communal discourse. When invoked by socially authorised speakers, they carry the weight of tradition and collective memory. Consequently, they may reinforce established norms, including those governing gender roles and domestic conduct.

This study therefore approaches proverbs not as neutral reflections of communal wisdom but as discursive practices situated within relations of power. By integrating insights from paremiology and oral literature studies with critical gender analysis, it examines how particular proverbial formulations may participate in the ideological normalisation of gender-based violence. In doing so, it situates African proverbs within broader theoretical debates concerning language, authority, and the reproduction of social hierarchy, while remaining attentive to the performative and context-dependent character of oral discourse.

In contemporary research on gendered harm, gender-based violence (GBV) is conceptualised not simply as interpersonal conflict but as structurally embedded harm that disproportionately affects women and girls. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), violence against women encompasses “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life” (*Violence against women*). This definition

highlights both the breadth of GBV and its grounding in gender inequality rather than isolated incidents of conflict or aggression. WHO further notes that nearly one in three women globally has experienced physical and/or sexual violence in her lifetime, primarily by an intimate partner, emphasising the pervasiveness and normative integration of GBV across cultural contexts (*Violence against women*). Such data underline that GBV is a global public health and human rights concern shaped by social norms, power imbalances, and harmful gender stereotypes.

Similarly, UN Women, the United Nations entity dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women, situates GBV within a framework of structural discrimination and cultural norms that sustain it. UN Women reports that approximately 840 million women experience physical and/or sexual violence over a lifetime, a figure that has remained largely stable over the past two decades, illustrating the resilience of the social and cultural conditions that underlie violence (*Facts and figures: Ending violence against women*). This persistence is attributed not only to individual behaviours but to broader systems of inequality and tacit cultural acceptance. By foregrounding both prevalence and normative framing, the WHO and UN Women reports provide essential definitional clarity and context for analyses that seek to understand how cultural artefacts such as proverbs can reflect, reinforce, or contest the ideologies that undergird gender-based violence.

Furthermore, while much of the existing literature on African proverbs discusses *representation*, that is, how proverbs depict gender roles and patriarchal values, this study distinguishes representation from *normalisation* as a distinct discursive process. Representation describes what is shown or referred to in a text; by contrast, normalisation involves the systematic reproduction of meanings that make certain behaviours appear natural, inevitable, or beyond question. In critical discourse studies, normalisation is not merely about depiction but about the discursive mechanisms through which particular attitudes become taken for granted in everyday language. For example, presupposition can embed assumptions about male authority without explicit assertion, while inevitability framing constructs unequal power relations as natural outcomes rather than socially produced ones (Fairclough, *Language and Power* 143–45). Moralisation and victim-blaming can frame violence against women not merely as descriptive content but as culturally justified corrective behaviour, and humour or “discipline as love” framing can trivialise harm by recasting it as an affectionate or educational act (van Dijk, *Discourse and Power* 57–59). By operationalising these mechanisms – presupposition, moralisation, naturalisation, humour, inevitability framing, victim-blame, and discipline-as-love – this study moves beyond descriptive representation of gender bias to demonstrate analytically how normalisation

is enacted through recurring linguistic patterns in proverbs.

Review of Relevant Literature

Proverbs as Ideology and Social Regulation

Scholarship in critical discourse studies has long established that proverbial discourse functions not merely as aesthetic ornamentation but as a mechanism of social regulation. Fairclough (*Language and Power* 14-15, 55-56) argues that discourse constitutes a form of social practice through which ideological meanings are naturalised and power relations stabilised. In this view, recurring textual forms, including proverbs, contribute to the reproduction of social structures by embedding normative assumptions within everyday language. Similarly, van Dijk (*Ideology* 8-9, 121) conceptualises ideology as socially shared belief systems that are enacted and reproduced through discourse, particularly in routine communicative forms that appear culturally self-evident. Proverbs, by virtue of their mnemonic authority and intergenerational transmission, are especially potent in this regard.

Within African studies, Finnegan (390-92) emphasises that proverbs operate as instruments of moral instruction and social control, frequently invoked in adjudication, conflict resolution, and public deliberation. Obiechina (156-57) further observes that Igbo proverbs function as “the palm oil with which words are eaten,” underscoring their legitimising authority in communal speech. When read alongside critical theories of discourse and ideology, such insights clarify that proverbs do not simply reflect cultural values; they participate in shaping, authorising, and policing them. This conceptual grounding is essential for distinguishing between representation and normalisation: while representation depicts social roles, normalisation operates through repetition, moral framing, and presupposition, rendering particular hierarchies commonsensical and morally binding.

Gender Representation in African Paremiology

A substantial body of African paremiological research documents patterned gender representation across linguistic communities. Hussein (60-62) demonstrates that African proverbs frequently encode masculinity as rational, authoritative, and socially normative, while femininity is associated with weakness or moral deficiency. Comparable findings emerge in Akan studies, where proverbs institutionalise gender hierarchy by embedding expectations of female obedience and domesticity within apparently neutral moral aphorisms (Gyan, Abbey, and Baffoe 1-3).

Research on Yoruba proverbial traditions likewise highlights metaphorical constructions that trivialise or discipline women’s agency (Adegbola 44-45; Balogun 25-31). In Southern Africa, Nyembezi (12-15)

catalogues proverbs that encode prescriptive gender roles, while later critical analyses reveal how such formulations reinforce patriarchal authority structures (Baloyi, *Gendered Character of Barrenness* 2). Ethiopian scholarship similarly documents recurrent negative portrayals of women in Amharic and related languages, linking such portrayals to enduring gender bias (Assefa 90-91; Gebeyehu 489). Taken together, these studies demonstrate that gender representation in African proverbs is rarely incidental. Instead, it is structured by historically sedimented patriarchal assumptions that position male authority as natural and female subordination as normative. Yet much of this scholarship remains descriptive, cataloguing representations without fully theorising the discursive mechanisms through which such representations acquire regulatory force.

Proverbs and Discursive Violence: What Exists and What Is Missing

Emerging scholarship has been examining how gendered proverbs may be contributing to what may be termed discursive violence. Pierre Bourdieu conceptualises symbolic violence as the subtle imposition of systems of meaning that legitimise domination while appearing natural (Masculine Domination 1–2). When proverbs frame women’s suffering as virtuous endurance or marital discipline as moral correction, they may function as symbolic instruments that obscure structural inequality.

In the South African context, Moloko-Phiri, Mulaudzi, and Heyns show how the proverb *lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi* exerts psychological pressure on women to remain in abusive marriages, thereby normalising endurance of harm (246). Such findings resonate with Johan Galtung notion of cultural violence, which refers to symbolic systems that render direct or structural violence socially acceptable (291-92). Despite these insights, explicit engagement with gender-based violence as a discursive outcome of proverb use remains limited. Much of the literature documents patriarchal bias but stops short of analysing how humour, inevitability framing, moralisation, or victim-blame embedded in proverbial forms may legitimise coercion or silence dissent. This lacuna underscores the need for a more systematic interrogation of proverbs as mechanisms in the discursive normalisation of violence.

Cross-Cultural versus Single-Culture Approaches

Most existing studies are grounded in single-ethnic or single-linguistic contexts, offering valuable depth but limited comparative scope. While such studies illuminate culturally specific dynamics, they risk presenting patriarchal proverb usage as uniquely local rather than structurally patterned. Comparative discourse analysis, as advocated by Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer, enables the identification of trans-contextual discursive strategies while

remaining attentive to socio-historical particularities (Wodak and Meyer 22-23). Cross-cultural comparison does not erase difference; rather, it reveals how analogous mechanisms of moralisation, presupposition, and naturalisation operate across distinct communities.

By juxtaposing proverbs from multiple African contexts, this study advances beyond ethnically bounded analysis to examine whether the discursive normalisation of gender-based violence reflects broader ideological patterns. Such a comparative move aligns with van Dijk's insistence that ideologies are socially shared yet contextually instantiated (*Ideology* 8-9). It therefore allows for a more rigorous assessment of how patriarchal discourse travels, adapts, and stabilises itself across cultural formations.

Discursive Legitimation, Symbolic Power, and the Normalisation of Violence

To strengthen the theoretical grounding of the present study, it is necessary to situate the analysis of proverbs within core frameworks of Critical Discourse Analysis and language-and-violence scholarship. Norman Fairclough conceptualises discourse as a form of social practice that both constitutes and is constituted by relations of power (*Language and Power* 14-15). He further argues that ideological meanings become naturalised when particular representations are repeatedly embedded within routine textual forms, thereby contributing to the reproduction of dominance (55-56). In the context of proverbs, this insight clarifies how seemingly neutral expressions may participate in the stabilisation of gender hierarchies. Representation alone does not entail normalisation; rather, normalisation occurs when discourse renders hierarchical meanings commonsensical, legitimate, and resistant to contestation.

Similarly, Teun A. van Dijk locates ideology at the interface between discourse, cognition, and social structure, arguing that ideologies are socially shared belief systems reproduced through everyday communicative practices (*Ideology* 8-9). He emphasises that discourse contributes to the maintenance of group dominance by shaping mental models and social knowledge (121-22). Proverbs, because of their brevity, memorability, and intergenerational transmission, are particularly effective vehicles for such ideological reproduction. When gendered assumptions are embedded within proverb usage, they do not merely describe social difference; they organise cognition in ways that normalise asymmetrical power relations.

A more granular account of discursive normalisation is provided by Theo van Leeuwen, whose model of legitimation identifies four principal strategies: authorisation, moral evaluation, rationalisation, and mythopoesis (106). Authorisation legitimises social practices through appeals to tradition,

law, or institutional authority (105-08), while moral evaluation draws upon shared value systems to frame actions as inherently right or wrong. Rationalisation justifies practices by reference to purpose or “the way things are” (116), and mythopoesis legitimises through narratives that reward conformity and punish deviation. These strategies are highly relevant to proverbial discourse. Appeals to “tradition” or “custom” exemplify authorisation; depictions of obedient women as virtuous enact moral evaluation; claims that male dominance reflects natural order instantiate theoretical rationalisation; and cautionary tales embedded in proverb usage illustrate mythopoesis. Through such mechanisms, proverbs may legitimate not only gender hierarchy but also the disciplining of women’s bodies and voices.

The operation of such legitimation must also be understood in relation to symbolic power. Pierre Bourdieu argues that symbolic power functions through the misrecognition of domination as natural, such that linguistic forms carry authority precisely because they are perceived as legitimate (*Language and Symbolic Power* 1-2, 37). Proverbs, often attributed to ancestral wisdom, derive authority from their association with collective tradition. This confers upon them a form of linguistic capital that can render contestation socially costly. In this sense, the normalisation of gendered violence is not enforced solely through coercion but through symbolic systems that secure consent.

The discursive construction of gender itself further illuminates how proverb usage may contribute to regulatory norms. Judith Butler contends that gender is not an ontological essence but a performative effect of reiterated norms (*Gender Trouble* 12). Speech acts participate in this reiteration, and injurious language can materialise and constrain subjects (*Excitable Speech* 15). When proverbs repeatedly associate femininity with submission or moral fragility, they contribute to the performative production of gendered expectations. Such reiteration does not merely mirror social reality; it helps to constitute it. The normalisation of violence thus emerges not only from explicit endorsement but from the sedimentation of norms that render women’s suffering intelligible, expected, or even virtuous (*Undoing Gender* 41-42).

Finally, Erving Goffman work on framing and social interaction offers insight into how proverbs organise interpretive schemas. Frames structure “the organisation of experience” by guiding participants’ understanding of events (*Frame Analysis* 10-11). If marital conflict, for instance, is framed through proverbs that equate endurance with honour, the interpretive field within which violence is evaluated is narrowed. Goffman’s discussion of stigma further demonstrates how social labels regulate interaction and identity

(*Communication and Enforcement Systems* 3-5). Proverbs that stigmatise women who resist patriarchal authority may thus function as interactional enforcement systems, discouraging dissent and reinforcing conformity (*Communication and Enforcement Systems* 68-69).

Collectively, these foundational theorists provide a coherent framework for analysing how proverbs move beyond representation to discursive normalisation. Through legitimisation strategies, symbolic authority, performative reiteration, and framing processes, gendered proverbial discourse may contribute to the reproduction of patriarchal power and the subtle legitimisation of violence.

Gaps in Existing Research: Legitimation of Violence in Proverbial Discourse

Although substantial scholarship has documented gender bias in African proverbs, very few studies move beyond description to analyse the *discursive legitimisation* of violence against women. Three representative studies illustrate this limitation clearly, underscoring the need for more nuanced analyses that link proverb discourse to frameworks of gender-based violence (GBV).

Firstly, Hussein's widely cited analysis of gender representation in African proverbs provides a comprehensive catalogue of stereotypes and prescriptive roles associated with men and women (Hussein 59-87). While this work demonstrates the ubiquity of patriarchal themes, it stops short of examining how specific linguistic patterns serve to legitimise or normalise violence. As critical discourse scholars point out, identification of bias does not automatically reveal the *mechanisms* through which bias becomes embedded and reproduced (Fairclough, *Language and Power* 14-15). Thus, although Hussein identifies misogynistic representations, the study does not unpack how proverbs function rhetorically to justify coercive behaviour or diminish the seriousness of harm.

A second representative study by Gyan, Abbey, and Baffoe examines Akan proverbs and their reinforcement of traditional gender roles in Ghanaian society (Gyan, Abbey, and Baffoe 1-10). Their findings are valuable in highlighting how proverbs contribute to the socialisation of gender norms, but the analysis remains at the level of content description rather than discursive process. Specifically, the study does not investigate how moral evaluation, metaphor, or appeal to custom in these proverbs might rhetorically legitimise behaviour that perpetuates women's subordination, including violence. The absence of a connection to GBV frameworks – such as those found in gender studies or peace and conflict research (Heise et al. 1168-76) – means that the broader implications of proverb discourse for women's lived experiences are not fully theorised.

Thirdly, Balogun's work on Yoruba proverbs as instruments of social control offers valuable insights into how language embeds cultural norms (Balogun 21-36). However, like the previous two studies, it foregrounds gendered meaning and social norms without analysing mechanisms of legitimisation. Balogun does not engage with how proverbs might function to rationalise *or* authorise violence against women, nor does the study link its findings to intersectional frameworks of GBV that consider power, authority, and normalisation. This gap mirrors broader trends in language and violence research where symbolic or structural violence is acknowledged theoretically but rarely traced through specific linguistic patterns (Galtung 291-305).

In contrast to these descriptive approaches, a critical discourse perspective emphasises the *processes* through which language legitimates social practices (Fairclough, *Language and Power* 55-56; van Leeuwen 105-08). As Theo van Leeuwen's model of legitimation shows, discourse can render social hierarchies and practices acceptable through strategies such as authorisation, moral evaluation, rationalisation, and mythopoesis (106). Without attention to these processes, studies of proverbs risk documenting stereotypes without explaining how they participate in the normalisation of violence.

In the field of gender and violence studies, researchers such as Heise et al. argue that understanding GBV requires moving beyond identification of attitudes to analysing norms and mechanisms that sustain harmful behaviour (1168-76). By integrating insights from critical discourse analysis with frameworks of gender-based violence – for example, the ecological model that situates individual behaviour within cultural and structural contexts – scholarship on proverbs can more effectively illuminate how seemingly innocuous cultural expressions may contribute to the legitimisation of harm. By identifying these gaps, the present study positions itself to contribute to a more robust understanding of how proverbs do not merely reflect gender inequality but may function as discursive vehicles that legitimise, justify, or normalise violence against women.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive research design grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and cross-cultural comparative methods. The objective is to examine how proverbs drawn from diverse African and non-African contexts discursively construct gender relations and potentially normalise patriarchal violence. In line with established qualitative approaches in the social sciences, proverbs are treated as culturally embedded texts that reflect and reproduce social ideologies rather than as isolated linguistic artefacts (Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis* 71-75; Wodak and Meyer 3-5). The corpus comprises 40 proverbs: 21 African and 19 non-African. The

African proverbs were selected from the Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, Amharic, Bukusu, and Frafra traditions, while the non-African ones come from European and Asian contexts for comparative balance. The data were drawn from two primary sources: (1) published collections and (2) peer-reviewed articles. Only sources with identifiable authorship, publication details, or institutional affiliation were included in order to ensure reliability and traceability.

The sampling procedure followed a purposive and criterion-based approach, consistent with qualitative research standards (Creswell and Poth 7-9, 155-156). An initial pool of 65 proverbs relating broadly to gender and social relations was compiled. From this pool, proverbs were screened using a keyword and thematic filter designed to identify references to women, wives, daughters, mothers, femininity, or gendered behavioural expectations. Keywords included terms equivalent to *woman, wife, mother, daughter, female, obedience, discipline, violence, and authority* in the respective languages. Proverbs that did not directly or implicitly reference female identity or gendered power dynamics were excluded. Following this filtering process, 21 African and 19 non-African proverbs were selected for detailed analysis. Selection criteria required that each proverb contain (a) explicit reference to women or femininity, or (b) implicit gendered assumptions that positioned women within hierarchical or disciplinary frameworks.

The analytical procedure combines Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) with Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA). CDA conceptualises discourse as a form of social practice through which power and ideology are produced and reproduced (Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis* 71-75; Wodak and Meyer 3-5, 15). Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) extends this framework by foregrounding the ways in which discourse sustains gendered hierarchies and patriarchal norms (Lazar, *Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis: Gender, Power and Ideology in Discourse* 1-3, 11-14).

The analysis proceeded in three stages. First, each proverb was subjected to close textual reading to identify lexical choices, metaphors, evaluative adjectives, and semantic presuppositions relating to gender and authority. Particular attention was paid to imagery involving discipline, control, silence, obedience, and punishment. Second, the proverbs were contextualised within their socio-cultural environments using secondary ethnographic and sociolinguistic literature. This step ensured that interpretations were not decontextualised or rendered anachronistic. Third, the proverbs were grouped into thematic clusters reflecting recurrent discursive patterns as follows:

- Cluster A: Discipline as entitlement (wife-beating as correction)
- Cluster B: Violence as affection expression (beating as proof of love)

- Cluster C: Victim-blame and provocation frames
- Cluster D: Dehumanisation via animal/object metaphors
- Cluster E: Masculinity as control and dominance

This thematic categorisation enabled systematic comparison across cultural contexts while preserving sensitivity to local variation. To enhance analytical rigour, interpretive decisions were cross-checked against existing proverb scholarship and gender-studies literature. Where translations were required, attention was given to semantic equivalence rather than literal correspondence, and glosses were compared across multiple sources when available. The study also recognises the researcher’s positionality within contemporary gender discourse; reflexive awareness was maintained in order to avoid imposing external normative judgements without textual justification.

Data¹ Presentation

African Proverbs: Typology of Discursive Legitimation in Gendered Proverbial Violence

In line with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA), this section organises the proverbial data into analytical clusters that foreground the linguistic mechanisms through which violence is discursively normalised. CDA conceptualises discourse as a social practice through which power relations and ideological structures are produced and reproduced (Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis* 71-75; Wodak and Meyer 3-5, 15). FCDA extends this perspective by examining how discourse sustains patriarchal authority and gendered asymmetries (Lazar *Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis: Articulating a Feminist Discourse Praxis* 1-3, 11-14). The analysis below identifies lexical selections, grammatical constructions, transitivity patterns, and pragmatic framing devices that encode entitlement, inevitability, and moral justification.

A. Discipline as Entitlement (Wife-Beating as Correction)

1. *Pashan ta fi na yale, oun be laja fun yawo* – “The whip that was used to beat the first wife is kept for the second wife” (Yoruba) (Balogun 25)
2. *Doseka n gme pogi keema la, n gme’ere pogsariga* – “The stick used to beat the first wife will be used on the second wife” (Frafra) (Baataar, Agana and Akapule 9)
3. *Nwaanyi na-dighi anuru di ya okwu, itali ka e ji ezi ya ibe.* – “A woman that is disobedient to her husband must be taught obedience with the cane.” (Igbo) (Agbedo, Obiora, and Ahamefula 48-49)
4. *Eyaapa nabulobe, elipa nabukelema* – “The cane that beat the sent-away wife will also beat the incoming” (Bukusu) (Barasa and Opande 166).
5. *Nsati wa le nbongeni a nga yingisi* – “A woman who is always beaten with

a stick does not mind being beaten anymore” (Tsonga-Shangana) (Baloyi, *Wife Beating* 4).

6. *Setanna abayya bādulla* – “A woman and a donkey are controlled by a stick” (Amharic) (Assefa 77)

These proverbs rely heavily on generic present constructions (“is kept,” “does not mind”), future inevitability (“will be used”), and deontic modality (“must be taught”), which encode recurrence and moral obligation. The repeated lexical items “*whip*,” “*stick*,” and “*cane*” institutionalise violence as a legitimate corrective instrument. The Yoruba, Frafra, Igbo and Bukusu proverbs in (1), (2), (3) and (4) construct violence as transferable and continuous through parallel clause structure, implying that the disciplinary practice transcends individual women.

The Tsonga proverb in (5) uses habitual aspect and frequency marking (“always beaten”), which routinises assault and frames desensitisation as an expected outcome. In CDA terms, such constructions contribute to the naturalisation of coercion by presenting it as customary practice rather than contingent abuse (Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis* 75). Van Leeuwen identifies this appeal to tradition and repetition as a form of authorisation through custom (105–08). Marriage is constructed as a hierarchical structure in which husbands possess disciplinary rights. Physical violence is legitimised as pedagogical correction. Endurance of beating is normalised as a female condition rather than a violation of rights.

B: Violence as Affection (Beating as Proof of Love)

7. “If you really love your wife, you have to beat her” (Tigrinya) (Tatar 44).

8. “Now the marriage is going to begin, as the neglected wife said, when she was flogged with thorns” (Hausa) (Tatar 44).

9. *Ku teka nsati i ku boxa nyoka exinkwameni* – “To marry is to put a snake in one’s handbag” (Tsonga-Shangana) (Baloyi, *Wife Beating* 4).

The conditional clause in (7), “If you really love,” constructs violence as an index of emotional authenticity. The modal verb “have to” encodes obligation, transforming assault into a proof of relational commitment. The Hausa proverb in (8) employs narrative framing, exemplifying what van Leeuwen calls mythopoesis, where storytelling legitimises behaviour by embedding it within a moral sequence (106). The Tsonga proverb in (9) metaphorically casts marriage as containment of danger. While not explicitly violent, it frames wives as inherently threatening, thereby pre-emptively rationalising coercive control. FCDA emphasises that repeated metaphorical constructions stabilise gender hierarchies by linking femininity with disorder and masculinity with corrective authority (Lazar, *Feminist Critical Discourse*

Analysis: Articulating a Feminist Discourse Praxis 11–14). Male love is equated with authority and discipline. Violence becomes a relational act rather than an ethical transgression. Women are expected to interpret coercion as commitment.

C: Victim-Blame and Provocation Frames

10. “Beat your wife regularly; if you do not know why, she will know why” (West Africa) (Tatar 43).

11. *Zhinakubilayikambunjimatukakabaeyineyitalakuowumuvumburuchinana* – Lunda proverb ridiculing a wife after being beaten (Mutunda 521).

12. *Chanunantunū* – “A roof remover,” implying a woman provokes violence (Lunda) (Mutunda 521).

The imperative verb in (10), “Beat,” directly commands violence. The adverb “regularly” encodes habitual repetition, transforming assault into routine practice. The clause “she will know why” presupposes female culpability and shifts epistemic responsibility to the victim. The Lunda proverb in (11) deploys ridicule and metaphor to infantilise the assaulted wife. Mutunda observes that such proverbs portray women as children who require correction (521). The grammatical erasure of male agency reflects what van Dijk describes as ideological framing that represents dominant actors as rational while subordinated actors are constructed as blameworthy (*Ideology* 121–22). Furthermore, in (12) the woman is positioned as the cause of male aggression, with violence thereby cast as a justified response or means of preventative discipline rather than abuse.

D: Dehumanisation through Animal and Object Metaphors

13. “A woman and a donkey are controlled by a stick” (Amharic) (Assefa 77).

14. “A woman and a donkey can tolerate everything” (Amharic) (Assefa 77).

15. “A mother is trampled like the earth” (Amharic) (Assefa 77).

16. *Ku teka nsati i ku hoxa nyoka exinkwameni* – “To marry is to put a snake in one’s handbag” (Tsonga-Shangana) (Baloyi, *Wife Beating* 4).

The proverbs in (13-16) rely on simile and nominal comparison, equating women with animals and inanimate objects. Such metaphors reduce women to entities lacking agency. In FCDA, dehumanisation functions as a discursive strategy that legitimises domination by symbolically lowering the moral status of the target group (Lazar, *Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis: Articulating a Feminist Discourse Praxis* 11–14). Bourdieu argues that symbolic power operates through misrecognition, whereby arbitrary hierarchies appear natural (37). By comparing women to donkeys or snakes, the proverbs encode endurance and

danger as intrinsic female qualities, thereby diminishing the perceived gravity of violence against them. Women's suffering is trivialised while endurance of abuse is constructed as inherent to female identity.

E: Masculinity as Control and Dominance

17. "When asked over whom he enjoys victory, he said: 'My wife'" (Amharic) (Assefa 77).

18. "When a man was beaten in a forum, he went home and beat his wife" (Amharic) (Assefa 77).

19. "When ordered to hit someone, he runs to his wife" (Amharic) (Assefa 77).

20. "When he was allowed to whip whomever he can, the husband returned home and whipped his wife" (Oromo, Ethiopian; Hussein 86)

21. *Lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi* – "The grave of a woman is in her marriage or in-laws" (South African proverb) (Baloyi, *A Re-reading* 5).

The Amharic and Oromo proverbs (19 & 20) foreground material process verbs ("beat", "hit" "whip") in which the wife is consistently positioned as Goal in transitivity structures. Such repeated syntactic positioning encodes asymmetrical power relations. The South African proverb in (21) uses existential and locative framing to deny women the right to exit violent marriages. Baloyi explains that it implies a woman must remain in her marriage even under life-threatening conditions (*A Re-reading* 5). The absence of a parallel expectation for men illustrates what FCDA identifies as asymmetrical norm construction (Lazar, *Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis: Articulating a Feminist Discourse Praxis* 12). Goffman's notion of framing suggests that repeated narrative patterns shape expectations of legitimate conduct (10–11). Here, masculinity is constructed as the capacity to assert dominance and restore status through control over women. Male authority is reaffirmed through domination. Female endurance of violence is framed as marital obligation.

Across clusters, the linguistic markers of normalisation are consistent:

- Imperatives ("Beat your wife")
- Deontic modality ("must," "have to")
- Generic present tense ("is kept," "does not mind")
- Habitual frequency markers ("always," "regularly")
- Metaphorical comparisons (woman as donkey, snake, child)
- Transitivity patterns positioning women as affected objects

These features transform contingent acts of violence into socially sanctioned norms. As Fairclough argues, ideology becomes most effective when embedded in routine discourse and presented as common sense (75). The proverbs analysed here therefore function not merely as reflections of

patriarchy but as discursive mechanisms that legitimise and reproduce gender-based violence across cultural contexts.

Non-African Proverbs: Typology of Discursive Legitimation in Gendered Proverbial Violence

As noted earlier, the discursive normalisation of gender-based violence is not confined to African cultural contexts. Cross-cultural proverbial traditions in Europe, Asia, the Americas, and the Middle East contain expressions that explicitly endorse the beating of women as corrective, necessary, or even virtuous behaviour. Drawing on collections cited in Fernández's study of Spanish proverbial discourse and Tatar's cross-cultural compilation (citing Schipper), this section also organises the non-African data into analytical clusters.

A: Discipline as Entitlement (Wife-Beating as Correction)

22. "The ass and the woman must be beaten with sticks" (Spanish tradition) (Fernández 89).
23. "A bad woman and a good woman both need the rod" (Spanish, Argentina) (Tatar 44).
24. "Clubbing produces virtuous wives" (Chinese) (Tatar 44).
25. "A woman who is beaten is going to be a better wife" (Korean) (Tatar 44).
26. "A nut, a stockfish, and a young wife should be beaten, in order to be good" (Polish) (Tatar 44)

The modal verb "must" in (22) encodes deontic obligation, presenting violence as a normative requirement rather than a contingent action. The generic noun phrases "the ass and the woman" collapse individuality into type categories, thereby universalising the claim. In (23), the determiner pair "a bad woman and a good woman" eliminates behavioural distinction, implying that violence is justified irrespective of moral conduct. Proverbs (24) and (25) rely on causative constructions ("produces," "is going to be") that frame beating as instrumentally effective in generating virtue. Such grammatical structuring presents violence as pedagogically productive. Fairclough notes that modality and generic statements function ideologically by transforming socially constructed hierarchies into apparent inevitabilities (*Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* 75). Within FCDA, these patterns demonstrate how patriarchal authority is sustained through discursive claims of corrective necessity (Lazar, *Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis: Articulating a Feminist Discourse Praxis* 12). Women are positioned as subjects requiring physical discipline to attain moral virtue. Violence is framed as corrective entitlement embedded within marital governance.

B: Violence as Affection (Beating as Proof of Love or Relational Maintenance)

27. “Women, like dogs: the more you beat them, the more they love you” (Spanish, Argentina) (Tatar 44).

28. “If you don’t thrash your wife, she might think she’s already a widow” (Armenian) (Tatar 45).

29. “For who beats up his wife, God improves the food” (Russian) (Tatar 44).

30. “If your lover hits you, it’s only comfort” (Romanian) (Tatar 44).

Proverb (27) uses comparative syntax (“like dogs”) and scalar intensification (“the more... the more”) to construct violence as proportionally linked to affection. The correlative comparative clause naturalises escalating abuse as increasing emotional reward. In (28), the conditional clause (“If you don’t thrash...”) encodes beating as preventative maintenance. The hypothetical outcome (“she might think she’s already a widow”) frames non-violence as destabilising male authority. The Russian proverb (29) introduces divine sanction. The declarative structure implies that God rewards wife-beating, thereby invoking what van Leeuwen describes as authorisation through higher moral authority (105–08). Violence is not merely tolerated but spiritually legitimised. Physical punishment is constructed as evidence of masculine involvement, authority, and relational vigilance. Non-violence is framed as neglect.

C: Victim-Blame and Provocation Frames

31. “The man who cannot slaughter his sheep or beat his wife [when she deserves it], it is better for him to die than to live” (Arabic, Maghreb) (Tatar 43).

32. “To keep your wife on the rails, beat her – and if she goes off the rails, beat her” (Spanish, Puerto Rico) (Tatar 44).

The embedded clause “when she deserves it” in (31) presupposes female culpability. The conditional framing establishes violence as justified response to perceived wrongdoing. The evaluative comparison (“better for him to die than to live”) ties masculine worth to capacity for violence, constructing beating as proof of legitimate manhood. Proverb (32) uses imperative structure (“beat her”) and parallel repetition. The cyclical logic (“keep... beat her... if... beat her”) removes the possibility of alternative responses. This repetition encodes inevitability and routinisation. Van Dijk argues that ideological discourse often constructs subordinate groups as responsible for their own subordination (*Ideology* 121–22). Here, women are discursively framed as deserving or necessitating violence. Violence is justified as rational response to female deviance. Masculinity is measured through the capacity to

enforce obedience physically.

D: Dehumanisation through Animal and Object Metaphors

33. “A woman, a dog and a walnut tree, the harder you beat them, the better they be” (English, UK/USA) (Tatar 45).

34. “Women and steaks, the more you beat them, the better they’ll be” (German) (Tatar 45).

35. “Good horses and bad horses need the spurs, good women and bad women need the whip” (European and American variants) (Tatar 44).

36. “To a woman and a dog, a stick in one hand and bread in the other” (Spanish) (Fernández 86).

These proverbs employ simultaneous nominal listing, equating women with animals, food, and agricultural objects. The correlative comparative construction (“the harder... the better”) suggests measurable improvement through violence. By embedding women within lists of domesticated or consumable entities, the syntax strips them of subjectivity and aligns them with property. Bourdieu’s notion of symbolic power is relevant here: domination becomes naturalised through classificatory language that appears commonsensical (37). FCDA identifies such metaphors as dehumanising strategies that lower moral status and facilitate justification of harm (Lazar, *Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis: Articulating a Feminist Discourse Praxis* 11-14). Women are framed as manageable objects whose value increases through physical force. Violence is represented as a legitimate tool of refinement.

E: Masculinity as Control and Dominance

37. “Do not spare a bullock or a wife” (Burmese) (Tatar 44).

38. “Caulk a new boat; beat a new wife” (Khiongha) (Tatar 44).

39. “The nails of a cart and the head of a woman, they only work when they are hit hard” (Rajasthani) (Tatar 44).

40. “Wring a wife’s and a hen’s neck, if you want them good” (European and American variants) (Tatar 45).

Imperatives (“Do not spare”) encode authoritative instruction. The structural parallelism between agricultural or mechanical objects and wives situates women within domains of ownership and maintenance. In (38), the juxtaposition of “caulk” and “beat” equates marital initiation with mechanical adjustment. The syntactic coordination implies equivalence between tools and wives. Proverb (39) uses mechanical metaphor and necessity marker (“only work when”) to present violence as functional prerequisite. Such constructions exemplify what Fairclough terms naturalisation: socially contingent practices presented as technical necessity (*Critical Discourse Analysis*:

The Critical Study of Language 75). Masculinity is constructed as supervisory control over women. Physical force is normalised as a maintenance strategy essential for order and functionality.

Across the clusters, several recurring linguistic features emerge thus:

- Imperative verbs (“beat,” “do not spare,” “wring”)
- Deontic modality (“must,” “need,” “should”)
- Correlative comparatives (“the more... the more”)
- Generic noun phrases (“a woman,” “the wife”)
- Conditional clauses presupposing female guilt
- Nominal listings equating women with animals or objects

These grammatical and lexical strategies convert violence from an individual act into a socially sanctioned norm. As Fairclough argues, ideology operates most effectively when embedded in routine linguistic practice and presented as common sense (*Critical Discourse Analysis* 75). The cross-cultural recurrence of these discursive structures indicates not isolated prejudice but patterned ideological reproduction. While originating in diverse cultural contexts, the proverbs analysed here share a common discursive logic: they legitimise male authority, encode entitlement, and naturalise violence as corrective, affectionate, preventive, or functional. Recognising these linguistic mechanisms is essential for dismantling the cultural narratives that continue to normalise gender-based violence globally.

Discussion of Findings

The first and most consistent finding concerns the systematic legitimization of coercion through moral evaluation, obligation, and authorisation. Across both African and non-African corpora, imperatives (“Beat your wife”), deontic modal verbs (“must”, “have to”, “need”), and generic present constructions (“is kept”, “does not mind”) frame physical violence as normatively required rather than ethically problematic. Within Critical Discourse Analysis, such modality is understood as a key mechanism through which discourse encodes authority and constructs social necessity (Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis* 71-75). Van Leeuwen similarly identifies authorisation through tradition, custom, and higher moral order as a central strategy in the legitimization of social practices (105-08). In the proverbial data, violence is repeatedly presented as corrective pedagogy, divine expectation, or proof of responsible masculinity. These linguistic patterns do not merely describe behaviour; they prescribe it. The recurrence of material process verbs (“beat”, “whip”, “thrash”) in transitivity structures where women are consistently positioned as Goal reinforces asymmetrical power relations. Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) emphasises that such grammatical positioning contributes to the reproduction of patriarchal hierarchies by normalising male disciplinary

authority (Lazar, *Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis: Articulating a Feminist Discourse Praxis* 11-14). The finding, therefore, is not simply that proverbs contain violent imagery, but that they encode coercion as morally sanctioned and socially intelligible conduct.

A second finding concerns the recurrent deployment of animal and object metaphors that symbolically reduce women's moral status. Nominal listings equating women with donkeys, dogs, snakes, horses, or mechanical objects function as classificatory devices. Bourdieu argues that symbolic power operates precisely through such acts of categorisation, which render arbitrary hierarchies natural and self-evident (*Language and Symbolic Power* 37). Within FCDA, metaphor is recognised as a powerful ideological resource that stabilises inequality by embedding it in seemingly commonsensical imagery (Lazar, *Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis: Articulating a Feminist Discourse Praxis* 11-14). When women are syntactically coordinated with domesticated animals or consumable goods, they are discursively relocated from the realm of autonomous subjects to that of manageable property. The correlative comparative construction (“the more... the more”) further encodes violence as instrumentally productive. Dehumanisation thus emerges not as rhetorical exaggeration but as a structured pathway through which harm becomes morally trivialised and socially defensible.

A third pattern involves the presupposition of female culpability and the framing of violence as inevitable response. Conditional clauses (“if she deserves it”), habitual frequency markers (“always”, “regularly”), and cyclical imperatives remove contingency and construct assault as preventive maintenance. Van Dijk notes that ideological discourse frequently attributes responsibility for social harm to subordinated groups, thereby legitimising domination (*Ideology* 121-22). In the corpus, women are positioned as provocateurs, disobedient subjects, or inherent sources of disorder. Such constructions align with global research on gender-based violence, which demonstrates that victim-blaming narratives contribute significantly to its persistence (World Health Organization 9-12). By embedding inevitability within grammar and repetition, the proverbs transform contingent acts into predictable social outcomes. The discursive effect is to shift moral scrutiny away from male agency and project it on female behaviour.

A fourth finding concerns patterned cross-cultural recurrence. Similar linguistic strategies appear across geographically and linguistically distinct traditions, including African, European, Middle Eastern, and Asian corpora. Recurrence here does not imply cultural uniformity; rather, it denotes the repetition of comparable discursive mechanisms: imperatives of correction, divine authorisation, animal metaphors, and correlative comparatives linking violence to improvement. Importantly, this corpus is purposively selected for

proverbs containing violent or coercive imagery. It does not claim statistical representativeness of entire continents or cultures. The finding, therefore, concerns patterned discursive logic within a defined dataset, not universal cultural disposition. The recurrence indicates that patriarchal ideology travels through analogous linguistic strategies across contexts, reinforcing what Connell describes as hegemonic configurations of masculinity that legitimise gender hierarchy (77-81).

However, it would not be fair to suggest that such proverbs are the more pervasive in the cultures from which they have been drawn. Indeed, many of these languages equally have counter-discursive examples of proverbs and other idiomatic forms that in fact acknowledge and celebrate women's wisdom, moral authority, and social significance. For example, the Yoruba proverb *Iya ni wura, baba ni jigi* (Adegbola 55), translated as "Mother is gold, father is a mirror," elevates maternal worth by associating motherhood with intrinsic value. Similarly, a Chewa proverb, "Mother is God number two" (Dipio 18), symbolically attributes a near-sacred status to maternal care. Again, a Kikuyu proverb maintains that "As long as grandmother is in the house, the rain will not spoil the millet" (Dickson and Mbosowo 638), thus positioning elderly women as models of stability and protection. In the Hausa expression *Uwa ita ke maganin kukan danta*, interpreted as "The mother wipes the tears of the child" (Dickson and Mbosowo 638), maternal compassion is foregrounded as restorative and indispensable. Collectively, these proverbs construct women as central to familial continuity, moral guidance, and emotional sustenance.

Nevertheless, despite their affirmative tone, these proverbs differ markedly in discursive function from those that legitimise coercion. Their grammatical structure is predominantly declarative and metaphorical rather than imperative or deontic. They do not encode obligation, command, or behavioural enforcement. Instead, they operate through praise and symbolic elevation, frequently confining women's value to nurturing, protective, or supportive roles within domestic space. Unlike the violent proverbs analysed earlier, they lack prescriptive force and do not regulate conduct through modality or direct instruction. Their usage appears largely ceremonial or rhetorical, reinforcing ideals rather than enforcing discipline. This asymmetry indicates that while empowering proverbs are present within the cultural repertoire, their normative authority is comparatively weaker. The contrast underscores the importance of examining not merely the existence of positive representations, but their relative discursive weight and regulatory power within broader systems of patriarchal expression.

These findings therefore emphasise the importance of educational and policy interventions grounded in language awareness. As curriculum research

demonstrates, critical language education can disrupt the naturalisation of discriminatory discourse by making linguistic mechanisms visible (Janks 25-28). Feminist pedagogy similarly advocates critical literacy practices that enable learners to interrogate inherited narratives rather than reproduce them uncritically (Hooks 41-49). At the policy level, language planning frameworks increasingly recognise that public discourse shapes behavioural norms (Spolsky 4-7). Behaviour-change scholarship further indicates that shifting social norms requires challenging narratives that legitimise harm (Cislaghi and Heise 616-20). Integrating critical proverb analysis into civic education, teacher training, and media literacy programmes could therefore contribute to long-term attitudinal transformation. Such interventions should not aim to eradicate oral tradition but to foster reflexive engagement. Reinterpretation, contextualisation, and the creation of alternative proverbs can operate as culturally embedded strategies of resistance. As global data indicate that nearly one in three women worldwide has experienced physical or sexual violence (World Health Organization 2), confronting the linguistic normalisation of coercion is not merely a scholarly exercise but a matter of social urgency.

In sum, the discussion demonstrates that the analysed proverbs function as discursive technologies of patriarchy. Through moral authorisation, dehumanising metaphor, victim-blame framing, and routinised grammar, they transform violence from aberration into expectation. Recognising these mechanisms enables more precise intervention at the level of discourse, education, and policy, while avoiding over-generalisation beyond the limits of the corpus.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine how selected African proverbs, read comparatively alongside non-African corpora, function discursively in relation to patriarchy and the normalisation of violence. Drawing on Critical Discourse Analysis and Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis, it analysed a purposively selected corpus of proverbs containing coercive or disciplinary imagery in order to identify patterned linguistic mechanisms through which gender hierarchy is reproduced. The aim was not to generalise about entire cultures or continents, but to interrogate the discursive logic embedded in a defined body of texts.

Four principal findings emerge, each best understood as a recurring discourse pattern. First, the corpus demonstrates the systematic legitimisation of coercion through moral evaluation, deontic modality, and authorisation. Imperatives and modal constructions encode violence as obligation, corrective duty, or divine expectation, thereby transforming contingent acts into socially sanctioned practice. Such patterns align with accounts of authorisation and

moral legitimization in discourse (Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis* 55-56; van Leeuwen 105-08), but this study shows their operation with particular clarity in proverbial form, where brevity and repetition intensify normative force.

Secondly, the data reveal the recurrent use of animal and object metaphors as classificatory devices that symbolically diminish women's moral and social status. By coordinating women syntactically with domesticated animals, tools, or consumable goods, the proverbs enact what Pierre Bourdieu terms symbolic power: the naturalisation of hierarchy through everyday categorization (*Masculine Domination* 1-2). Within the corpus, metaphor does not function ornamentally; it repositions women from autonomous subjects to manageable property, thereby trivialising harm and reinforcing asymmetrical agency.

Thirdly, the proverbs frequently presuppose female culpability and frame violence as inevitable response. Conditional clauses, habitual markers, and cyclical imperatives shift moral responsibility from male actors to female behaviour, echoing patterns identified in ideological discourse analysis. In grammatical terms, male agency is normalised while female provocation is presupposed. The discursive effect is to render violence predictable, preventative, and morally intelligible rather than aberrant.

Fourthly, comparable linguistic strategies recur across geographically and linguistically distinct traditions. While the corpus is not statistically representative, the patterned repetition of corrective imperatives, divine authorisation, dehumanising metaphor, and productivity-linked comparatives indicates that patriarchal ideology travels through analogous discursive mechanisms. In this respect, the findings resonate with R. W. Connell's account of hegemonic masculinities (77), yet they extend that framework by demonstrating how such configurations are stabilised and circulated through micro-level proverbial grammar rather than only through institutional structures.

Collectively, these findings contribute to proverb and gender scholarship in three principal ways. First, whereas much earlier research has catalogued misogynistic imagery or thematically described patriarchal values, this study specifies the linguistic mechanisms – modality, transitivity, presupposition, metaphor, and genericity – through which violence becomes discursively authorised. Secondly, it introduces a cross-cultural comparative lens that identifies shared discursive logics without collapsing cultural difference into homogenising claims. Thirdly, it differentiates between affirmative and coercive proverbs in terms of their regulatory force, demonstrating that positive depictions of women often lack the prescriptive modality that characterises violent injunctions. The analysis therefore shifts

the debate from representation alone to normative authority and discursive power.

These contributions must, however, be understood against the backdrop of the study's limitations. The corpus is purposively sampled and restricted to proverbs containing violent or coercive imagery; therefore, it cannot be taken as representative of entire linguistic traditions. The study relies primarily on published collections and translated texts, which may reflect editorial selection, contextual loss, or translational smoothing of modality and metaphor. Furthermore, the analysis examines discursive potential rather than actual uptake: it does not include reception data indicating how contemporary speakers interpret, resist, or reinterpret these proverbs in practice.

Future research should therefore move from textual analysis to reception-focused design. Interviews and focus groups could explore how proverbs are understood across age groups, educational levels, and urban – rural contexts, thereby assessing whether coercive formulations retain normative authority or are critically re-contextualised. Ethnographic observation of proverb use in specific speech events – marriage negotiations, conflict mediation, classroom interaction, or media discourse – would illuminate how and when such expressions acquire performative force. Comparative generational analysis would further clarify whether discursive normalisation translates into social endorsement or whether alternative readings are emerging. Such approaches would enable scholars to move from identifying discursive potential to examining social uptake.

In conclusion, this study has demonstrated that selected proverbs function as discursive technologies through which patriarchal authority and the normalisation of violence are linguistically sustained. By identifying patterned mechanisms of moral authorisation, dehumanisation, victim-blaming, and cross-cultural recurrence, it makes explicit and limited claims about the ideological work performed within a defined corpus. At the same time, by acknowledging its methodological limits and outlining a reception-oriented research pathway, the study positions itself as a foundation for further empirical inquiry into how proverbial discourse is contested, transformed, or reproduced in contemporary social life.

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Note

1 This study necessarily reproduces proverbs that contain explicit representations of physical violence and derogatory constructions of women. The inclusion of such material entails ethical risk, particularly in light of the

potential to re-traumatise readers, to appear to amplify misogynistic language, or to reproduce harmful stereotypes about specific cultural communities. These proverbs are therefore cited not for rhetorical effect, nor to sensationalise their content, but as primary linguistic data required for critical analysis. Given that Critical Discourse Analysis conceptualises discourse as a form of social practice through which power relations are produced and reproduced, it is methodologically indispensable to examine the wording, metaphors, grammatical structures, and presuppositions through which violence is normalised. The proverbs are quoted verbatim only where analytically necessary, and they are consistently framed within a critical interpretive context that makes explicit their ideological work.

Care has also been taken to avoid presenting such expressions as representative of entire cultures or as evidence of inherent cultural pathology. The analysis treats proverbs as historically situated discursive artefacts whose meanings are shaped by specific socio-political conditions and patriarchal structures, rather than as fixed reflections of collective moral character. Furthermore, the discussion foregrounds the global and cross-cultural circulation of gendered violence discourses, thereby resisting the stigmatisation of any single linguistic or ethnic community. By maintaining a scholarly tone, limiting quotation to what is strictly required for analysis, and situating all examples within a framework that condemns rather than reproduces violence, this study seeks to balance analytical rigour with ethical responsibility and sensitivity to affected readers and communities.

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