

Cultural Meanings Of *Zeit* in Proverbs: A Comparative Study Between Indonesian and German

Amalina Rachmi Fatina¹,

¹Universitas Negeri Surabaya, amalinafatina@unesa.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the cultural meanings of time (*Zeit*) in German and Indonesian proverbs through a comparative semantic and pragmatic analysis. Grounded in Cultural Linguistics and Cognitive Semantics, the research examines how time-related proverbs encode culturally shared conceptualizations, metaphors, and value systems. Drawing on selected German proverbs such as *Zeit ist Geld*, *Was du heute kannst besorgen, das verschiebe nicht auf morgen*, *Morgenstunde hat Gold im Mund*, and *Gute Dinge will Weile haben*, *Kommt Zeit, kommt Rat*, *Die Zeit heilt alle Wunden* and their Indonesian counterparts including *Waktu adalah uang*, *Hari ini harus lebih baik dari hari kemarin* *Siapa cepat dia dapat*, *Sedikit demi sedikit, lama-lama menjadi bukit*, *Ada masanya ada waktunya*, and *Waktu adalah penyembuh terbaik*. The findings reveal that German proverbs predominantly reflect a monochronic, linear, and efficiency-oriented model of time, emphasizing punctuality, productivity, and economic value. In contrast, Indonesian proverbs tend to express a more flexible and process-oriented perspective, highlighting patience, harmony, and gradual progress. Despite these differences, both traditions share universal metaphors such as time as a healer and time as a source of wisdom. The study demonstrates that proverbs serve as linguistic repositories of cultural chronemics and offer valuable insights for intercultural communication and language education.

Key Words: *time metaphor, German proverbs, Indonesian proverbs, cultural linguistics, comparative study*

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini menyelidiki makna budaya waktu (*Zeit*) dalam peribahasa Jerman dan Indonesia melalui analisis semantik komparatif dan pragmatis. Berlandaskan Linguistik Budaya dan Semantik Kognitif, penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana peribahasa yang berkaitan dengan waktu menyandikan konseptualisasi, metafora, dan sistem nilai yang dimiliki bersama secara budaya. Berdasarkan peribahasa Jerman terpilih seperti *Zeit ist Geld*, *Was du heute kannst besorgen, das verschiebe nicht auf morgen*, *Morgenstunde hat Gold im Mund*, dan *Gute Dinge will Weile haben*, *Kommt Zeit, kommt Rat*, *Die Zeit heilt alle Wunden* dan padanan bahasa Indonesianya termasuk *Waktu adalah uang*, *Hari ini harus lebih baik dari hari kemarin* *Siapa cepat dia dapat*, *Sedikit demi sedikit, lama-lama menjadi bukit*, *Ada masanya ada waktunya*, dan *Waktu adalah penyembuh terbaik*. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa peribahasa Jerman sebagian besar mencerminkan model waktu monokronik, linier, dan berorientasi efisiensi, menekankan ketepatan waktu, produktivitas, dan nilai ekonomi. Sebaliknya, peribahasa Indonesia cenderung mengekspresikan perspektif yang lebih fleksibel dan berorientasi proses, menyoroti kesabaran, harmoni, dan kemajuan bertahap. Terlepas dari perbedaan ini, kedua tradisi tersebut memiliki metafora universal seperti waktu sebagai penyembuh dan waktu sebagai sumber kebijaksanaan. Studi ini menunjukkan bahwa

peribahasa berfungsi sebagai gudang linguistik kronemik budaya dan menawarkan wawasan berharga untuk komunikasi antarbudaya dan pendidikan bahasa.

Kata Kunci: metafora waktu, peribahasa Jerman, peribahasa Indonesia, linguistik budaya, studi komparatif

INTRODUCTION

Proverbs represent one of the most enduring and widespread forms of folk wisdom, serving as compact expressions of shared cultural knowledge, values, and worldviews transmitted across generations. Among the many domains encoded in proverbs, the concept of time stands out as particularly revealing of cultural differences. Time is not a neutral, universal datum; it is socially constructed and encoded in language, behaviour, and shared wisdom. Proverbs—brief, conventionalized utterances that compress communal experience into portable norms and heuristics—are especially revealing for how a culture conceptualizes time because they index values (e.g., punctuality, patience, urgency), preferred temporal frames (past-oriented, present-oriented, future-oriented), and behavioral prescriptions about how to act in time. Studying proverbs, therefore, offers a compact, high-signal window into cultural chronemics: the ways communities organize, value, and communicate about time (Mieder, 2004).

In many Western cultures, especially those influenced by German-speaking societies, time is conceptualized as a linear, scarce, and commodifiable resource. This monochronic orientation is vividly captured in the well-known proverb “*Zeit ist Geld*” (Time is money), which equates temporal efficiency with economic value and underscores punctuality, planning, and productivity as core virtues (Hall, 1976:63-67). In stark contrast, Indonesian culture reflects a polychronic understanding of time characterized by flexibility, cyclicity, and the primacy of human relationships over strict schedules. Levine (2006:48) stated that expressions such as “*jam karet*” (rubber time) illustrate how time is perceived as elastic and negotiable, while proverbs like “*Buru-buru buruk akhirnya*” (haste makes waste) emphasize patience, relational harmony, and the idea that outcomes unfold in their own natural rhythm rather than according to rigid clocks.

Despite the rich tradition of time-related proverbs in both languages and the well-documented cross-cultural variation in temporal orientations, comparative studies that systematically examine the cultural meanings of time in Indonesian and German proverbs remain limited. This gap is significant because proverbs do not merely describe cultural realities—they actively reinforce and transmit them, influencing intercultural communication, misunderstandings, and mutual perceptions.

From a linguistic–anthropological perspective, proverbs are culturally salient speech acts that reflect a worldview. They often employ metaphorical language to frame abstract concepts such as time in concrete, culturally meaningful terms (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). For example, time may be conceptualized as a resource, a healer, a cyclical process, or an uncontrollable force, depending on cultural context. Through repeated use in everyday discourse, proverbs reinforce culturally appropriate attitudes toward time, such as valuing patience, discouraging haste, or emphasizing long-term planning.

A comparative focus on Indonesian and German proverbs is particularly relevant. German culture is frequently characterized as future-oriented, time-disciplined, and efficiency-driven; traits reflected in linguistic expressions that emphasize punctuality, planning, and the productive use of time. German proverbs often conceptualize time as a valuable resource or a strict regulator of human action. According to Levine (2006: 134-138), in contrast, Indonesian cultural discourse tends to emphasize patience, harmony, and acceptance of the process, values that are frequently articulated through proverbs that advise restraint, endurance, and trust in gradual outcomes (Danandjaja, 2003). These differing emphases suggest that temporal meanings in proverbs may reflect broader sociocultural logics.

This study seeks to address these gaps by investigating how time (*Zeit*) is conceptualized in Indonesian and German proverbs through a comparative semantic and pragmatic analysis. By examining recurrent metaphors, evaluative stances, and communicative functions associated with time-related proverbs, the study aims to uncover both convergences and divergences in cultural temporal cognition. In doing so, it contributes to proverb studies, intercultural communication, and linguistic

anthropology by demonstrating how micro-level linguistic artifacts can illuminate macro-level cultural models of time.

Understanding cultural meanings of time through proverbs also has practical implications. In foreign language education and intercultural communication, misaligned temporal expectations such as differing interpretations of punctuality or delay are a common source of misunderstanding. Insights from proverb analysis can therefore inform culturally responsive language teaching and enhance intercultural competence. Ultimately, this study argues that proverbs are not merely rhetorical ornaments but vital cultural texts that encode culturally situated philosophies of time. Within Cultural Linguistics, language is understood as a repository of culturally shared conceptualizations, including cultural schemas, cultural categories, and cultural metaphors that guide meaning-making in a speech community (Sharifian, 2017). Similarly, Lakoff & Johnson (1980) stated that cognitive semantics emphasizes that abstract concepts such as time are structured through metaphorical mappings grounded in embodied and cultural experience. Although these frameworks have been widely applied to lexical semantics and discourse analysis, their systematic application to traditional formulaic language, particularly proverbs, remains limited.

DISCUSSION

This study set out to examine how cultural meanings of time are conceptualized and transmitted through proverbs in Indonesian and German. Drawing on Cultural Linguistics and Cognitive Semantics, the analysis demonstrates that proverbs function as repositories of culturally shared conceptualizations, encoding not only abstract temporal metaphors but also normative attitudes toward action, patience, productivity, and emotional regulation. The comparison of selected German proverbs with Indonesian equivalents reveals both cross-cultural commonalities and culturally specific emphases in temporal cognition. The contrastive analysis of time-related proverbs in German and Indonesian shows that time is understood in two culturally distinct ways, empirically confirmed by Hall (1976) idea of monochronic versus polychronic time and Sharifian (2011) cultural conceptualization in Cultural Linguistics. Below are the explanations about themed time (*Zeit*) proverbs from different perspectives, such as valuable resource

and moral obligation, economic capital, source of wisdom and emotional resolution, and cultural implication.

1. *Zeit* as a Valuable Resource and Moral Obligation

The German proverbs analyzed show mostly a monochronic time perspective, which views time as linear, finite, and tradable. The proverb “*Zeit ist Geld*” (time is money) commercializes time and considers it an economic resource that is not to be wasted. The German proverbs “*Was du heute kannst besorgen, das verschiebe nicht auf morgen*” (don’t put off until tomorrow what you can do today) and “*Morgenstunde hat Gold im Mund*” (the morning hour has gold in its mouth) encourage people to do actions, energized by the cause of the gold, and see discipline in the arrangement of the day as morally and practically useful. These proverbs emphasize that punctuality, productivity, and planning for the future are greatly important in both the individual and society.

“*Morgenstunde hat Gold im Mund*” and “*Was du heute kannst besorgen, das verschiebe nicht auf morgen*” foreground a conceptualization of time as a valuable and limited resource that must be exploited efficiently. In cognitive-semantic terms, these proverbs instantiate the conceptual metaphor time is a resource, closely aligned with time is money (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Early action and punctuality are morally evaluated as virtuous, while delay is implicitly sanctioned. This orientation reflects a culturally entrenched schema of industriousness and future-oriented planning often associated with German-speaking societies (Levine, 2006:140-143).

Comparable Indonesian proverbs such as *Hari ini harus lebih baik dari hari kemarin* or *Siapa cepat dia dapat* likewise encourage initiative and promptness. However, Indonesian expressions tend to frame diligence less in terms of economic efficiency and more as moral self-improvement or opportunity-taking. The contrast suggests that while both cultures value timely action, German proverbs emphasize discipline and optimization, whereas Indonesian proverbs embed action within broader ethical and social narratives. From a Cultural Linguistics perspective, this reflects different cultural schemas governing the moral evaluation of time use (Sharifian, 2011).

When time is seen in a flexible and cyclical manner with an emphasis on human relationships and nature, as is the case in most Javanese time-related proverbs, that is referred to as a polychronic system. The well-known “*Sedikit-sedikit, lama-lama*

menjadi bukit” (Little by little it becomes a mountain) convey the same surface meaning as the German “*Gute Dinge will Weile haben*” (Good things take time), yet they carry a deeper cultural emphasis on patience, harmony, and acceptance of natural rhythms rather than deliberate efficiency. The warning “*Buru-buru buruk akhirnya*” (Haste brings a bad end) directly counters the German insistence on prompt action, highlighting that rushing disrupts balance and often leads to failure.

Proverbs that appear more universal, such as “*Kommt Zeit, kommt Rat*” (Time brings counsel) and “*Die Zeit heilt alle Wunden*” (Time heals all wounds), also exist in Indonesian discourse (e.g., “*Ada masanya ada waktunya*” or “*Waktu adalah penyembuh terbaik*”). Those proverbs mean that time will reduce the problems. However, in the German corpus, they coexist comfortably with efficiency-oriented sayings (Çorakli, 2024). In contrast, in Indonesian usage, they reinforce a more forgiving, event-oriented understanding of time in which outcomes unfold when the moment is right.

2. *Zeit* as Economic Capital

The German proverb *Zeit ist Geld* (time is money) explicitly equates time with monetary value, reinforcing a commodified view of temporality. This proverb exemplifies a strongly entrenched capitalist temporal schema in which time loss equates to economic loss. Indonesian does not possess a proverb with an equally direct equation of time and money. Instead, expressions such as *Waktu adalah uang*, linguistically, the copular construction “is” and “adalah” in both proverbs signals a strong ontological equivalence rather than a loose analogy, reinforcing the idea that time can be quantified, saved, wasted, or invested. Both metaphors promote purposeful action and underscore the importance of context and readiness rather than constant productivity.

Khatin-Zadeh et al., (2023) stated that in a cross-cultural study of time metaphors across 14 languages, demonstrate that while resource-based metaphors are widespread, their evaluative load depends on socio-economic structures and modernization intensity. This finding corroborates the present analysis German proverb networks show strong internal reinforcement of time-as-resource metaphors, whereas Indonesian proverb systems distribute emphasis more evenly across processual and relational metaphors.

Contemporary research into metaphor adaptation in multilingual and globalized contexts indicates that new economic metaphors often coexist with older indigenous

schemas rather than replacing them (Tianying & Bogoyavlenskaya, 2023). This dynamic is visible in Indonesian proverb discourse, where capitalist-influenced expressions such as *Waktu adalah uang* circulate primarily in institutional and business contexts, while traditional sayings valorizing patience and incremental progress remain dominant in domestic and moral domains. Similarly, German proverb traditions reflect internal balancing mechanisms. While proverbs such as *Zeit ist Geld* promote economic discipline, others like *Gute Dinge will Weile haben* counterbalance haste with deliberative patience.

From a purely cognitive perspective, the existence of this metaphor in both German and Indonesian suggests a degree of cross-cultural convergence in the conceptualization of time, particularly under conditions of modernization and economic rationalization. This supports the argument that some metaphors are widely shared due to common embodied and socio-economic experiences. This divergence indicates a culturally specific instantiation of the time as a valuable entity metaphor. Cognitive Semantics predicts such variation, as metaphors are shaped not only by embodiment but also by sociohistorical experience (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Both the German and Indonesian proverbs emphasize economic efficiency contrasts.

3. *Zeit* as a Source of Wisdom and Emotional Resolution

The proverb *Kommt Zeit, kommt Rat* conceptualizes time as an agentive force that brings clarity and solutions. A close Indonesian equivalent, *Ada waktu ada jalan*, expresses an almost identical cultural schema: patience allows solutions to emerge naturally. Similarly, *Die Zeit heilt alle Wunden* corresponds closely to the Indonesian proverb *Waktu menyembuhkan segala luka*. These pairings indicate a shared cross-cultural metaphor of time as a healer or time as a problem-solver, highlighting a universal human experience of emotional recovery over time (Lapasau, 2017). From a Cultural Linguistics standpoint, these similarities suggest overlapping cultural conceptualizations rooted in shared embodied and emotional experiences. Despite differences in action-oriented temporal schemas, both cultures acknowledge time as a non-human agent capable of restoring balance, thereby legitimizing patience and emotional endurance as socially acceptable responses to adversity (Sharifian, 2017).

A crucial distinction emerging from recent scholarship is the difference between the existence of a metaphor and its cultural prominence. Corpus-based and cross-linguistic

research shows that the metaphor *Zeit ist Geld* appears in many languages; however, its normative force varies (Tutton, 2023). In German discourse, *Zeit ist Geld* operates as a culturally entrenched evaluative principle aligned with efficiency, punctuality, and economic rationalization. By contrast, although *Waktu adalah uang* exists in Indonesian, it does not displace indigenous proverbs that conceptualize time as gradual accumulation (*Sedikit demi sedikit, lama-lama menjadi bukit*) or patient endurance.

The German proverb *Gute Dinge will Weile haben* emphasizes the necessity of duration and patience for quality outcomes. Indonesian proverbs such as *Sedikit demi sedikit, lama-lama menjadi bukit* convey a comparable valuation of gradual progress. In both traditions, haste is implicitly discouraged, and endurance is framed as a virtue. Conceptually, these proverbs instantiate the metaphor time is a process, where meaningful outcomes require temporal investment.

4. *Zeit* as Cultural Implication

The data shows that German and Indonesian proverbs both reinforce and undermine existing chronemic models. German proverbs fit mainly with a monochronic, linear and efficiency-driven approach to time. Indonesian proverbs show a mixed case with a focus on time and action, as well as flexibility, patience, and context. Overall, proverb-based data indicate that cultural views on time are not a single, unified phenomenon but rather a range of conflicting conceptual frameworks that come into play in different pragmatic situations. Focusing on traditional linguistic data, this research shows that by placing chronemic analysis in context, proverbs present a more precise and culturally relevant view on time which both refines and contradicts large-scale models (Hall, 1984; Levine, 2006). This means that proverbs are an excellent empirical means of synthesizing cognitive and cultural dimensions.

The comparative analysis of German and Indonesian time-related proverbs demonstrates that cultural conceptualizations of time are not monolithic but multi-layered and domain-sensitive. Recent cross-cultural metaphor research confirms that temporal metaphors vary in salience, distribution, and pragmatic force across languages (Khatin-Zadeh et al., 2023). However, subtle cultural differences persist. German usage often balances patience with goal orientation—patience serves eventual efficiency—whereas Indonesian expressions more strongly emphasize harmony with process and acceptance

of gradual change. This distinction reflects differing cultural attitudes toward control over time: German proverbs suggest managed patience, while Indonesian proverbs convey adaptive patience.

Emerging research in digital paremiology and corpus linguistics demonstrates that proverb frequency and contextual distribution can serve as indicators of socio-cultural transformation (Atmawati, 2024). In rapidly modernizing societies, resource-based metaphors tend to increase in institutional discourse, reflecting global economic integration. However, indigenous metaphors persist in everyday speech, illustrating semantic layering rather than conceptual replacement.

From the perspective of Cultural Linguistics, these proverbs function as concise instantiations of cultural schemas and metaphors (Sharifian, 2011). German time metaphors map time onto a scarce commodity or a straight line that must be segmented and filled productively. Indonesian metaphors map time onto an elastic band (*jam karet*) or a flowing river whose pace cannot—and should not—be forced.

The practical implication is significant for intercultural communication. A German speaker's expectation of punctuality and planning may be interpreted by an Indonesian interlocutor as impatience or lack of relational sensitivity, while an Indonesian's flexible approach to deadlines may be read by a German as unreliability. Recognizing these culturally embedded conceptualizations can therefore reduce misunderstandings and foster more empathetic cross-cultural dialogue.

In sum, although both languages possess proverbs that acknowledge patience and the healing power of time, the overall configuration of their time-related proverb inventories reveals two coherent but contrasting cultural worldviews: one that masters time and one that flows with it. A German speaker's expectation of punctuality and planning may be interpreted by an Indonesian interlocutor as impatience or lack of relational sensitivity, while an Indonesian's flexible approach to deadlines may be read by a German as unreliability. This distinction reflects differing cultural attitudes toward control over time: German proverbs suggest managed patience, while Indonesian proverbs convey adaptive patience.

CONCLUSION

This comparative study has demonstrated that time (*Zeit*) in German and Indonesian proverbs is not merely a chronological concept but a culturally embedded system of meaning that reflects broader sociocultural worldviews. Drawing on Cultural Linguistics (Sharifian, 2011, 2017) and Cognitive Semantics (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), the analysis shows that proverbs function as condensed representations of cultural schemas, encoding normative attitudes toward punctuality, patience, productivity, endurance, and emotional resilience.

The findings indicate that German time-related proverbs predominantly reflect a monochronic orientation, consistent with Hall (1976, 1984) chronemic model and Levine (2006) description of linear, efficiency-driven temporal systems. Proverbs such as *Zeit ist Geld*, *Was du heute kannst besorgen, das verschiebe nicht auf morgen*, and *Morgenstunde hat Gold im Mund* conceptualize time as a scarce and economically valuable resource that demands discipline, planning, and productive use. Even proverbs emphasizing patience, such as *Gute Dinge will Weile haben*, remain embedded within a goal-oriented and managed understanding of duration.

In contrast, Indonesian proverbs reveal a more flexible and process-oriented conceptualization of time. Expressions such as *Sedikit demi sedikit, lama-lama menjadi bukit*, and *Buru-buru buruk akhirnya* highlight gradual progress, relational harmony, and acceptance of natural rhythms. Although modernization has introduced resource-based metaphors such as *Waktu adalah uang*, these coexist with traditional schemas rather than fully replacing them (Tianying & Bogoyavlenskaya, 2023). This coexistence confirms recent cross-cultural metaphor research demonstrating that temporal metaphors vary in salience and domain distribution rather than forming uniform cultural systems (Khatin-Zadeh et al., 2023).

Importantly, the analysis also reveals shared metaphors across both traditions, particularly time as a healer and time as a source of wisdom, reflected in *Die Zeit heilt alle Wunden* and *Waktu menyembuhkan segala luka*. These parallels suggest that while cultural configurations differ, certain embodied and experiential dimensions of time remain cross-culturally recognizable (Lapasau, 2017). Overall, the study supports the argument that cultural models of time are plural, layered, and context-sensitive rather

than monolithic. Proverbs provide a valuable empirical bridge between macro-level chronemic theory and micro-level linguistic evidence. By examining traditional formulaic language, this research refines broad cultural typologies and demonstrates how culturally shared conceptualizations are encoded, transmitted, and negotiated through everyday discourse.

From a practical perspective, these findings have important implications for intercultural communication and foreign language education. Misaligned expectations regarding punctuality, deadlines, and the acceptable pace of action may stem from deeply embedded proverb-based schemas. Recognizing these culturally situated philosophies of time can reduce misunderstandings and foster more culturally responsive interaction.

In sum, German proverbs tend to portray time as something to be managed and optimized, whereas Indonesian proverbs more often depict time as something to be lived through and harmonized with. Together, these proverb systems reveal two coherent yet contrasting cultural orientations: one that seeks to master time and one that seeks to flow with it.

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