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and Erik Aasland

Contemporary Kazakh Proverb Research

Digital, Cognitive, Literary, and
Ecological Approaches



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National Cognitive Activity of Proverbs in the Language of Fiction

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Introduction

Proverbs and sayings are the basis of folk art. Proverbs and sayings are wise teachings that summarize the key ideas about life events in a rational, concise, and sharp way. Proverbs and sayings emerge from life. They are the experience and philosophical essence of life struggles, constant efforts, and social contradictions. They are made up of deep insights into life laws, comparisons, and reflections of the truths of human society. Like other branches of oral literature, proverbs and sayings have been sorted out over time, replenished, sharpened, and replaced by concepts that do not satisfy modern requirements, and only the most updated versions have been preserved.

Proverbs and sayings are a small genre of Kazakh oral literature. Nonetheless, they have a special significance in the spiritual life of our nation. They describe both the epoch and history of the ancient people, their customs, knowledge and skills, art and culture, professions, beliefs, and the ways of cultural development. Rakhmankul Berdibay writes, “Labor, profession, pastoralism, farming, livestock, unity, courage, bravery, defense of the country, homeland, social relations, morality, education, art, health, friendship, love, youth, oldness, generosity and honor have become the main topic of proverbs and sayings. There are many comparisons in the proverbs related to the ancient profession of the Kazakh people like herding and livestock, which prove the understanding, wisdom, evaluation of the events and artistic understanding of the nation ” (Berdibay 2005, 349).

It can be said that each individual work in this genre has been sorted and systematized in terms of content and transmitted from generation to

generation. In ancient times, they carried the same burden as the fables of large genres, such as short stories and novels. Zhumat Tilepov (2010, 8) says, "In general, sayings, which are the source of folk philosophy, have become an impressive phraseological unit due to their unique expressiveness, and are an indicator of the thinking level of our nation. The dynasty of writers, who deeply understood this, has always used proverbs and sayings in their works of art, articles, essays and descriptions." Hence, proverbs and sayings are an encyclopedia that summarize various events that take place in people's lives.

Proverbs and sayings are a "golden bridge" that connect the past and present of the people with their future. They are a guarantee of the continuation of spiritual and cultural traditions in the cognition, social memory, language, and mentality of the nation. Any ethnic community that forgets its spiritual heritage is deprived of its past, and its future is obscure. More detailed studies of individual proverbs and sayings in cultural contexts are necessary. The work so far shows that proverbs as *monumenta humana* contain general wisdom that, in many cases, defy geographical or linguistic boundaries (Kuusi 1985). According to the proverb critic Wolfgang Mieder, it is important to study proverbs and sayings in a cultural context because proverbs and sayings are an expression of human wisdom (Mieder et al., 2019). There is both wisdom that is passed down and insight gained in succeeding generations and expressed through new sayings and proverbs.

A number of research works on Kazakh proverbs and sayings have been written in both linguistics and literary criticism. According to the scholar Abduali Qaidar (2004, 142), proverbs and sayings "have extremely important role in the life of the Kazakh people in understanding the history and present nature of the people in terms of ideological, logical and ethnolinguistic point of view. Proverbs and sayings are related to all events in the world, society and nature. There is a natural order in the nature of the world from the very beginning. This sequence can be seen only by grouping all things and phenomena into three large areas and exploring them by concentrating on their internal system and meaning."

In general, the thinking peculiarities of any nation are reflected in its native language. There are also unique proverbs and sayings in the language of each nation that describe the consciousness, knowledge, customs, traditions, culture, and history of that nation. Therefore, proverbs and sayings are integral parts of the language, which determine the process of development of the national language and the main indicators of culture of the nation.

It is impossible to imagine the richness of the Kazakh language without folklore. For example, the art of oratory and aitys are considered as the spiritual treasure of the nation. They have flourished and developed from the rich

vocabulary of phraseological units in our language. The language of fiction was also formed as a continuation of such traditional linguistics.

In works of art, poets and writers use vernacular vocabulary in creating the image of the character or conveying their ideas. M. Sergaliyev (1995, 60) writes, “The language of the Kazakh people is both rich and artistic. A variety of beautiful and wise words, oratory and proverbs are in national use. The expressive and impressive methods are also there.”

The use of proverbs and sayings in a work of art requires great skills from the writer. The mastery of the poets and writers is assessed according to the extent to which the noble heritage of the people—proverbs—are appropriately used in their works (Sarsenbayev 1980, 14). The writer uses a variety of visual tools to convey the story to the reader effectively. Also, the author makes a good use of proverbs and sayings to convey ideas. “Here, the writer’s ability to appropriately and effectively use the pragmatic function of the language plays an important role. One of the main features of proverbs and sayings is their evaluation. Evaluation is the speaker’s assessment of the event, object, action, attitude, and viewpoint” (Momynova 1999, 134).

Intricate evaluation is inherent to proverbs and sayings. In proverbs and sayings, the assessment is given both figuratively and explicitly. They also evaluate any situation in human life, human behavior, actions, and human qualities.

B. Dinayeva claims that “The properties of proverbs and sayings such as emotional expressiveness, evaluation, didactics, and conclusiveness about a particular situation are associated with their natural function. The meaning of the evaluative and descriptive function in proverbs and sayings is primarily related to the positive or negative assessment by the subject. Secondly, the exact situation is not considered as an individual phenomenon. A set of typical situations are often given in a proverbial form. The speaker expresses his opinion and evaluates a particular situation by choosing the proverb and sayings. Emotional tone and evaluative quality are not interchangeable. However, there is a similarity between them, because evaluation is a certain type of utterance in the expression of the emotional relationship” (2013, 70).

The evaluative properties of proverbs and sayings are widely used in works of art to depict the image of the characters, reveal their personality, and evaluate their actions. In this article, we will focus on the proverbs and sayings in Kazakh writer Mukhtar Magauin’s works. Mukhtar Magauin is a famous Kazakh writer. He stepped towards literature in the 1960s. The author’s work, “Tazynyn olimi” (Death of Tazy), which was written in 1969, criticizes the ideology of the Soviet Era. The main character in the work is a hunting dog / hound. The Kazakh people call a hound *tazy*. The name *tazy*

comes from the Persian, meaning “pure, agile, and quick.” It is also possible that the word *tazy* means “pure,” pure-blooded, and may have been changed to *tazy* due to the laws of reduction. It seems that the Kazakh *tazy* and the Afghan *tazy* came to Central Asia at the same time period as the Persian *tazy*. They were artificially selected and improved by the Sakas and Afghans in accordance with the local natural conditions (Hinayat and Isabekov 2007).

The main storyline of this work begins with the puppet period of *tazy*, and every aspect of life is developed through the eyes of the *tazy*, and the theme is revealed through his death.

The death of the *tazy* is not just the death of a dog. “Tazy is a symbolic image taken from the national tradition. For our nation, where a hound is one of the seven treasures, it is also a continuation of antiquity, a source of our virtue, and a value of our traditions. The death of that *tazy* is a death of our spirit, traditions and people” (Baitursyn 2021). This theme is artistically developed by impressive ideas.

“Hey, why are you beating my hound?” he shouted.

“I not only beat it; I will skin it.”

“What? Who are you?”

“You don’t know me yet!” Esenzhol said with a sneer. “You will know me. I will make sure you know me. You will follow your uncle.”

“My uncle is none of your business,” said Kazy. The pace has slowed. “You can’t do anything to me. It is said that “Aq yilip—bugilmes,” “white does not bend.” I am a bloodthirsty person. Everyone knows. Here it is!” Kazy leaned over and hit his wooden foot. (Magauin 1990, 23)

Here, the proverb, *Aq yilip—bugilmes* (White does not bend), serves to convey the main idea of the work. In the Kazakh worldview, the color white (aq) is a symbol of purity, honesty and justice. In the explanatory dictionary of the Kazakh language, white is an adjective like the color of snow, milk (the opposite of black). It means honesty, purity, and innocence (Zhanuzakov 2008). Bending means bowing down, bowing of one’s head, and inflexibility is a negative to white. It means not to bend, not to lower the head, and not bowing. The general meaning of the proverb is that a pure person does not bow his head, bend or bow down in front of anyone. In the work, the main character, Kazy, is slandered innocently. However, after some time, he was acquitted and released. Injustice is defeated by justice. This proverb is repeated twice in the work. In a broad sense, the main problem raised in the work is the destruction of the centuries old native culture and national values of the Kazakh people by the colonial Soviet Union, assimilating alien, artificial, and cheap cultures into the minds of the people. In the end, the writer suggests that Soviet policy will be exposed at last, justice will triumph,

and the Kazakhs will become an independent country. The day will come to revive Kazakh culture and national values. In his work, the author uses this proverb to convey the main idea and his metaphor to the reader. During the Soviet Era, censorship in literature was severe. Control over ideas of national interest was especially strong. The Soviet authorities demanded that the literature be based on Communist Party principles. Kazakh literature developed from the experience of a complex society. This period, which spans more than seventy years, was not the same in terms of the development of society and the exchange of ideological positions and ideas. “The Communist Party led the literary process. Literature was mainly based on the tasks of the epoch set by the party, trying to be the voice of that epoch. However, despite political pressure, literature has become a national category” (Adilkhanova 2014). During this period, when creative people could not express themselves freely, writers used different methods to convey their ideas, such as illustrations, parables, etc. Mukhtar Magauin used this proverb in order to deliver his thoughts at that period.

The proverb *Aq yilip—bugilmes* (White does not bend) is sometimes used as *Aq yilip synbaidy* (White does not break) (Alpysbayeva, Alibekov, and Qosan 2010, 147). Here, the word “bend” in the proverb is replaced by the word “break.” The proverb, “White does not break,” means that an innocent person does not give up; thus, no evil can break an honest person. That is why he does not lower his face in front of anyone. The word “unbreakable” here further expands the meaning of “not bending” in the previous article. Such practices are found in the use of proverbs. Finding and using proverbs differently depends on the writing style. The use of different versions of proverbs in colloquials and literary language is of great stylistic significance. Therefore, its two types usual (according to the language norm) and occasional (deviation from the norm or personal use of the speaker) should not be ignored (Smagulova 1983, 68). Variation is also inherent in the nature of proverbs; it is the result of a living process arising from their usual and occasional use. “Variability is not a rigid phenomenon of proverbs, but a living phenomenon that is suitable for use in any field of language, adaptable to changes as needed, and flexible in wording” (Qaidar 2004, 107–108). The scientist says that in paremiology, variability and invariance is inherent in the nature of proverbs. “Usual comes from the term *use* in English, which describes the proverbs that have become an established tradition, in accordance with the norms of literary language” (Akhmanova 1969). Occasional (variable) proverbs tend to be modified and change constantly. Occasional change is a phenomenon that differs from the established speech skills, depending on the context, and belongs to the individual speech patterns of the speaker.

“The occasional events are often found in proverbs. Non-compliance with the norms is the main property of occasional words. Proverbs are mainly used in oral literature, the language of fiction, journalism, in the traditional form and non-traditional form” (Dinayeva 2013, 30). Occasional use is also called “author’s use” in paremiology because the proverb is changed at the will of the author, but the main requirement is to fully preserve the meaning of the proverb.

A. Qaidar divides the changes associated with the occasional use of Kazakh proverbs into four groups:

- The first group: changes in the composition of proverbs due to the replacement of lexemes (components).
- The second group: changes due to the expansion of the structure and lexical structure of proverbs.
- The third group: changes due to the narrowing (reduction) of the structure and lexical structure of proverbs.
- The fourth group: the phenomenon of allusions inherent in the compositional development of proverbs.

In particular, the occasional use of proverbs belonging to the first group is divided into several types. One of them is the use of a structural element in a different way (paraphrasing). The purpose of this method is to slightly change and use the proverbs differently that bother the speaker (Qaidar 2004, 113–114). How to change it is up to the user, but the basic meaning should not be altered.

Mukhtar Magauin has changed the popular saying, “White does not bend,” to “White does not break.” Proverbs, as mentioned above, can be changed in accordance with the author. The original meaning of the proverb has not changed. It can only be said that the author has adapted the proverb to the content of his work. Kazy, who was a victim of injustice, escaped innocent slander and was released from prison, but his illness worsened in prison, and he died shortly after his release. He was a person who continued the Kazakh traditions and national values. At that time, there were few people like Kazy who preserved ancient heritage. However, the injustice that he saw in society hurt both his soul and his body, and he eventually died. Therefore, M. Magauin may have used the proverb in a form, “White does not break.” Also, it is possible that the proverb has changed depending on various situations. In any case, the proverb “White does not bend” corresponds to the author’s idea raised in the story. The author has a deep knowledge of the Kazakh literary language.

The language of Mukhtar Magauin's works, who had mastered a sacred heritage of the nation—the art of speech—is extremely rich. There, you can find all the literary elements, methods, and techniques that depict artistic phenomena related to literature, language, grammar, and logic. The readers are especially impressed by the skill of the writer, who treats the language responsibly and uses every word with pleasure to revive the ancient words in his works. "Everyone who studied and read the works of M. Magauin would clearly notice the words he created himself. It is not easy to play with the word, to illuminate, characterize and draw a picture with a word. It also needs a certain amount of accuracy, measurement and weighing. Regular phrases, fables, proverbs and sayings, suitable lines, words-pictures, and landscape-painting are typical only for masters of literary methods. If we could classify and filter the synonymous, ethnographic, exotic, and ancient words used by Magauin, how many wonderful dictionaries and books could we create," writes literary critic Zhanat Elshibek (2010). The language of M. Magauin's works is rich and prolific. He frequently and effectively uses proverbs and sayings in his works. In his story "Kara Kyz" (Black Girl), the writer plays with proverbs and sayings depending on the content of his work.

"There may be times when I did not satisfy your thoughts, but I'm devoted. I am faithful to you, and you also need to try to be a good husband to me."

"There is no doubt that I am trying to be a good husband, but God knows how faithful you are, thought Bekseit."

"Who will help us if we do not rely on each other? 'Tuiagy butin tulpar zhoq' (There is no steed with a whole hoof). Is there a perfect human being in this life? Let's not let each other down." (Magauin 1990, 51)

In this short dialogue between the main character Bekseit and his wife Gulzhihan, the author uses the proverb, "There is no steed with a whole hoof" (*Tuiagy butin tulpar zhoq*). The steed here is a horse. The Kazakh people highly valued horses and likened them to the man's wing. In the worldview, mentality, and language of the Kazakh people, there is a different philosophical and cultural system formulated about the horse. Kazakhs viewed man and his horse as a single world. And a *tulpar* (steed) is a racehorse. The Kazakh people divided horses into three groups. Kazakhs call racehorses (a kind of national sport) *tulpar*, *argymak*, and *saigulik*. Such horses were cared for specially. A horse that can withstand heavy loads and long distances is called *kazanat* and was also considered as a special type of horse. The rest of the horses kept for their meat and milk are called *zhaby* (Torekhanov 2021).

The horse's hoof illustrates its power. In particular, if the hooves are thick and the heels are high, it is considered a strong horse. Such horses are fast. Hence, they usually run the races.

A difficult task in the study of proverbs as an object of ethnolinguistics is to accurately identify the factors of their emergence in the language and the reasons for their development and transition to humans (character, behavior, actions, attitudes, etc.). The proverb “There is no steed with a whole hoof” was originally associated with horses, but over time it has become associated with humans. Paremiologists say that proverbs go through two stages in their semantic development. In the first stage, the proverbs preserve their initial meaning, while in the second stage they develop. “Usually the original meaning of proverbs is forgotten, and the version that is abstract and directed to humans is preserved” (Qaidar 2004, 85).

Literally, the horse’s hooves are its most important parts. The whole weight of the body falls on them. When it gallops fast, it can hurt its hooves. Hoof injuries are especially common among racehorses. This is probably the origin of the proverb. As for the figurative meaning, there is no one in the world who is without any worries. Everyone has their own sorrows and problems. It means that no human is perfect. This proverb is abstracted, shifting its direction from the horse to humans. There is a logical-semantic connection between the original meaning and the figurative meaning of the proverb.

Another feature of this proverb is that, in the beginning, it had two parts. After some time, the second part was forgotten. In paremiology, this is also called usual-elliptical (usual-elliptical version) or tight version. The essence of this phenomenon is as follows: one, two, or three of the original elements (components) of these proverbs are included in such a way that they do not affect the general meaning when omitted (Qaidar 2004, 11). The general meaning of proverbs do not change when they are simplified, shortened, and their individual components omitted. The full version of the proverb is *Tuiagy butin tulpar zhoq, Qiyagy butin sunqar zhoq*, in English, “There is no steed with a whole hoof, no falcon with the whole nib.” Nib (*qiyag*) is one feather of the bird’s wings (Utemisova 2012, 82). Sunkar is a species of falcon. It belongs to the family of predators. The falcon is distinct due to its greatness, courage, and beauty. We can also call the falcon the fastest bird in the world. It flutters its wings four or five times in a second. The second part of the proverb literally means that the beautiful falcon, which flies high and fast, does not have whole feathers. That is, because it is a bird of prey, it often damages its feathers while hunting, so its feathers and wing fibers are not intact. When this proverb is used for the person, it completes the first part of the proverb. That is, no matter how beautiful and strong a person is, he/she is not flawless. It means that nobody is perfect. Both of the components used in parallel have the same pattern. Although their meanings are different, they are repetitive. Scientists call this phenomenon *syntactic parallelism*. In

paremiology, this is called *symmetry*. “Symmetry is usually considered to be the basis of beauty, harmony, and elegance as a phenomenon that represents two identical parts of an object that occur in nature. Symmetrical balance is often found in proverbs consisting of two parts” (Qaidar 2004, 104). The features mentioned by the scientist are clearly visible in this article. It is not uncommon for M. Magauin to use this proverb in his work. The main character in the work is Professor Bekseyit, Doctor of Historical Sciences. He has devoted his life to science and left his wife Aigul and son from a simple family in order to achieve his desired position and marry Gulzhihan. Finally, he achieves his dream career. However, the middle-aged couple is not happy in their family life. Although they looked like happy families with no needs, the couple could not communicate well with each other. The writer tells this proverb through Gulzhikhan, Bekseyit’s wife. Noticing that Bekseyit was disgusted with her wife, she tried to console herself by saying this proverb. In Kazakh people’s cognition, this proverb is often used to comfort people. For example, it is often used to express condolences to the bereaved. There is a tradition of expressing condolences to the bereaved. It is called consolation. Consolation is a ceremony of condolences to the bereaved. It is a type of folk song. It is a long-standing tradition which is expressed by a well known compositional system. There are many verses in consolation songs that have become proverbs and sayings. The core themes are developed through proverbs and sayings, the commandments and life experiences (Auezov 1960, 22).

The proverb “There is no steed with a whole hoof, no falcon with the whole nib” is often used in this case. That is, there is nobody without sorrow, without grief, without any problems. Everyone has their own worries. The writer M. Magauin was able to successfully demonstrate this folklore in his work, “Kara Kyz.” Let us look at the author’s work:

“There is only one thing I am not satisfied with. I had my first unprotected doctoral work.”

“Yes . . .”

“Invulnerable topic . . .”

“If the knot is strong, the felt stake goes into the ground,” the problem is not in the title, but in the writing. (Magauin 1990, 45)

Here, the author uses the Kazakh proverb, If the hammer is strong, the felt stake is driven into the ground (*Toqpagy myqty bolsa, kiyz qazyq zherge kiredi*). Taking into account the rich information and valuable contribution of each proverb on the essence of the ethnos, its spiritual and material culture, worldview, customs, traditions, and beliefs, we can conclude that they are making a significant contribution to the study of ethnic identity.

This article reflects the names of things used in the daily life of the Kazakh people. *Toqpaaq* here is a thick tool that hits something on the ground. *Qazyq* (a stake) is a strong piece of wood or metal that is used to tie an animal to a rope and to keep it loose. It is easy to hit such a stake with an iron hammer, an ax, or a stick and knock into the ground. Felt (*kiyz*) is a thick, dense material made of animal hair. Stake (*qazyq*) is not made of felt, and even if it is made, it is impossible to knock it into the ground. However, the strength of the hook is so great that it drives the “felt stake” into the ground. Figuratively, if a person has someone to rely on, a strong support, he will be able to achieve his goals regardless of being educated or not. In other words, it means that a person who has a supporter will succeed in any sphere of life (Qaidar 2014, 500).

Proverbs and sayings utilize logical formulas and rules created by each nation. It comes to mind in every event or problem. Thus, they explain in a simple way something that is difficult and requires a lot of thinking and lengthy narration. Bekseyit's dissertation on the proverbs and sayings as a young graduate student failed because the topic of his dissertation did not correspond to the political ideology of that time. Bekseyit, who later took a different topic, successfully defended his dissertation and received a degree and became a professor. He enhanced his financial situation, thanks to a new job, a new position, and a reputation. He intends to use the opportunity to refine his scholarly work, which he wrote at a young age, and publish it as a book. The writer uses the Kazakh proverb that “If the hammer is strong, the felt stake is driven into the ground” (*Toqpagy myqty bolsa, kiyz qazyq zherge kiredi*) because of Bekseyit's current situation and actions. Proverbs and sayings in a fiction are often used to create an image and reveal the character, as well as draw conclusions about a particular situation. One of the characteristics of our nation is to figuratively deliver the thoughts with the help of proverbs and sayings.

The features in the work of art, such as the use of proverbs and sayings at different levels, the omission of their pairs, or the change of lexical composition, differ depending on the writer's linguistic skills. Taking into account that the source of the literary language is the national language, the ability to use the proverbs and sayings in a work of art, which are part of this national language, depends on the level of knowledge and stylistic taste of the writer. We aimed to analyze the purpose of these proverbs and sayings in conveying the author's ideas in the work, their meaning, and the scope of their usage in terms of the Kazakh people's cognition by analyzing the proverbs and sayings in the works of the writer Mukhtar Magauin. Considering the language as a living phenomenon, it is normal that proverbs and sayings constantly evolve and update. It is common that proverbs and sayings come in different

versions that are similar to each other. This is due to the fact that orators, who are poetic by nature, sometimes use proverbs and sayings in different forms depending on the situation. However, each of these words passes through the analysis of the nation. After all, only beautiful, sharp, profound proverbs and sayings with a deep meaning stay with the nation. Therefore, in the process of oral literature, the nation accepts not the attenuated proverbs and sayings, but the renewed ones (Tilepov 2010, 15). Kazakh is a nation which values witty words and ingenious minds that can be reflected in proverbs and sayings.

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