



## CONCEPTUAL OPPOSITIONS AND THE CULTURAL SEMIOSPHERE IN PROVERBS

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### ABSTRACT

*This article discusses the use of antonymic evaluative units in English and Karakalpak proverbs, as well as the concept of the cultural semiosphere. This semiosphere plays a decisive role in shaping values, reinforcing them, and transmitting them to future generations.*

**Introduction.** Literary works that serve all social strata of any nation equally have not only an aesthetic impact on individuals but also perform an important social function. Therefore, this style makes use of the common national language to an unrestricted degree. Among such forms, proverbs occupy a significant place. All the richness of the national language is reflected in literary language through specific artistic and stylistic functions, and this feature is also characteristic of the language of proverbs. Proverbs convey ideas concisely and clearly.

In the Karakalpak language, the literary style is divided, in terms of genre, into two major groups: prose style and poetic style. Proverbs belong to the poetic style. The primary function of the literary style is to exert an aesthetic influence on readers and listeners; it is this function that distinguishes it from other styles. Imagery and artistic expression are characteristic features of literary style. All of these features are also found in proverbs. In poetic style, meaning is conveyed through verse structure, intonation, and logical conciseness, which indicates the close connection of proverbs with this style. Proverbs are also notable for their expressive and impactful language.

Proverbs represent a distinct type of folkloric language and are considered one of the forms of oral literature. The language of proverbs makes extensive and artistic use of various lexical units, including synonyms, homonyms, antonyms, as well as phraseological expressions whose meanings are equivalent to a single word.

In Karakalpak folklore, proverbs are recognized as short-form works distinguished by their specific artistic qualities and significant cultural value. Within the rich folkloric heritage of the people, such genres as proverbs, riddles, verbal contests, humorous songs, and many others exist as independent genres. Among them, proverbs stand out in terms of their brevity and structure, as well as for the vivid imagery and sharp expressiveness of their language. In this respect, antonyms are also actively employed and occupy an important place in proverbs. Proverbs are concise and aphoristic both in form and



content, and are characterized by their figurative nature and expressive linguistic potential. The distinctive lexical features of proverb language serve as a key factor that differentiates proverbs from other genres. Words in proverbs may be used in both literal and figurative meanings.

Antonyms used in Karakalpak folk proverbs have been selected as the object of this study and examined as one of the folkloric forms that differ from the style of the literary language. The stylistic features and functions of antonyms in proverb discourse are analyzed and elucidated. The language of proverbs is inherently expressive; its linguistic characteristics—brevity and imagery—demonstrate its unique nature. The study of each lexical unit in proverbs is of particular interest. Among them are words with opposing meanings, and their scholarly analysis provides a basis for identifying the linguistic devices that contribute to the conciseness, artistic quality, imagery, and expressive power of proverb language.

**Literature Review:** The study of proverb language is one of the most relevant issues in Karakalpak linguistics. The language of various folkloric works and some of their specific features have been examined from a scholarly perspective by linguists, and the language of proverbs has become the object of a number of small-scale research studies.

The lexicon of the Karakalpak language was scientifically investigated by E. Berdimuratov, whose works have been published; these studies also address antonyms. Several research works have been conducted on antonyms in the Karakalpak language. A. Bekbergenov published a substantial scholarly article addressing key issues related to antonyms in Karakalpak. M. Qudaybergenov also carried out studies on antonyms. Together with T. Bashirov, he published a dictionary of antonyms.

**Discussion:** Proverbs serve as a fundamental tool in constructing the conceptual models of collective consciousness. In particular, they articulate reality through binary oppositions—such as white and black, light and darkness, good and evil—by defining semantic meaning and value. In this context, it is necessary to clarify several key terms in order to identify conceptual models and binary oppositions.

A conceptual model is a system of notions formed in the human mind, expressed through language, and used to describe reality. Within this model, semantic structures in language are aligned with cognitive knowledge, thereby facilitating the perception, evaluation, and classification of reality. Through conceptual models, individuals store knowledge shaped by experience within semantic frameworks, while language functions as a verbal means of expressing this knowledge. Proverbs activate this model as a representational framework grounded in universal and national values embedded in folk thinking. Through them, individuals organize, structure, and evaluate their experience. Conceptual models are conveyed through linguistic units—particularly proverbs—which help structure the human cognitive perception of reality. Such models may be semantically stable, cognitively functional, and stylistically figurative. The primary function of a conceptual model is to structure knowledge within human cognition, transmit it in linguistic form, and provide a meaningful interpretation of reality.

A binary opposition refers to pairs of semantically contrasting elements, such as light/darkness or wisdom/foolishness. These oppositions function as fundamental



conceptual structures within the language system and serve as key semantic and cognitive criteria for the structural comprehension of reality. Such oppositions constitute one of the core logical and semantic principles of human cognition: through them, contrasts in worldviews are systematized, evaluative criteria are formed, and events are hierarchically organized.

Antonymy refers to ideas or concepts that are logically opposite yet can be applied or considered within the same context.

A paremiological unit refers to fixed word-combination units belonging to oral folk tradition, such as proverbs, sayings, and aphorisms. These units function as linguistic carriers that encode collective consciousness, ethical perspectives, and cultural values. Their main functions include the following:

1. Semantic – naming social phenomena and reflecting ethical norms;
2. Stylistic – ensuring imagery and emotional-expressive effect;
3. Cognitive – shaping the people's worldview and providing it with a conceptual framework;
4. Cultural – serving as a means of reinforcing national identity and transmitting cultural heritage across generations.

Binary oppositions expressed through proverbs help to identify the fundamental value criteria of collective consciousness. They provide evaluative judgments of events, establish ethical or social standards, and thereby contribute to the formation of social awareness and cultural identity. Within the language system, these oppositions operate as basic conceptual frameworks and are regarded as essential semantic and cognitive mechanisms for structuring the understanding of reality.

Cultural Semiosphere refers to a complex of cultural concepts, values, historical and aesthetic consciousness, and their communicative forms as reflected in language, text, and discourse. This notion represents a system of socio-cultural signs formed within a people's historical memory, identity, and collective consciousness. Proverbs, as core components of this semiosphere, encode national values through language and transmit them from generation to generation. By its very nature, the cultural semiosphere constitutes an integrated representation of ethical and aesthetic views that emerge in social consciousness. Through language, it reflects dominant societal values, interprets them, and shapes attitudes toward them. Paremiological units function as the linguo-semantic structure of this semiosphere, performing the roles of transmitting cultural information, standardizing it, and endowing it with symbolic significance.

**Results:** Binary structures in national consciousness express not only opposition but also interrelatedness. For example, the proverb “Bir qalta qara, bir dán aq” – (One sack of black, one grain of white) contrasts collectivist and individual values, yet this opposition contains an element of cultural balance. In N. S. Trubetskoy's phonological theory, such oppositions are differentiated on the basis of “distinctive features”, through which linguistic units acquire semantic classification<sup>1</sup>. When this relational model is

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<sup>1</sup> Трубецкой Н.С. Основы фонологии // Н.С.Трубецкой; Пер. с нем. А.А.Холодовича; Ред. С.Д.Кацнельсона; Послесл. А.А.Реформатского. – 2 изд. – Москва : Аспент пресс, 2000. – 351, [1] с. : 21 см – (Классический учебник).; ISBN 5-7567-0250-4.





applied to proverbs, each oppositional element reveals its specific social and cultural significance. For instance, in the proverb “Jaqsılarga jaqsılıq - hár kimniń isi, jamanlıqqa jaqsılıq - er adamniń isi” – (Doing good to the good is everyone’s duty; doing good to the bad is the duty of a brave person,) the concepts of “good” and “evil” are distinguished through differential features, and their semantic function is manifested in the formation of a social ideal. This demonstrates that distinctive features possess not only linguistic relevance but also ethical and conceptual evaluative power.

Such conceptual pairs as light/darkness and heaven/earth define ethical positions within collective consciousness. These oppositional structures are reinforced in language through stylistic devices such as metaphor, antithesis, and synecdoche, thereby generating emotional and expressive meaning. For example, in the proverb “Kewli qarańǵı júrgen jolınan adasadı” – (One whose heart/mind is dark loses their way,) darkness functions as a metaphor for ignorance or choosing an incorrect path. In the proverbs “Til janı - kewilde, sózdiń janı – júzinde” – (The soul of language is in the heart, the soul of words is in the face) and “Kewil-kewilden suw isher” – (The heart is nourished by the heart of another,) individual virtues are evaluated through synecdoche. From this perspective, proverbs function as the core of the “cultural semiosphere” in language: they not only articulate ethical and aesthetic views but also transmit them from generation to generation. According to M. R. Galieva, the cultural semiosphere encodes dominant societal values through language. O. N. Volobueva, in turn, identifies metaphor as the primary discursive model of the cultural semiosphere and emphasizes its communicative role<sup>2</sup>. She interprets metaphorical models activated through proverbs as semantic mechanisms that encode the people’s worldview, ethical evaluations, and aesthetic ideals.

Proverbs in language perform not only the function of conveying information but also that of emotional encoding, social evaluation, and the establishment of ethical boundaries. G. K. Kdirbaeva demonstrates how mythological images embedded in proverbs reveal a people’s historical-aesthetic perspectives, national memory, and collective identity<sup>3</sup>. According to her, such images (for example, mythical figures such as “Umay”, “Albasty”, or “Jeztırnaq”) serve to reinforce gender stereotypes in collective consciousness and are encoded into the semiosphere on a metaphorical basis.

E. V. Paleeva focuses on the cultural and semantic nature of metaphorical structures encoded in proverbs<sup>4</sup>. According to her, proverbs function as multi-layered coding units within the semiosphere, through which the people’s worldview, ethical evaluations, and aesthetic values are conveyed via stylistic devices such as metaphor, metonymy, and synecdoche. For example, proverbs such as “Ózi bay, kewli jarlı” – (it conveys that a person may be materially wealthy or self-sufficient but lacks generosity, compassion, or inner virtue), and “Awzı qıysıq bolsa da, baydıń balası sóylesin” – (It reflects social hierarchy and respect for status—even if someone speaks poorly or imperfectly, their

<sup>2</sup> Волобуева О.Н. Концептуальное поле «человек и его интеллект» в русской и английской фразеологии: дис. ... канд. филол. Наук. Тюмень: ТГУ, 2011. 268 с.

<sup>3</sup> Кдырбаева Г.К. Мифологик концептосфера бирликлари лисоний вокеланишининг когнитив-дискурсив хусусиятлари (инглиз ва қорақалпоқ тиллари мисолида): дисс. ... филол. фан. док. – Нукус, 2024. – 236 б.

<sup>4</sup> Палеева Е.В. Концептуальный анализ как метод лингвистических исследований / Вып 2(8). - Курск. - 2010. – 1-5с.



words carry weight because of their social position or family background,) express both external and internal contrasts, enhancing figurative evaluative meaning. Paleeva emphasizes that the semiosphere model treats proverbs not only as units of linguistic expression but also as mechanisms of cultural communication.

In this process, proverbs become essential tools for evaluating social phenomena, defining normative behaviors, and shaping aesthetic perspectives. For instance, proverbs like “Miyneŧ etken toyadı (Miyneŧ etseñ emeseñ)” – (the proverb emphasizes the importance of diligence and hard work, suggesting that success generally comes through effort) and “Eshektiñ júgi jeñil kelse, jatağan keler” – (When the load is light, one feels no desire to work.) standardize cultural attitudes toward diligence and laziness through the semiosphere, embedding these norms within collective consciousness.

For example, the proverb “Naqlıdı bir aytpasa, aqlsız aytpaydı. Aqlılı adam ángimesin, naqlsız aytpaydı” – (A wise person speaks thoughtfully, with meaningful words or proverbs, representing knowledge, insight, and prudence. A foolish person speaks only in imitation or without real understanding, representing ignorance or lack of discernment. It conveys that wisdom guides social behavior and speech, while foolishness follows it blindly) creates a model of a value-laden human being through the binary opposition of wisdom and ignorance. Here, the cognitive function is not merely realized; the evaluative function is also explicit—wisdom is presented as a valued trait, while ignorance is depicted as undesirable.

From a cognitive perspective, the oppositions encoded in proverbs shape the fundamental categories of human thought. As Sh. S. Safarov notes, language and consciousness are integrated, and semantic-cognitive models transmitted through linguistic units are themselves communicative. Safarov emphasizes that the integration of language with conceptual fields is an essential component of the process of cultural cognitive modeling<sup>5</sup>. According to him, folk oral tools—particularly proverbs—encode cognitive structures in linguistic form and become key factors in consolidating national identity. Therefore, the semantic contrasts in proverbs function as mechanisms that reflect the categorical structure of human thought.

Paremiological units, as coded forms of the cultural semiosphere, not only express the aesthetic consciousness of a people but also serve as instruments for reinforcing national identity. As observed by B. T. Yusupova, her research distinguishes the semantic and stylistic layers of Karakalpak proverbs, analyzing their figurativeness, aphoristic structure, and rhythm not merely from an aesthetic perspective, but as cognitive and linguo-pragmatic tools. She further highlights the role of ethical connotations in shaping social consciousness and their position within the spiritual-normative system. Her analyses demonstrate that the values encoded in proverbs operate as ethical guides and are essential subjects for pedagogical and sociocognitive study. This confirms that proverbs function not merely as units of speech, but also as cultural phenomena.

G. K. Kdırbaeva, in her research, discusses the role of paremiological units—particularly mythological conceptsphere units—in expressing the national-linguistic

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<sup>5</sup> Сафаров Ш. Когнитив тилшунослик. – Жиззах: Сангзор, 2006. – 92 б.



worldview. According to the author, these units, through the “human concept,” convey individual, social, and often national values within society. For example, the proverb “Adam-adam menen tiri” - (community, social bonds, and mutual support are essential for personal and collective well-being,) verbalizes concepts of social interaction, closeness, interpersonal connection, and community. This illustrates that, in the national consciousness, conceptual and semantic units are deeply integrated.

Kdirbaeva emphasizes that by identifying the mythological roots of proverbs, one can trace their function within a multi-layered conceptual system. She regards these units as “archetypes relevant to the national language” and notes that they encompass cultural models, historical consciousness, and social values. Furthermore, one of the core principles of metaphorical thinking is the integration of conceptual fields in a stacked manner. This phenomenon allows two or more concepts to merge, giving rise to new, multi-layered semantic units.

**Conclusion:** Thus, proverbs serve as a linguistic representation of deeply rooted conceptual models and semantic structures within collective consciousness. They not only articulate opposing binary structures but also encode the aesthetic perspectives, ethical ideals, cultural identity, and cognitive frameworks essential to a people. Through language, proverbs shape the cultural semiosphere in national consciousness by means of metaphorical models, mythological concepts, and mental constructs. This semiosphere plays a decisive role in shaping values, reinforcing them, and transmitting them to future generations.

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