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FOLK THINKING AND COGNITIVE PROCESSES REFLECTED IN PROVERBIAL EXPRESSIONS

Babanazarova Sokhiba Abdusharipovna
Doctoral student, Khorezm Mamun Academy

Abstract: This study explores proverbs through the prism of the cognitive dimensions of popular reasoning. It supports the notion that proverbs, as one of the briefest forms of oral folk creativity, serve as conceptual constructs encapsulating human life experience, cultural principles, and outlook. The research demonstrates the interrelation of proverbs with such cognitive activities as perception, remembrance, abstraction, categorization, and conceptual modeling. Proverbs are also interpreted as instruments for organizing collective knowledge, upholding ethical codes, and transmitting accumulated experience through metaphors, symbolic imagery, and prototypes.

The article identifies the fundamental cognitive functions of proverbs — epistemological, axiological, pragmatic, and interpretive. Proverbs are regarded as a form of collective consciousness preserving socio-cultural heritage and values through generations. It is further observed that although proverbs represent national thought, they retain universal and intercultural dimensions.

Keywords: proverbs, folk mentality, cognitive linguistics, conceptual metaphor, symbol, prototype, collective consciousness, cultural values, mental processes.

Proverbs constitute one of the most ancient and concise forms of oral heritage, embodying the everyday realities, accumulated experience, and worldview of humanity. Expressed linguistically, they emerge as the direct outcomes of mental operations such as perception, recollection, grouping, and generalization — products of collective cognition. They encapsulate profound meanings in short and memorable forms and, by being handed down through generations, preserve and transmit social and cultural wisdom. Hence, proverbs are valued as reflections of human intellect, practical experience, and civilization.

From the standpoint of cognitive linguistics, proverbs reveal the internal mechanisms of perception, memory, abstraction, and conceptual structuring within the human mind. They are grounded in conceptual metaphors, figurative images, and symbols, which elucidate how people classify and interpret reality. For instance, the Uzbek proverb “El bilan borsa – el bo‘lar, yo‘qolsa – cho‘l bo‘lar” (“He who goes with the people becomes a people; he who loses them becomes a desert”) conveys the notion of social solidarity, illustrating the centrality of the concept “people” (el) in folk consciousness. As linguistic constructs, proverbs bear not only artistic but also analytical value, serving as vital material for examining cultural concepts, moral principles, and cognitive habits of a nation.

Manifestations of Folk Reasoning in Proverbs:

1. Generalization and Preservation of Experience.



Date: 27th October-2025

Proverbs summarize the collective experience accumulated through centuries.

Example: “He who works enjoys food; the idle one enjoys sleep.” Diligence is thus represented as a universal virtue.

2. Comparison and Analogy.

Complex meanings are often conveyed through parallels with nature, animals, or everyday life.

Example: “A blind man who is used to it will find the bottom of the cauldron.”

This illustrates that habit and experience guide a person to success.

3. Cultural Values and Moral Norms.

Proverbs reinforce ethical standards and community values.

Example: “A good horse turns back from a bad road, a good friend from a bad word.”

Proverbs are also interlinked with cognitive operations such as perception, conceptualization, metaphorical reasoning, recollection, and knowledge transmission. When examining perception and conceptualization within proverbs, we find that ideas derived from one’s environment and social reality are encoded succinctly. Moreover, according to cognitive linguistic theory, metaphor constitutes a fundamental mechanism of thought. Widespread use of metaphor in proverbs enhances comprehension of human existence.

Additionally, the rhythmic and compact form of proverbs makes them easy to memorize and recall, transforming them into tools for preserving social memory and collective intellect across generations.

Similar to idioms and fixed expressions, proverbs function as mental units shaping national outlook. They embody human relations to nature, social roles, moral obligations, and the collective mindset of the people. Proverbs form the semantic nucleus of folk thinking, expressing perception, experience, and worldview through language. From a cognitive perspective, they are valuable not only as linguistic artifacts but also as mechanisms preserving conceptual metaphors, collective insights, and cultural ideals. Consequently, studying proverbs through the lens of cognitive linguistics offers a deeper understanding of popular reasoning and cultural memory.

The Role of Proverbs in the System of Thought:

1. Structuring Knowledge.

Proverbs organize and categorize human experience.

Example: “He who reads much may not know; he who sees much does.” This contrasts theoretical and experiential cognition.

2. Conceptual Metaphor and Logical Correlation.

Human thought often interprets the world metaphorically.

Example: “Life is a journey” — “Without walking the road, no destination can be reached.”

3. Moral and Didactic Standards.

Proverbs contribute to forming ethical norms and moral discipline.



Date: 27th October-2025

Example: “Do good — cast it into the sea; if the fish does not know, the Creator will”.

4. Collective Nature of Folk Thought.

Proverbs reflect not individual but communal reasoning, hence being known as “folk wisdom”.

Semantically, proverbs combine symbolic imagery and generalization, encapsulating the life experience of a people in condensed linguistic form. Within the cognitive framework, they serve to systematize knowledge, define moral principles, and construct shared worldviews. Thus, the exploration of proverbs holds significance for linguistics, philosophy, psychology, and cultural studies alike.

A central notion in cognitive linguistics is that of the prototype. Proverbs frequently embody archetypal experiences representing universal human situations. For example, “A true friend is known in hardship” expresses the prototypical experience within the concept of friendship. Hence, proverbs transmit the most characteristic cognitive models of humankind. Moreover, their symbolic dimension—rooted in nature, animals, and everyday life—illustrates how abstract reasoning is conveyed through tangible imagery.

Cognitive Functions of Proverbs:

1. Epistemic: generating and conveying knowledge across generations;
2. Axiological: affirming cultural virtues such as honesty, labor, and loyalty;
3. Pragmatic: delivering concise social judgments or advice;
4. Interpretive: framing and interpreting life experiences.

As intercultural mental constructs, proverbs simultaneously mirror national mentality and reveal universal cognitive patterns across civilizations. For instance, the English saying *‘‘Don’t put all your eggs in one basket’’* corresponds to similar expressions in Uzbek and many other languages, demonstrating the universality of cognitive mechanisms.

Conclusion:

Proverbs illustrate the conceptual frameworks through which societies generate meaning. They embody archetypal experiences, condense abstract notions through symbolic reasoning, and operate as vehicles for transmitting collective knowledge, moral values, and social practices. Viewed cognitively, they represent not merely linguistic phenomena but vital instruments for studying processes of abstraction, logical association, and cultural continuity.

The cognitive-linguistic analysis of proverbs, therefore, offers profound insight into folk mentality, perception, categorization of the world, and symbolic representation of communal identity. It bears theoretical importance for linguistics, cultural cognition, and philosophy, while providing practical implications for education, ethical upbringing, and intercultural dialogue.



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