

SEMANTIC AND METAPHORICAL FEATURES OF LEXICAL COMPONENTS IN THE STRUCTURE OF PROVERBS

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18666497>

Abstract. *In modern linguistics, paremiological units, that is, proverbs and sayings, are studied not only as examples of folklore, but also as linguistic units that carry profound cultural, cognitive, and semantic information. Paremiological units reflect not only spiritual values and traditions, but also the structure of national consciousness. Through them, the historical memory of a people, their observations of social life, ethical norms, and emotional experiences are expressed. This article analyzes the key components in English and Karakalpak proverbs from the perspective of semantic shift, metaphorical features, and cultural connotations.*

Keywords: *paremiological units, semantic shift, lexical components, metaphorical components, value.*

Аннотация. *В современной лингвистике паремиологические единицы, то есть пословицы и поговорки, изучаются не только как образцы устного народного творчества, но и как лингвистические единицы, несущие глубокую культурную, когнитивную и семантическую информацию. Паремиологические единицы отражают не только духовные ценности и традиции, но и структуру национального сознания. С их помощью выражается историческая память народа, наблюдения за социальной жизнью, этические нормы и эмоциональный опыт. В данной статье анализируются ключевые компоненты в английских и каракалпакских пословицах с точки зрения семантических изменений, метафорических особенностей и культурных коннотаций.*

Ключевые слова: *паремиологические единицы, семантическое изменение, лексические компоненты, метафорические компоненты, ценности.*

Annotatsiya. *Zamonaviy tilshunoslikda paremiologik birliklar, ya'ni maqol va iboralar, faqat xalq og'zaki ijodining namunasi sifatida emas, balki chuqur madaniy, kognitiv va semantik ma'lumot tashuvchi lingvistik birliklar sifatida o'rganilmoqda. Paremiologik birliklar nafaqat ruhiy qadriyatlar va an'analarni, balki milliy onglik tuzilishini ham aks ettiradi. Ular orqali xalqning tarixiy xotirasi, ijtimoiy hayotdagi kuzatuvlari, etik me'yorlar va hissiy tajribalari ifodalanadi. Ushbu maqolada ingliz va qoraqalpoq tilidagi asosiy komponentlar semantik o'zgarishlar, metaforik xususiyatlar va madaniy konnotatsiyalar nuqtai nazaridan tahlil qilinadi.*

Kalit so'zlar: *paremiologik birliklar, semantik o'zgarish, leksik komponentlar, metaforik komponentlar, qadriyatlar.*

Introduction. In linguistics, paremiological units—namely proverbs, sayings, and fixed expressions—are considered one of the fundamental elements that convey the cultural, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of a language. Such units may undergo semantic shifts over time as a result of changing social conditions, translation processes, and contextual transformations. Semantic change often emerges in connection with modifications in syntactic structure.

Proverbs represent one of the most concise and expressive means of articulating collective thought, cultural memory, and worldview. They not only preserve everyday experience and ethical values, but also transmit conceptual knowledge through language. In particular, the lexical components within proverbs (such as references to humans,

animals, natural phenomena, social roles, etc.) possess semantic and metaphorical meanings, and their functions within discourse may vary depending on context.

Literature Review. As noted by the researcher A.I. Soboleva, the key components within proverbs “express the cultural archetypes of a people and define the national conceptual field.”[4.C.122.] This view is supported by S.G. Vorkachev, who argues that through semantic components, “a semiosphere emerges in which language and thought function together.”[1.C.74] These approaches establish the main theoretical principles for intercultural and linguocognitive analysis of the components found in proverbs and traditional sayings.

According to A.I. Soboleva, “cultural archetypes are reproduced and actualized through linguistic images,” which determines the functional role of paremiological units in shaping collective thought. S.G. Vorkachev, in turn, emphasizes that semantic units and components serve as fundamental elements of the semiosphere, forming the social, emotional, and ideological semantics of a society. Thus, the components of proverbs operate not only within the framework of philology but also play a decisive role in cognitive-cultural interaction. Therefore, we support the view that language and consciousness function together in creating a semiosphere.

Discussion. The following analysis examines in greater depth the syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations of lexical components within proverbs, their semantic transformations, connotative meanings, and metaphorical properties. Particular attention is given to components that form the core semantic force of proverbs (for example, “wise,” “wolf,” “blind,” “elder,” “squirrel,” “fool,” etc.). Through semantic shifts in context, such components perform various stylistic functions, including conveying emotional evaluation, implicit meaning, criticism, didactic instruction, or figurative representation.

For example, in the Karakalpak proverb “Qasqır toymay – xan toymas” (“A wolf is never satisfied – nor is a khan”), the component “wolf” represents not merely an animal image, but metaphorically conveys greed, cruelty, and the stereotype of a socially dangerous individual. In the English proverb “Wolves are often hidden under sheep’s clothing,”[5.] the component “wolf” symbolizes hypocrisy and enters into opposition with “sheep.” In this case, the components function within a contrastive framework, expressing evaluative relations in discourse.

In the proverb “Ġarġa ġarġaniń kózin shoqımaydı” (“A crow does not peck out another crow’s eye”), the component “crow” represents loyalty within one’s own group and refraining from harming one’s peers. Similarly, in the English proverb “Birds of a feather flock together,” the component “birds” conveys social closeness based on similarity. In both proverbs, zoosemiotic components express the idea of group solidarity.

In the proverb “Bir padanı bir buzaw buzır” (“One calf can spoil the whole herd”), the component “calf” becomes a metaphor for a socially disreputable individual. In

English, this corresponds to the expression “black sheep.” Here, the component demonstrates semantic transformation as a tool of social evaluation.

In the proverbs “Aqıllı jigit el-xalıqtı qorğaydı, aqmaq jigit eldi qorlaydı” (“A wise man protects his people, a foolish man disgraces them”) and “A wise man uses his mind, a fool never will,” [6.] the components “wise” and “fool” express social values through the contrast between wisdom and ignorance. At the paradigmatic level, these components function as antonyms and constitute the semantic core of the statement.

In the Karakalpak proverb “Soqır tawıqqa bári tarı” (“To a blind hen, all grains are millet”), the metaphorical image of the “blind hen” carries a connotation of limited or biased judgment. In the English proverb “Even a blind squirrel finds a nut once in a while,” the component “blind squirrel” signifies accidental or unexpected success. In both proverbs, lexical units related to vision are used in an implicit, figurative sense.

In the Karakalpak proverb “Túyeniń úlkeni kópirde tayaq jeydi” [2.] (“The biggest camel is beaten on the bridge”), the component “camel” does not merely denote an animal but metaphorically represents individuals who occupy a high position within a social hierarchy. Such metaphorical components arise in discourse through semantic transfer, including metaphor and metonymy.

Similarly, in the English proverb “Don’t count your chickens before they hatch,” the component “chickens” metaphorically refers to unrealized hopes or anticipated outcomes. Although “chickens” denotes a real object, within the proverb it represents a mental model associated with uncertain future results.

Another well-known English proverb, “The early bird catches the worm,” employs the components “bird” and “worm” to express a causal relationship between time, action, and result. Here, the “bird” symbolizes an active individual, while the “worm” represents reward or success. The evaluative metaphor encourages proactive behavior and mental initiative.

In “You can’t teach an old dog new tricks,” [3.] the component “old dog” models a person with a fixed or resistant character. The “dog” functions as a metaphorical image representing experienced yet change-resistant individuals. Through these components, stereotypes related to learning psychology are reinforced, and social adaptability is evaluated within a unified semantic framework.

Furthermore, lexical components in other well-known English proverbs also reflect a people’s worldview and cultural values. For instance, in “Actions speak louder than words,” the components “actions” and “words” convey the superiority of real deeds over mere speech. In this oppositional structure, “actions” carry a positive evaluative meaning, whereas “words” are associated with passivity or lack of effectiveness. Paradigmatically, the proverb is structured around the opposition of meaningful versus insignificant expression.

Another example is the proverb “All that glitters is not gold,” in which the components “glitters” and “gold” express the distinction between outward appearance and inner authenticity. While “glitters” denotes external attractiveness, “gold” symbolizes value and true worth. Consequently, the proverb conveys a cultural stereotype that outward beauty does not necessarily correspond to inner quality.

In “When in Rome, do as the Romans do,” the components “Rome” and “Romans” signify the necessity of adaptation and integration into a particular social environment. Here, the proper noun functions as a symbol of a cultural system of norms and practices, through which a model of global intercultural accommodation is expressed.

In the proverb “Too many cooks spoil the broth,” the components “cooks” and “broth” represent the relationship between social roles and outcomes. The idea conveyed is that excessive interference by multiple individuals may negatively affect the final result. In this case, “broth” symbolizes the collective outcome, while “cooks” construct the image of individuals with differing opinions or approaches.

In the English proverb “Curiosity killed the cat,” “curiosity” denotes excessive inquisitiveness, while “cat” functions as the image of a victim. The semantic projection here is associated with danger. Through the metaphorical component “cat,” the proverb conveys a cultural lesson about caution and the importance of recognizing limits.

Another important aspect of lexical components is their semantic transformation in intercultural comparison. In the English proverb “No pain, no gain,”[3.] the components “pain” and “gain” express the socio-economic principle that effort precedes achievement. In the Karakalpak proverb “Miyneŋ etseŋ erinbey, toyadı qarnıń tilenbey” (“If you work diligently, your stomach will be full without begging”), the components related to “labor” and “dependence” strongly emphasize the value of hard work.

Results. These proverbs are shaped by values, stereotypes, and cultural markers embedded in collective consciousness, while the semantic load of their lexical components conveys profound information at both connotative and metaphorical levels.

Metaphorical components are frequently associated with concrete objects and acquire semantic extension. For example, in the proverb “Kóz – dárya” (“The eye is an ocean”), the component “eye” denotes not merely a human organ, but serves as a symbol of the inner world. Similarly, in “Kewilde bar – tilde joq” (“What is in the heart is not on the tongue”), the components “heart” and “tongue” are contrasted to represent the internal and external aspects of a person.

At the level of components, the main types of semantic transformation can be identified as follows:

Transition from denotative to connotative meaning (e.g., “dog” = animal → evil or immoral person);

Figurative generalization (e.g., “crow” → corrupt individuals or bearers of negative traits);

Mental stereotypes (e.g., color-based semantics such as “white” = good, “black” = bad);

Axiological evaluation (e.g., “wolf” = cruelty, “sheep” = innocence).

Through such components, proverbs acquire semantic intensity and function as reflections of dominant stereotypes and values in national consciousness. Each component performs different discursive functions depending on its metaphorical, evaluative, implicit, or emotional meaning.

Thus, in both English and Karakalpak proverbs, lexical components demonstrate multilayered semantic, metaphorical, cultural, and contextual characteristics. These features reveal both ethnic specificities and universal patterns in language and thought. As scholars note, such components construct a coded semantic model of collective consciousness.

Semantic features are manifested through the expansion (generalization) or narrowing (specification) of a component’s meaning, as well as through the acquisition of new connotations arising from the full contextual environment.

In the English proverb “Don’t count your chickens before they hatch,” the component “chickens” metaphorically denotes unrealized hopes or anticipated outcomes. Although “chickens” refers to a real object, within the proverb it represents a mental model associated with expecting uncertain future results. Semantically, the proverb reflects ethical values related to possibility, patience, and restraint.

Metaphorical features emerge through the transfer of a component into another conceptual domain. This process is often clarified through etymological roots. For instance, the word “wolf” (qasqır) in ancient Turkic languages already symbolized cruelty and predatory behavior, and this archaic semantic meaning has been preserved in contemporary proverbs. Similarly, the English word “fool,” derived from the Latin *follis* (“empty, light”), explains how the semantic associations of foolishness and superficiality were historically formed. Images such as “blind hen” or “blind squirrel” function as metaphorical devices expressing human misfortune or limited judgment. In such cases, metaphor operates not merely as a poetic device, but as a cognitive model of collective thought. Structural and semantic analysis of these components allows for a deeper understanding of proverbs from a semantic perspective.

Conclusion. Lexical components within proverbs serve as carriers of the semantic codes of national thought and as essential units shaping a cognitive worldview. Through them, the values, stereotypes, emotional responses, and systems of social evaluation of a people are expressed. When analyzed from an intercultural comparative perspective, these components reveal both universal ideas and ethnically specific features simultaneously.

Such analysis demonstrates that metaphor and semantic connotation play a crucial role in reflecting the cultural-cognitive functions of paremiological units. Particularly in

cross-cultural comparison, the intersections of national mental codes highlight how representatives of different cultures linguistically perceive and conceptualize the world.

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