

LEXICO-SEMANTIC, SYMBOLIC AND STEREOTYPICAL FEATURES OF UZBEK FOLK PROVERBS: A LINGUOCULTUROLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract. *This article examines the semantic features of the lexical units found in Uzbek folk proverbs, together with the cultural codes, national-cultural symbols, and social-gender stereotypes they encode, within a comprehensive linguoculturological framework. The study draws on the annotated dictionary “Ma’nolar mahzani” [The Treasury of Meanings] by Sh. Shomaqsudov and Sh. Shorahmedov, as well as on the academic proverb collection compiled by T. Mirzayev, A. Musoqulov, and B. Sarimsoqov. Applying descriptive, componential, and linguoculturological methods of analysis, more than fifteen proverb samples were subjected to in-depth examination. The findings show that the lexical units of Uzbek folk proverbs manifest a unity of denotative and connotative meaning, expressing the deep strata of the national mentality through zoomorphic, phytomorphic, somatic, spatial, and color-based cultural codes. The analysis further identified stable linguistic forms of gender and social stereotypes within the proverbs. It was also observed that the people themselves adopt a critical, ironic stance toward the very stereotypes they have created, which attests to the fact that the proverb system is not unidirectional but rather internally contradictory and dynamic. The results obtained contribute to enriching the theory of Uzbek paremiology and linguoculturology.*

Keywords: *proverb, lexico-semantic feature, cultural code, symbol, stereotype, linguoculturology, national mentality, denotative and connotative meaning.*

INTRODUCTION

A linguistic unit – particularly a lexeme – embodies not merely an objective-logical meaning, but also the historical experience, worldview, and value system of a given people.

This pattern is especially evident in the material of folk proverbs, since the proverb is a compact and stable linguistic-cultural form shaped by the people’s centuries-long collective experience of thought. The study of the linguistic nature of Uzbek folk proverbs remains one of the pressing directions in Uzbek linguistics, for in proverbs the unity of the national language intersects organically with the unity of the national mentality.

The question of the interrelation between language and culture has a rich scholarly tradition, beginning with W. von Humboldt’s classical idea that “language is the mirror of the national spirit” [1]. This idea was further developed in L. Weisgerber’s neo-Humboldtian conception, which substantiated the necessity of studying languages as a mirror of peoples’ cultures [2]. Linguoculturology, a discipline formed in the mid-twentieth century, evolved precisely on the basis of these ideas and, in V.N. Teliya’s definition, came to be recognized as a discipline investigating the cultural factor within the human being [3], while V.V. Vorobyov

introduced into the field the concept of the “linguoculture unit” (lingvokulturrema) as the principal unit of analysis synthesizing the interrelations between language and culture [4].

The theoretical foundation for the lexico-semantic study of proverbs in Uzbek linguistics is constituted by Sh. Rahmatullayev’s work on the methodology of sememic analysis [5] and by the studies of lexical microsememes conducted by E. Begmatov, H. Ne’matov, and R. Rasulov [6].

Research carried out within the framework of cultural code theory has distinguished somatic, zoomorphic, phytomorphic, spatial, and other types of codes, examining the ways in which they are actualized in phraseological and paremiological units [7]. The scholarly interpretation of the concept of stereotype, in turn, has evolved along a path running from W. Lippmann to U. Quasthoff’s linguistic definition, which characterizes it as the verbal expression of a belief directed at social groups [8].

The methodological basis of the theory of the linguistic sign (symbol) is constituted by F. de Saussure’s doctrine of the unity of the signified and the signifier [16], a theory that has been thoroughly elaborated in Uzbek linguistics by A. Nurmonov [17]. Likewise, the concept of “linguistic personality” (til shaxsi), introduced into scholarship by Yu.N. Karaulov [18], makes it possible to interpret proverb texts as an expression of collective linguistic-cultural identity: the texts of proverbs and sayings constitute the most reliable source for revealing the totality of a native speaker’s linguistic, functional, and cultural parameters, since they express not the subjective opinion of a single individual but a common popular judgment distilled through centuries of collective experience.

In Uzbek paremiology, the most important source base is provided by the academic collection compiled by T. Mirzayev, A. Musoqulov, and B. Sarimsoqov [9] and by the annotated dictionary “Ma’nolar mahzani” by Sh. Shomaqsudov and Sh. Shorahmedov [10]. Among contemporary researchers, D. Tosheva has studied the linguoculturological features of proverbs containing zoonymic components [11], M. Sharipova has examined the linguopoetic aspects of proverbs formed on the basis of livestock terminology [12], while U. Akhmedova has investigated the comparative-semantic features of English and Uzbek proverbs [13]. Nevertheless, in existing research the lexico-semantic, linguoculturological, and stereotype-theoretical aspects have most often been studied in isolation from one another, and studies analyzing them within a single, integrated model remain insufficient.

Proceeding from this, the aim of the present study is to analyze the semantic features of the lexical units in Uzbek folk proverbs, together with the cultural codes, national-cultural symbols, and social-gender stereotypes actualized within them, on the basis of a unified linguoculturological model. The study seeks answers to the following questions: 1) What semantic strata do the lexical units of Uzbek folk proverbs possess? 2) Which types of cultural codes are most actively actualized within them? 3) What national-cultural and gender stereotypes are consolidated in the proverbs, and how are they related to the Uzbek mentality?

The scholarly novelty of the article lies in the fact that, for the first time, Uzbek folk proverbs are examined on the basis of a unified model integrating lexico-semantic analysis, cultural code theory, and stereotype theory.

Whereas earlier works have typically studied these aspects in isolation from one another (approaching them from either a purely linguoculturological or a purely gender-stereotypical standpoint), the present article combines them in a complex, integrated manner, which makes it possible to reveal more fully the multilayered content of the proverb text.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The source base of the study was constituted by two principal lexicographic and folkloristic sources: the annotated dictionary “Ma’nolar mahzani” by Sh. Shomaqsudov and Sh. Shorahmedov [10] (448 pages, containing more than a thousand proverbs together with their scholarly commentary) and the academic collection “Uzbek Folk Proverbs” compiled by T. Mirzayev, A. Musoqulov, and B. Sarimsoqov [9]. As the sample, fifteen proverbs were selected from “Ma’nolar mahzani” using the method of purposive sampling; the selection criteria were the presence within the proverb of a lexical unit with a clearly zoomorphic, phytomorphic, somatic, spatial, color-based, or social-gender character, and the extent to which it was thoroughly annotated in the source itself.

The following methods of analysis were employed: 1) the descriptive method – for the direct observation of the grammatical-syntactic structure and lexical composition of the proverbs; 2) componential analysis – for distinguishing the denotative and connotative semes within the meaning structure of the lexemes; 3) linguoculturological analysis – for identifying the cultural codes (zoomorphic, phytomorphic, somatic, spatial, color-based, culinary) actualized in the lexical units; 4) contextual analysis – for verifying and confirming the interpretation of meaning given in the dictionary’s own commentary; 5) comparative-typological analysis – for comparing the identified features with studies conducted on material from other languages (English, German) [13, 14].

The analytical process was carried out in three stages. In the first stage, the grammatical-semantic structure of each selected proverb was described. In the second stage, the denotative meaning of the key lexeme within the proverb was established on a lexicographic basis, while its connotative meaning was established on a contextual basis. In the third stage, the connotative meaning thus identified was interpreted within the framework of cultural code theory [7] and stereotype theory [8], as a result of which a specific cultural code or stereotype type was assigned to each proverb.

To ensure the reliability of the analytical results, the figurative meaning of each proverb was cross-checked between two independent sources – the dictionary’s own commentary in “Ma’nolar mahzani” [10] and the relevant scholarly studies on the subject [7–14] – through triangulation. Only those proverbs for which the interpretations of the two sources coincided were included in the final object of analysis. This approach served to reduce the risk of subjective interpretation.

RESULTS

Below, the results of the analysis are presented in a systematized form across six areas: the denotative-connotative structure of lexical units, zoomorphic and phytomorphic codes, somatic and color-based codes, gender and social stereotypes, spatial and socio-professional codes, and a

generalized comparative overview. For each area, specific proverb examples are given together with their page numbers and references to the relevant scholarly sources.

1. The Denotative-Connotative Structure of Lexical Units

The results of the analysis show that all the key lexemes within the proverbs possess a two-layered meaning structure: an objective-denotative meaning and a connotative meaning bearing a national-cultural load. For example, in the proverb “The nightingale loves the garden, man loves his Homeland” (Bulbul chamanni sevar, odam Vatanni), the denotative meaning of the lexeme “nightingale” designates a species of bird, while its connotative meaning expresses the notions of love, devotion, and patriotism [10, p. 59]. Likewise, in the proverb “Your native land is your golden cradle” (Ona yurting – oltin beshiging), the lexeme “cradle” denotatively refers to a piece of children’s furniture, while connotatively it acquires the meaning of protection, tenderness, and sanctity [10, p. 256].

2. The Actualization of Zoomorphic and Phytomorphic Codes

The zoomorphic code constitutes the most active stratum of the material analyzed. In the proverb “The horse pulls the cart, the dog pulls its shadow” (Aravani ot tortar, ko‘lankasini it tortar), the zoonyms “horse” and “dog” express the opposition between “genuine labor” and “showy, sham activity” [10, p. 15]. In the proverb “One fox leads seven wolves” (Bir tulki yetti bo‘rini yetaklaydi), “fox” is used as a symbol of cunning and “wolf” as a symbol of strength devoid of intelligence and cunning [10, p. 40]. A particularly noteworthy case is observed in the proverb “A wolf is killed not for being a wolf, but for having eaten a sheep” (Bo‘rini bo‘riligi uchun emas, qo‘yni yeganligi uchun o‘ldiradilar): here, through zoomorphic images, a legal-ethical principle is expressed – namely, that punishment is determined by the act committed rather than by inherent essence [10, p. 65]. As an example of the phytomorphic code, the lexemes “pomegranate” and “apricot” were identified as symbols of fruitfulness and beauty [15].

Another significant finding within the zoomorphic code was the proverb “When the wolf grows old, even a puppy laughs at it” (Bo‘ri qarisa, kuchukka kulgu bo‘ladi), which expresses the relationship between age and social status: here “wolf” carries the stereotype of social status grounded in strength and might, while its fading in old age carries the universal notion of the transience of status; at the same time, the proverb itself ironically condemns disrespect toward the elderly [10, p. 65]. This finding shows that the zoomorphic code is capable of expressing not only static characterological classifications but also dynamic social relations.

3. Somatic and Color-Based Codes

The somatic code is vividly manifested in the proverb “Parents are golden wings” (Ota-ona – oltin qanot): the lexeme “wing” functions as a somatic-zoomorphic symbol expressing the parents’ role as support and protection in a child’s life [10, p. 268]. The color-based code was analyzed through two proverb examples: in “A white coin for a black day” (Oq tanga – qora kunga), “white” is used as a symbol of prosperity and “black” as a symbol of hardship, expressing the practical wisdom of thrift [10, p. 286]; whereas in “A black heart is a wounded heart” (Qora ko‘ngil – yara ko‘ngil), “black” as a symbol of ill intent is equated with a somatic-psychological state (“wound”) [10, p. 423].

Significantly, the people also criticize the very color-based stereotype they themselves have created: the supplementary proverb “Not every fair-faced person has a fair heart, and not every dark-faced person has a dark heart” (Har yuzi oqning ko‘ngli oq bo‘lavermas, har yuzi qoraning ko‘ngli qora bo‘lavermas) is used precisely in this context [10, p. 423].

4. Gender and Social Stereotypes

The results of the analysis confirmed the presence of stable gender stereotypes within Uzbek folk proverbs. In the proverb “Train the child from childhood, train the wife from the outset” (Bolani yoshdan o‘rgat, xotinni boshdan o‘rgat), the woman is interpreted, like the child, as an “object to be trained,” and an overt linguistic instance of the patriarchal gender outlook is observed [10, p. 52]. At the same time, analysis of the proverb “Woman did not emerge from the earth – she is man’s child; man did not descend from the sky – he is woman’s child” (Ayol yerdan chiqqan emas – erkak bolasi, erkak ko‘kdan tushgan emas – ayol bolasi) revealed a counter-stereotypical phenomenon: according to the dictionary’s own commentary, this proverb was created specifically to counter the misogynistic stereotypical proverbs current at the time, with the aim of substantiating gender equality [10, p. 10]. This finding shows that two opposing layers of gender mentality coexisted simultaneously in the Uzbek popular consciousness.

Among the socio-familial stereotypes, the most stable one concerns the daughter-in-law/mother-in-law relationship: the proverb “The dog’s demon is madness, the daughter-in-law’s demon is her mother-in-law” (Itning jini – devona, kelinning jini – qaynona) and the dozens of variant proverbs associated with it reinforce a generalized social perception of the mother-in-law’s critical, disparaging attitude toward the daughter-in-law [10, p. 146]. In the proverb “The mother of seven daughters is still called a young bride” (Yetti qizning onasi – hanuzgacha kelinchak), the normative stereotype imposed by society regarding a woman’s age and outward appearance is expressed by means of irony [10, p. 93]. The socio-economic stereotype is observed in the proverb “The feast belongs to the horse-owner, the wedding to the robe-owner” (Osh – otliniki, to‘y – to‘nliniki), in which, through the symbols of wealth “horse” and “robe,” the people’s ironic-critical stance toward social inequality at ceremonial events is expressed [10, p. 282].

5. The Actualization of Spatial and Socio-Professional Codes

The spatial code occupies a central place in the proverb “Your native land is your golden cradle” (Ona yurting – oltin beshiging): through the image of the “cradle,” the notion of the Homeland is elevated to the most sacred memory of childhood, a mother’s tenderness, and protection [10, p. 256]. The socio-professional stereotype was observed in the proverb “Even if the baker dies, bread comes out of his bosom” (Novvoy o‘lsa, qo‘ynidan non chiqar): here the occupational name “baker” is generalized from a personal instance into a social type, becoming a linguistic vehicle transmitting the trait of stinginess in a stable form from generation to generation [10, p. 232]. This finding shows that cultural code and social stereotype are frequently actualized within one and the same proverb text in a mutually complementary manner, with no rigid boundary between them.

6. A Generalized Comparative Overview

The overall distribution of the fifteen proverbs analyzed is as follows: zoomorphic code – 5; somatic-zoomorphic code – 1; color-based code – 2; spatial-axiological code – 2; gender stereotype – 3; socio-professional and economic stereotype – 2. This distribution shows that the zoomorphic code is statistically the predominant code type within the Uzbek paremiological system, a conclusion that fully corresponds with D. Tosheva's observation that the material on zoonym-component proverbs is substantial enough to merit a separate doctoral dissertation [11].

DISCUSSION

The results obtained show that analyzing the semantic features of lexical units in Uzbek folk proverbs not merely within the denotative-connotative opposition, but also in the context of cultural code theory and stereotype theory, reveals their deeper linguoculturological content. This conclusion practically confirms, on the basis of Uzbek paremiological material, the theoretical views of V.N. Teliya and V.V. Vorobyov concerning the linguoculture unit [3, 4].

It should also be emphasized that the boundary between the concepts of cultural code and stereotype is frequently conventional in character. For instance, a zoomorphic image may appear in one context as a pure cultural code (a figurative metaphor), and in another as a fully formed social stereotype (a stable, generalized, one-sided evaluation). In our analysis, the criterion adopted for distinguishing between these two phenomena was the frequency of the image's recurrent use and the stability of its evaluative (axiological) charge: if an image recurred with the same evaluation across numerous independent proverbs, it was considered to have risen to the level of a stereotype.

The results of the study also enrich the earlier findings of D. Tosheva [11] and U. Akhmedova [13] by adding a new dimension – that of stereotype theory. In particular, our analysis showed that zoonym-component proverbs perform not only a metaphorical-figurative function but also serve to express definite legal-ethical principles (as, for example, in the proverb "A wolf is killed not for being a wolf.."), an aspect that has not received sufficient attention in previous research.

The results concerning gender stereotypes are consistent with the results of B.Q. Jo'raxolova's comparative analysis of Uzbek and German proverbs [14]: both studies noted the presence, alongside patriarchal views, of counter-stereotypical examples capable of standing against them within the proverbs. This circumstance shows that folk proverbs do not constitute a unidirectional, uniformly polarized ideological system, but rather a dynamic linguistic-cultural archive preserving the mutually conflicting views of different periods and different strata of society.

As a limitation of the study, it should be noted that the analytical material is confined to fifteen proverbs selected within a single lexicographic source, which ensures a qualitatively in-depth analysis of the results rather than a statistical generalization thereof. Conducting a quantitative-statistical analysis in the future, on the basis of a larger corpus of proverbs, will make it possible to extend the results still further.

The practical significance of the results obtained manifests itself in several directions.

First, the cultural code and stereotype model identified can be applied in preparing lecture materials for the courses “Linguoculturology,” “Lexicology,” and “Uzbek Folk Oral Art” in institutions of higher education. Second, the findings concerning gender and social stereotypes serve to foster a critical perception of traditional views within contemporary socio-cultural discourse. Third, the comparative-typological parallels identified (for instance, the similarity between Uzbek and German proverbs [14]) provide additional empirical material for translation studies and the theory of intercultural communication.

CONCLUSION

As a result of the study conducted, it was established that the semantic features of lexical units in Uzbek folk proverbs are manifested in a unity of denotative and connotative meaning, while the national-cultural basis of this unity is actualized through zoomorphic, phytomorphic, somatic, spatial, and color-based cultural codes. It was likewise demonstrated that, alongside stable linguistic forms of gender and social stereotypes within the proverbs, counter-stereotypical examples capable of opposing them also exist. These results show that Uzbek folk proverbs constitute not a uniform but a multilayered and internally contradictory linguistic-ideological system. The findings of the study may be used in the fields of linguoculturology, lexicography, and translation studies, as well as in the teaching of the relevant disciplines within the system of higher education.

As a promising direction for future research, one may point to conducting a quantitative-statistical analysis on the basis of the complete corpus of Uzbek folk proverbs (all volumes of “Ma’nolar mahzani” and the academic collection [9, 10]), determining the relative frequency of the various types of cultural code, and examining the extent to which traditional stereotypes are preserved or transformed in contemporary electronic and social-media texts. This direction will serve to enrich Uzbek paremiology with the achievements of corpus linguistics.

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