

PROVERBS AS LINGUOCULTURAL UNITS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ENGLISH AND UZBEK PAREMIOLOGICAL SYSTEMS

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Abstract

This article examines proverbs as core objects of linguoculturème within the framework of linguoculturology. the analyses of the proverbs reveals that how proverbs encode national-cultural identity, worldview, and value systems in English and Uzbek. The findings suggest that cross-linguistic comparison of proverbial funds yields significant insights into the cultural semantics of each language community.

Keywords: Linguoculturology, linguoculturème, proverbs, paremiology, anthropocentric paradigm, English, Uzbek, comparative linguistics.

Introduction

The era of globalization has generated new demands on linguistics, which need approaches that go beyond the description of language as a purely formal system. One of the new challenges is the study of language through the prism of the anthropocentric paradigm – a theoretical orientation that considers language not as a dry structure but as an open system closely related to human cognition, culture, society and psychology (Maslova, 1997). In the context of this paradigm, linguoculturology has become one of the most productive sub-disciplines of modern linguistics. Linguoculturology, as defined by Telia (1996), is a branch of linguistics that "aims at the study and description of the correlation between language and culture within the framework of contemporary national self-awareness and its semiotic expression The field lies at the intersection of linguistics, cultural studies, ethnolinguistics and sociolinguistics and concerns, what can be called, the "deep level" of semantics – the level where linguistic meaning intersects with universal and national cultural concepts (Krasnykh,

2002). In linguoculturology, the concept of the linguoculturème (also lingvokulturema or culturème) has been established as the central unit of analysis. A linguoculturème is a word, phrase or even a sentence which carries not only linguistic meaning but also culturally specific information, including national, social or psychological characteristics specific to a given language community (Yusupov, 2005). Importantly, linguoculturèmes include non-equivalent lexical items, anthroponyms, myths, phraseological units, paronyms, speech etiquette formulas and proverbs. This brings us to the central topic of the present study: proverbs as linguoculturèmes. (Yusupov, 2005).

Proverbs have long occupied a privileged position in folk oral tradition as carriers of collective wisdom, moral norms, and cultural memory. As Maslova (1997) observes, proverbs belong to the paremiological wealth of language — the study of which (*paremiology*, from the Greek *paroimia*, meaning "proverb") constitutes one of the key research objects of linguoculturology. However, the status of proverbs as literary or folkloric genre has remained ambiguous: they are alternately classified under folk prose, folk poetry, or treated as a minor sub-genre without independent status (Mieder, 2004).

Methodology

The study is grounded in the anthropocentric paradigm of modern linguistics, which positions the human being — with their cognition, culture, and communicative activity — at the centre of linguistic inquiry (Maslova, 1997). This paradigm encompasses cognitive linguistics, sociolinguistics, ethnolinguistics, psycholinguistics, pragmatics, and linguoculturology as its principal sub-disciplines.

The theoretical construct of the linguoculturème is adopted from the work of V.N. Telia (1996) and the Moscow School of Phraseology, which first introduced the term in the context of research on phraseological units and cultural semantics. The definition employed in this study follows Yusupov (2005, p. 47), who specifies that a linguoculturème is "a linguistic or speech unit that defines part of culture" — an entity that simultaneously carries lexical-semantic and cultural-semiotic content.

Maslova's (1997) tripartite periodization of linguoculturology's development provides the historical framework within which proverb research is situated:

- Foundational works (Humboldt, Benveniste, Weisgerber, Potebnia, Sapir);
- Emergence of linguoculturology as an autonomous discipline;
- Systematic development and consolidation of the field.

The anthropological and linguistic contributions of Humboldt, Potebnia, Sapir, Whorf, Wierzbicka, and others are acknowledged as foundational influences on the field (Maslova, 1997).

The primary material for this study are A corpus of English proverbs drawn from standard paremiological collections (Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs; Mieder, 2004); and A corpus of Uzbek proverbs drawn from classical collections of Uzbek folk oral literature (*maqol va matallar*) and relevant linguistic studies;

This research is based on a mixed methodological framework, incorporating Descriptive-analytical method, Comparative-contrastive method, Cultural-semantic analysis and Contextual analysis.

Results The case for treating proverbs as prototypical linguoculturèmes rests on several convergent properties.

First, proverbs are *linguistically complex* units. Unlike single lexical items, proverbs are complete syntactic structures — typically short, rhythmically marked, and often featuring figurative language, parallelism, or rhyme. This formal complexity allows them to convey dense semantic content efficiently.

Second, proverbs are *culturally saturated*. Each proverb encodes a perspective on human experience — relationships, labour, nature, time, morality — that reflects the collective wisdom and worldview (*Weltanschauung*) of the community that produced it. As Maslova (1997) notes, proverbs are "templates of national consciousness" (*ongning qoliplari*). Proverbs not only describe reality, but also evaluate it from within a culturally specific value system.

Third, proverbs are non-equivalent across languages. Some proverbs have cross-linguistic parallels (due to common human experience or historical contact), but many others are not easily translatable, but are culture-specific units that require cultural mediation rather than linguistic substitution. This non-equivalence is a defining property of the linguoculturème (Telia, 1996).

Fourth, from a pragmatic standpoint, proverbs serve multiple simultaneous speech functions. A single proverb may carry warning, advice, prohibition, consolation, criticism, or implicit threat depending on context (Mieder, 2004).

This functional complexity reflects their embeddedness in communicative culture.

These properties collectively justify the treatment of proverbs as *prime instances* of the linguoculturème category — units in which linguistic form and cultural content are fused to a degree that neither can be understood in isolation from the other.

The English paremiological tradition is one of the oldest and richest in the world, drawing on multiple historical sources. A significant portion of English proverbs derives from Latin originals — a legacy of the Roman presence in Britain and the enduring influence of classical civilization on English intellectual culture. Others entered English from French (following the Norman Conquest of 1066), from biblical sources (the Book of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes), and from later contact with other European languages (German, Dutch, Italian).

This layered etymology means that English proverbs often carry traces of multiple cultural traditions simultaneously. For example:

- *"Time is money"* — reflects a Protestant-capitalist ethic of productivity and temporal discipline, associated with Benjamin Franklin and the emergence of market society;
- *"Every cloud has a silver lining"* — encodes an optimistic orientation toward adversity characteristic of certain strands of Anglo-American cultural psychology;
- *"When in Rome, do as the Romans do"* — a direct calque of the Latin *"Si fueris Romae, Romano vivito more"*, reflecting the value placed on social conformity and contextual adaptability.

From a cultural-semantic standpoint, English proverbs frequently foreground values of individualism (*"God helps those who help themselves"*), pragmatism (*"Actions speak louder than words"*), and moderation (*"Everything in moderation"*). These orientations have been associated by Wierzbicka (1997) and others with the Anglo-Saxon cultural script of self-reliance and understatement.

The Uzbek language, whose literary tradition can be traced to the 10th–11th centuries, possesses one of the richest paremiological traditions of Central Asian culture. Uzbek proverbs (*maqollar*) and sayings (*matallar*) represent a great wealth of Uzbek cultural heritage. Although the language received its current name relatively recently, its continuous literary and oral tradition has preserved

thousands of proverbial expressions encoding Uzbek moral philosophy, social relations, and aesthetic sensibility.

The Uzbek paremiological fund reflects the profound influence of Islamic ethics, nomadic and sedentary co-existence, family and communal values, and the wisdom literature tradition (*hikmat*) associated with figures such as Alisher Navoi, Yusuf Khos Hojib, and Ahmad Yugnaki. Examples include:

- "*Mehnat — hayotning asosi*" ("Labour is the foundation of life") — encodes the value of industriousness and productive activity;
- "*Yaxshi so'z — jon ozuqi*" ("A good word is food for the soul") — reflects the Islamic and communal emphasis on respectful, nurturing speech;
- "*Ona yurting — oltin beshiging*" ("Your homeland is a golden cradle") — expresses the complex emotional attachment to one's native land, acknowledging both its comfort and its constraints.

Uzbek proverbs frequently encode values of collective solidarity ("*Kuch birlikda*" — "There is strength in unity"), respect for elders and tradition, the centrality of family and hospitality, and the importance of knowledge and wisdom. These orientations contrast in instructive ways with the more individualistic emphases found in the Anglo-American proverbial tradition.

Comparative analysis of English and Uzbek proverbs reveals three patterns:

Pattern 1 — Full equivalence: A small number of proverbs display both formal and semantic similarity across the two languages, suggesting either parallel independent development from shared human experience or historical cultural contact.

English	Uzbek	Shared theme
"A friend in need is a friend indeed"	"Do'st og'ir kunda bilinadi"	True friendship tested in adversity
"Strike while the iron is hot"	"Temirni qizigida bos"	Seizing the opportune moment
"Better late than never"	"Hechdan ko'ra kech yaxshi"	Value of belated action

Pattern 2 — Partial equivalence: Many proverbs share a general semantic theme but express it through culturally specific imagery or metaphorical vehicles, reflecting different environmental, social, or historical contexts.

English	Uzbek	Shared theme
"Don't count your chickens before they hatch"	"Chuchvarani xom sanamoq"	Premature expectations
"Every man is the architect of his own fortune"	" Yigitning baxtini mehnat ochar "	Personal responsibility

Pattern 3 — Cultural divergence: Some proverbs have no equivalent in the other language, marking zones of cultural uniqueness. These are the most prototypical linguoculturèmes, as their content is bound to historically and culturally specific conditions.

English proverbs emphasizing individual self-determination ("*God helps those who help themselves*") have no precise equivalent in Uzbek proverbial wisdom, which tends to foreground collective and communal action. Conversely, Uzbek proverbs expressing the paramount importance of filial piety and respect for parents (e.g., "*Ota rozi xudo rozi*") reflect a social structure and value system with no direct English counterpart.

Discussion

The results of the comparative analysis confirm the central thesis of linguoculturology: that language is not a neutral instrument of communication but a culturally shaped system that embeds and transmits the "linguistic picture of the world" characteristic of each speech community (Maslova, 1997; Humboldt, 1836/1988). Proverbs are among the most concentrated sites of this cultural encoding precisely because their brevity, memorability, and social circulation ensure that they are deeply internalized by native speakers.

The three patterns identified — full equivalence, partial equivalence, and cultural divergence — correspond to the three layers of human experience that proverbs draw on: *universal* (shared human biology and existential conditions), *typological* (shared social structures or historical contacts), and *particular* (culture-specific worldviews and historical experiences). This tripartite structure has been noted in comparative paremiology by Mieder (2004) and aligns with Telia's (1996) characterization of linguoculturology's object as encompassing both universal and culture-specific cultural information.

The analysis strengthens the theoretical claim that the *linguoculturème* — whether instantiated as a single word, a phraseological unit, or a full proverbial sentence — is the appropriate unit of analysis for linguoculturological research. Proverbs, as complete propositional structures, arguably represent the *maximal* form of the *linguoculturème*, containing within a single utterance a compressed cultural text that requires cultural competence, not merely linguistic competence, to decode.

This has significant implications for translation and foreign language teaching. As Krasnykh (2002) notes, linguoculturology studies language and speech through the lens of culture; and *lacunae* — gaps in the paremiological equivalence between languages — are among the most telling markers of cultural difference. Educators and translators who treat proverbs as mere stylistic ornaments, rather than as *linguoculturèmes* with embedded cultural content, risk systematic misunderstanding at the level of values and worldview.

The pragmatic multifunctionality of proverbs — their capacity to warn, advise, prohibit, console, criticize, or threaten within a single utterance — adds a further layer to their status as *linguoculturèmes*. This functional complexity means that proverb use is not merely a matter of semantic content but of social indexicality: deploying a proverb signals membership in a cultural community, appeals to shared authority, and performs a social act. This dimension connects linguoculturology to pragmatics and discourse analysis, reinforcing the interdisciplinary character of the anthropocentric paradigm.

The present study is necessarily selective in its paremiological coverage. A more systematic corpus-based comparison of English and Uzbek proverbs would permit quantitative assessment of the distribution of equivalence types and more fine-grained mapping of culturally specific semantic fields. Future research might also extend the comparison to Arabic-origin proverbs in Uzbek (reflecting Islamic cultural influence) and to Latin-origin proverbs in English, in order to trace the diachronic layering of cultural influences within each paremiological system. The ethnopsycholinguistic dimension — how speakers of each language actually interpret and deploy proverbs in natural discourse — also warrants empirical investigation through associative and experimental methods.

Conclusion

This article has examined proverbs as prototypical objects of the linguoculturrème within the framework of linguoculturology. The theoretical analysis demonstrates that proverbs satisfy all the defining criteria of the linguoculturrème: they carry fused linguistic and cultural content, exhibit cross-linguistic non-equivalence, encode national-cultural values and worldviews, and perform complex pragmatic functions in communicative contexts.

The comparative analysis of English and Uzbek paremiological systems reveals both shared paremiological universals — rooted in common human experience — and significant cultural divergences that reflect the distinct historical, religious, social, and ecological conditions of the two communities. These divergences are the most theoretically productive for linguoculturology, as they mark the zones of genuine cultural specificity that resist transparent translation. The study confirms that proverbs are not peripheral curiosities of folk literature but central objects of serious linguistic-cultural inquiry. As Maslova (1997) observes, language cannot exist without a nation's culture, and culture cannot live without language. Proverbs are among the most vivid expressions of this indissoluble unity — compressed cultural texts whose full meaning unfolds only at the intersection of linguistic form and cultural knowledge.

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