

AZERBAIJAN

WORDS OF THE FATHERS AND THEIR CHARACTERISTICS

PALABRAS DE LOS PADRES AZERÍES Y SUS CARACTERÍSTICAS

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the linguistic and cultural significance of Azerbaijani proverbial expressions referred to as “atalar sözü” or “words of the fathers,” which constitute an essential layer of the nation’s folkloric heritage. These expressions, deeply embedded in ceremonial and everyday communication, are analyzed for their historical development, pragmatic functions, and structural characteristics. While folk genres such as blessings, curses, oaths, and prayers have been discussed in previous literature, the specific nature and role of “atalar sözü” as a distinct folkloric phenomenon remain understudied. To address this research gap, the article aims to systematize these expressions within the broader framework of folklore, focusing on their semantic dualities, mnemonic structure, and moral content. It was used a qualitative and comparative lens, examining the idiomatic and syntactic features of selected expressions and their usage across different social contexts. It was determined that “atalar sözü” serve not only as vessels of ethical norms and practical wisdom but also as concise linguistic units with binary construction that enhance oral transmission. Their function is more than the aesthetic expression, influencing behavior norms and upholding intergenerational continuity. By foregrounding the multifunctionality of such expressions—from education to social regulation—it was underscored their relevance in contemporary cultural identity and linguistic research. Ultimately, this study contributes to the conservation and scholarly validity of intangible cultural heritage in Azerbaijan and offers methodological suggestions for future folklore and discourse studies.

Keywords: Folklore, Proverbs, Literature, Language.

RESUMEN

Este estudio explora la importancia lingüística y cultural de las expresiones proverbiales azerbaiyanas conocidas como “atalar sözü” o “palabras de los padres”, que constituyen un estrato esencial del patrimonio folclórico de la nación. Estas expresiones, profundamente arraigadas en la comunicación ceremonial y cotidiana, se analizan en función de su desarrollo histórico, funciones pragmáticas y características estructurales. Si bien géneros folclóricos como bendiciones, maldiciones, juramentos y oraciones se han abordado en la literatura previa, la naturaleza y el papel específicos de “atalar sözü” como fenómeno folclórico distintivo siguen siendo poco estudiados. Para abordar esta brecha de investigación, el artículo busca sistematizar estas expresiones dentro del marco más amplio del folclore, centrándose en sus dualidades semánticas, estructura mnemotécnica y contenido moral. Se utilizó una perspectiva cualitativa y comparativa, examinando las características idiomáticas y sintácticas de expresiones seleccionadas y su uso en diferentes contextos sociales. Se determinó que los “atalar sözü” sirven no solo como vehículos de normas éticas y sabiduría práctica, sino también como unidades lingüísticas concisas con construcción binaria que mejoran la transmisión oral. Su función va más allá de la expresión estética, influyendo en las normas de comportamiento y manteniendo la continuidad intergeneracional. Al destacar la multifuncionalidad de estas expresiones —desde la educación hasta la regulación social—, se subrayó su relevancia en la investigación contemporánea sobre identidad cultural y lingüística.

INTRODUCTION

National spiritual values are an expression of the uniqueness of every nation in the world. Here, music, painting, rituals performed for holy spirits, outlooks on life, and such values act as attributes of every nation (Hu & Zhou, 2024). One of the main carriers of national culture is oral folk literature. Its preservation and transmission to future generations as it is constitutes one of the tasks set. This is because the unique, rich, and rare pearls of word art play an important role in shaping the spiritual culture, outlooks, and worldview of people. Oral literature, with its fluency of language, wonder, and magical qualities, educates the aesthetic feelings and emotions of listeners and readers, as well as their taste. Oral folk literature, which is an important component of folklore, is not only an expression of the artistic thinking of the first people, but also a folk memory that has filtered through the centuries. Here, man's creative attitude toward the natural phenomena surrounding him is engraved (Fakhrurozi et al., 2025; Ramazanova et al., 2022).

Undoubtedly, life has not always been as comfortable as it is now. The birth of a person, the setting of the sun, the falling of rain, and the replacement of seasons were mysteries for the first human generation. However, the steps taken for the sake of understanding the world and the struggle for survival were greater than they are today. As a result, people did not remain in their places, but tried to search for the causes of every event that occurred. The conclusions obtained were passed on to the next generation in the form of descriptions or hymns, and they turned into folklore examples. Thus, the natural phenomena surrounding people and the first knowledge about them were also the main source of artistic imagination. Such events, mixed with mythical views in the artistic memory, expressed the models of their origin in the thinking of the people to whom they belonged—their first ideas about creation. In other words, folk creativity was also history. All these experiences in people's lives were reflected in one form or another in the first artistic examples that were created.

There are many genres of folklore through which the people tried to express their national self-expression. Through epics, tales and legends, anecdotes, as well as songs, people instilled qualities such as intolerance toward social ugliness, intransigence toward foreign invaders, loyalty to friends, and humanism toward helpless and needy people. Proverbs and parables have a special place among these examples (Turan, 2024). The educational significance of these wise expressions, which are both concise and full of meaning, plays an important role in the protection of national and human values. Therefore,

oral literature, which has become the interpreter of the people's desires and aspirations, sorrows and joys, and outlooks on life, must be preserved and passed on to future generations as it is (Kljajevic & Šarić, 2025).

As the name suggests, proverbs are wise expressions given by elders, fathers, and grandfathers. Thus, fathers and grandfathers used proverbs and sayings to briefly and concisely transfer the knowledge they had gained throughout their lives and the conclusions they had drawn from observing life events to the new generation. However, they are not only a means of transmitting acquired knowledge to the new generation; proverbs are also a creative attitude of people toward the life events surrounding them. They reflect people's original outlook on life, religious beliefs, attitude toward labor, and patriotism. The creation of these wise expressions circulating in the language of the people was influenced by a number of art forms. First of all, they are literary examples (Huseyn, 2024). In proverbs, the artistic and figurative thinking of the people finds expression. Traces of literary genres are also clearly visible here. Thus, jokes and folk tales play a decisive role in the creation of proverbs. The main idea expressed in jokes is given in one sentence, and this sentence becomes a folk proverb.

For example, the expressions "A man's word is one" and "Extend your leg according to your blanket" are the main ideas given in jokes and are currently widespread as folk proverbs. Tales, however, become independent after a long time and turn into proverbs. Sometimes epics also participate in the creation of proverbs. For example, in the epic poem "Koroglu," the expression "Keçal suya girmez" refers to Bald Hamza, who disagrees with Koroglu and is stubborn, and "Because you became a miller, call Koroglu to come" are widely spread as folk proverbs. Philosophy and logic also play an important role in the formation of proverbs. Proverbs are characteristic of all peoples of the world, and their role in the upbringing of the young generation is invaluable. Therefore, their research and publication have always been relevant.

In the case of Azerbaijan, proverbs began to be collected and published in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. "A concise and figurative expression of the conditions and situations, relationships and attitudes of people in different periods, and their life experiences" (Maharramova, 2017), proverbs have been one of the sources of both oral and written literature. Therefore, for a long time they have attracted the attention of scientists in one way or another and have been the object of research. For example, Yusifov (1969, p. 105) in "Lexical-stylistic features of Azerbaijani proverbs" (Ahmadova, 2011), in "Linguistic analysis and translation issues of proverbs in languages

with different systems”, and Mammadova Ulviyya in “Structural-semantic analysis of English and Azerbaijani proverbs” (Mammadova, 2013, p. 52), have carried out dissertations on the topic. In addition, Z. Alizadeh wrote a monograph on the topic “The life of proverbs” (Alizadeh, 1985, p. 79). The vast majority of these studies have focused on the analysis of proverbs from a linguistic point of view. In the article prepared by us, the complex nature of proverbs is analyzed, their ways of creation, their importance, their development in interaction with the fields of science and art, their research, and their human essence are examined.

Specifically, the main goal of the research is to reveal the characteristic features of proverbs, one of the most widespread genres of folklore, examining people's outlooks, creative attitudes toward their fields of activity, experiences gained after long trials, winged words, and wise expressions as a means of education. It is also intended to determine the mutual relationship of proverbs with philosophy, logic, literature, and other fields of art and profession. To address this research problem, in the article were used methods and techniques referring to folklore research and scientific experiments in the field of folklore studies, conducted comparisons, and performed analytical analyses. The study also took into account the current problems of Azerbaijani folklore, individual and national approaches to folklore, creative use of folklore, especially proverbs, addressing them as a national product, but also world scientific experience.

DEVELOPMENT

Proverbs as a genre of folklore.

Among the most widespread genres of folklore are proverbs and sayings, which are small in form but broad in content. Proverbs and sayings, which relate to all areas of human activity, life, work and everyday life, and reflect centuries-old views, experiences, beliefs and trials, are an expression of the wisdom and intelligence of the people. Such winged sayings, which reveal great points in a few words, are used not only in folk art, but also in written literature, communication and live speech to make the idea effective. This is because “the verdict is firmly confirmed in the proverb” (Nabiyev, 2015, p. 264). For example:

He who wants much can do little,

The head of an empty ear of corn is up

(Baydili, 2004, p. 76).

The first example emphasizes that a person who is not satisfied with little and is greedy loses what they have. The second example criticizes stubbornness. Hardworking

people submit to work, and the values they earn humble them. However, people who have no income in their hands are precisely the arrogant ones. Therefore, they hold their heads high like an unproductive ear of grain. This is, of course, a judgment based on long experience.

Proverbs and sayings, which are characteristic of all peoples of the world, have been given various names:

Russians have called them instructive words, golden words; Eastern peoples have called them the flower of the language, pearls not arranged in a thread; Greeks and Romans have called them ruling ideas; Italians have called them the school of the people; Spaniards have called them the nature of the soul; and the English and French have called them the fruit of experience. (Efendiyev, 1992).

These proverbs, distinguished by their high aesthetic value, are based on direct observations and experiments concerning the realities surrounding man. Proverbs, which represent such a simple initial beginning of philosophy, also talk about life events in their most diverse aspects and with infinite and inexhaustible variety. (Baydili, 2004, p. 6).

That is, proverbs cover all aspects of life and try to convey what they want to say with figurative colors through the power of judgment and logic.

For example, the proverb “no sound comes from a single hand” is a figurative expression, and here the meaning is not related to the hand itself. This expresses the logic that one person cannot cope with the work—that “strength is in unity”. It takes many years for a principle taken from a proverb to be formed. It is precisely for this reason that it is emphasized that proverbs and sayings “take their origin from the early community period. Since then, people's experiences, knowledge and trials about life and nature have been expressed briefly and artistically and have reached our time. Therefore, in proverbs and sayings, signs belonging to all periods of folk life and folk history are preserved” (Efendiyev, 1992, pp. 93–94). For example, the sayings “the master's property is lost, the servant's life is lost” or “the master and his wife fought, and the servant's life was lost” belong to ancient times, while the proverbs “man is a friend of man” and “all for one, one for all” are wise expressions belonging to recent times.

The role of science and art in the creation of proverbs

Proverbs are formed in connection with several folklore genres. The first of these consists of trials and folk experiences. Trials are the initial cognitive process that expresses people's beliefs and interpretations, observations and moral views, and the reasons for the occurrence of events. Trials are the evaluation of processes aimed at the

abstract solution of life events through long-term observation and experience. Trials played an important role not only in the formation of beliefs, but also in the creation of genres such as applause, curses, spells, fortune telling, and proverbs within folk creativity. People tested their observations in order to verify them and come to a definitive decision, and then expressed their opinion in the form of a verdict (Nabiyev, 2015, p. 291). For example, folk sayings such as “save the straw, the time will come”, “he who does not work will not eat”, and “the gardener’s burden ends on the shoulder of the gentleman” are conclusions reached after a long period of observations. Indeed, one of the resources that is important for life may seem unnecessary today, but at some point, it may suddenly become necessary. Similarly, a person who does not suffer, does not work, and does not submit to labor during the working season will go hungry. Furthermore, observations show that if someone does business with a person who is more experienced than them in terms of profession, the burden falls on the former. It can be said that deep observation and trials played a role in the creation of most wise sayings.

The role of jokes in the creation of proverbs is also important. Jokes that are simple, laconic, humorous and instructive are one of the most widespread examples of folklore genres that are concise, along with riddles, songs, and bayati. The basis of jokes is laughter. Here, laughter is conveyed through subtle humor, sarcasm, or bitter irony. In Azerbaijani jokes, this element is sometimes presented through the wit of the heroes in the jokes, who sometimes seem cheerful and witty, and sometimes ordinary, especially through such widespread characters as Molla Nasreddin and Bahlul Dananda. The target of laughter in jokes consists of social vices. The main idea in the joke is given at the end. This ending, which is short and concise in terms of volume, often turns into a folk proverb and, by circulating among people, helps to create proverbs.

For example, the popular sayings “A man’s word is one”, “You stole”, “Cut your coat according to your cloth” and similar ones are the main ideas expressed in jokes. In the first joke we present, the brief content is as follows: one day, Mullah Nasreddin was talking with his friends, and when the topic of age came up, they asked him how old he was. He said, “Forty is enough”. 10-15 years passed, and when they talked again on the same topic, Mullah said that he was 40. When asked how this happened—did you say the same thing a few years ago?—Mullah replied: “A man’s word is one”. Thus, “A man’s word is one”, “You stole”, and “Cut your coat according to your cloth” are folk sayings. They were formed on the basis of jokes. However, folk sayings are not yet proverbs. There

are certain differences between them. Sayings, as can be seen, are the main idea of a story—an anecdote. That is, behind each saying there is a story. But it is impossible to say the same about proverbs. They are complete expressions. At the same time, we must emphasize that the enrichment of proverbs is due to sayings. After many years, the topic expressed by folk sayings is forgotten and gradually solidifies, begins to carry a more general meaning, and ultimately turns into proverbs. Thus, anecdotes create sayings, and sayings create proverbs.

Sometimes folk epics also “participate” in the creation of proverbs. In the epic, Keçal Hamza’s statement “a bald man cannot enter the water”, Koro lu’s statements “do not call me a miller when you see my face covered with flour”, and “because you became a miller, call me for the grain, Koro lu” (Habibbayli, 2005, p. 154) have now become folk proverbs.

A number of fundamental disciplines, including philosophy, logic, literary criticism, linguistics, pedagogy and other fields, played an important role in the formation and development of proverbs. It is known that philosophy is a worldview science: the causes and consequences of life events are its main concern. There is a concept of “social consciousness” in philosophy. Social consciousness is “a set of ideas, concepts and views arising from people’s daily practical life activities. It combines direct empirical experience and knowledge, moral norms in society, and concepts about nature and people’s own social situation” (Aliyev, 2018). Proverbs are also a treasury of wise words that express the folk imagination and way of thinking, as well as observations. Here the role of philosophy is clearly felt. For example, the proverb “There is a cure for everything except death” reflects both folk experience (a person achieves their goal if they want to) and philosophy (there is no cure for death).

One of the main contributors to the way proverbs are passed down from mouth to mouth and from generation to generation is logic—specifically, syllogism. A syllogism is a logical structure that produces a third proposition from two propositions. For example: predators are carnivores; an eagle is a predator; therefore, an eagle is carnivorous. The proverb “A man without knowledge is like a bird without wings” expresses the logic that “a learned man can soar and fly like a bird.” If an unlearned man is likened to a wingless bird, then it creates the logical conclusion that he cannot soar or fly.

Proverbs are one of the forms of reflection of artistic thought. That is, “proverbs, which are drawn from the people’s own soul and bear the imprint of the general ideology and clearly express the national mood, are

literature that wanders within the people”(Baydili, 2004, p. 6). It is known that literature is divided into two parts: oral and written. In oral literature, the language of the work and its speech have a social character. However, in written literature, this attracts attention as individual speech. While in oral literature, wise expressions whose author is unknown stand out as proverbs and parables, in written literature, conversely, the author is known and these are characterized as aphorisms. For example:

“Power lies in knowledge, and no other source,

No one can give preference to anyone”

(Ganjavi, 2004, p. 37).

Additionally, proverbs are related to linguistics as well as literature. Tahira Maharramova, who conducts research in this field and discusses the relationship between proverbs and linguistics, notes that “proverbs should be studied together with phraseological units, within them” (Maharramova, 2017). N. A. Amosov approached proverbs as “phraseological units with a predicative structure” (Amosov, 1963). As can be seen, in terms of metaphorization and stabilization of meaning in proverbs, researchers try to study them within the framework of a section of linguistics. However, like many others, H. Bayramov sees this treasure trove of wise words that are passed from mouth to mouth as a matter of folklore studies (Bayramov, 1978, p. 36).

Undoubtedly, proverbs are not phraseological units. There are certain similarities between them; both are mainly figurative concepts and are readily available in the language. However, proverbs are not in the form of word combinations, but in the form of sentences and express complete thoughts. For example, “to curse” is a phraseological unit, while “A curse on the white of the snake and on its black” is a proverb. It is here that metaphor is characterized as a matter of linguistics. However, proverbs are literary examples and are the object of study of folklore. The educational nature of proverbs—the issue of transferring knowledge acquired through long-term observation by the older generation to the younger generation—is also the field of pedagogy.

Thematic content of proverbs

Although proverbs are a literary phenomenon, an example of folk literature, they express the views on life, national and spiritual values, historical periods they have passed through, determination to struggle, and labor relations of the people who created them. Indirectly speaking, proverbs are a collection of experiences and knowledge related to life events and all areas of activity that encompass humans, serving as a folk memory. The main reason for

people’s rise from the primitive, simple life in the primitive community structure to today’s level of development was labor. Therefore, people have repeatedly used proverbs, which are the simplest means of advice, to educate the new generation in the spirit of hard work:

“He who does not work does not eat”,

“Work is the essence of man”,

“Let’s cut the condition at the plow, not get wild at the threshing floor,”

“Give the bread to the baker, and one more loaf,”

“Saying halva-halva doesn’t make your mouth sweet,”

“What you sow, you reap.”

“A proverb from an old man, a labor from a young man”

(Baydili, 2004).

Most of the proverbs given here were created in the spirit of a call to work. Indeed, people who do not work and do not do their work on time face difficulties later. Additionally, there are proverbs that are historical relics of the struggle and sharp protests against both local and foreign oppressors:

“Here I am, the blind caliph in Baghdad,”

“The Arab died, blood was shed,”

“What the king looks at, what the scoundrel looks at,”

“See the Kankhuda, conquer the village”,

“I am a servant from the Khan, I will grind your teeth if you do not listen”

(Baydili, 2004).

Furthermore, there are also proverbs that express people’s worldview and mythological views, reflecting the ancient beliefs and customs of the people.

There is a God who makes a nail,

God is Generous,

The number you count, see what the sky counts,

God builds the nest of the blind lark,

God is the guarantor of good deeds

(Baydili, 2004).

Some proverbs instill positive human qualities, emphasizing love for one’s homeland, country, humanity, people,

and friends. In addition, those who make sacrifices in the struggle for the success of these values are valued with special nuances. For example:

I came to my homeland; I came to faith.

Everyone loves their homeland.

Even if the homeland is in ruins, it is still paradise.

Loyalty to the homeland is the adornment of a hero.

A brave man dies, but his name remains.

A friend is known in bad times,

The arrival of a friend is a celebration

(Baydili, 2004).

"Most proverbs are moral and educational examples based on life experience. These are the conclusions drawn from centuries of doing bad or good things" (Efendiyev, 1992). Therefore, in such examples, science, knowledge, and intelligence are viewed as highly valued. For example:

Science is the lamp of the mind,

Wisdom is not in age, but in the head,

Measure a hundred, cut one,

An illiterate person is like a blind person

(Baydili, 2004).

"The human essence of proverbs and their place in written literature. " Proverbs, which stand guard over the education and upbringing of the new generation and serve as a source of necessary knowledge for life, are characteristic of all peoples of the world. Although they are expressed in different languages, their content remains the same for relevant life events. Of course, proverbs are not literally translated into other languages, but equivalents of these wise expressions are not absent. For example:

"Think first, then speak. (Hasanova, 2022).

As with the world's peoples, Azerbaijani folklore has always played an important role in giving written literature new content. Azad Nabiyeu notes that:

In addition to being a source for written literature as a whole, oral literature, in its individual genres, is also used in written literature in a wide and inexhaustible way. If we take a single proverb, its functions in written literature, whether we like it or not, cannot but amaze the reader (Nabiyeu, 2015, p. 92).

Thus, by using proverbs and parables in written literature, they not only helped to enrich the content of the work but sometimes even created conditions for the full disclosure

of its idea by expressing the title of the work as a proverb. For example, "A stone thrown from a branch is worth a heel," "Later regret is useless," "We came out of the rain, we fell into the rain," "What you sow, you reap," and "If you eat goose meat, you will know its taste" are proverbs, but at the same time, the first four examples are titles of works by Najaf bey Vezirov (Vezirov, 2005, pp. 24–183), and the next one is the title of a work by Abdurrahim bey Hagverdiyev (2005). Even the text of one of the Azerbaijani folk songs, "Sarı gelin," begins with proverbs:

They don't braid the ends of your hair,

They don't pluck the rose with water,

Yellow bride.

What is love in this love,

They won't give you to me

(Qasimov, 2005).

A note about the study of proverbs in Azerbaijan

Proverbs have attracted the attention of scientists because they are related to philosophy, logic, literary criticism, linguistics, pedagogy, and other fields of science. The study of proverbs in Azerbaijan was carried out in a fragmented form until the 19th century. Proverbs have been collected and published since the last quarter of the 19th century. This campaign was initiated in the first national press of Azerbaijan, the "Ekinchi" newspaper, with the help of Hasan bey Zardabi. After that, proverbs and sayings collected by intellectuals began to be published in various newspapers and magazines, including the SMOMPK collection. Proverbs were collected and published in 1899 by Mahammad Veli Gamarli (Khalilov, 2003), and later, in the first decades of the 20th century, thanks to the hard work of Hanafi Zeynalli (1926).

The role of Salman Mumtaz, who played a prominent role in the development of Azerbaijani folklore in the direction of collecting and publishing the aforementioned examples, was important. He traveled around the regions, collected countless examples from the language of the people, and included them in his library of manuscripts. In the 1930s, Salman Mumtaz's library was subjected to repression and burned down, causing the vast majority of the proverbs collected there to be destroyed. However, despite this, hundreds of proverbs are still preserved in Salman Mumtaz's personal fund, and this serves as an important and rich source for new researchers.

Salman Mumtaz also conducted research on the etymology of proverbs and expressed his views on this field. In his opinion, the name "proverbs" is not foreign; in fact, its

national name should be “sav.” “Sav” means light, bright expression (Mumtaz, 2001, p. 84). It is clear from the word “proverb” that it was the elders, fathers, and grandfathers who created the treasury of wisdom of the people. Salman Mumtaz objects to this in his article dedicated to proverbs and emphasizes that women also played a role in the creation of these wise expressions and winged sayings. In the example given below, we see that Salman Mumtaz is right:

I was born a boy, he was my son,

I gave birth to a girl, but she robbed me

[Turkish proverb].

CONCLUSIONS

Proverbs and sayings represent a integral component of Azerbaijani folklore once they encapsulate the collective wisdom, moral values, and sociocultural worldview of the people through concise and metaphor-rich expressions. Far beyond mere linguistic ornamentation, these expressions function as dynamic tools of cultural transmission, reflecting historical experiences, labor ethics, resistance to injustice, and everyday philosophy. Their stylistic economy—marked by laconic structure and metaphorical precision—enhances both oral communication and literary composition, offering authors an effective means of enriching narrative and reinforcing thematic depth. In general, proverbs are deeply embedded in multiple spheres of knowledge, including philosophy, logic, pedagogy, and linguistics, and are formed through complex interactions with jokes, anecdotes, epics, and communal experiences. They not only preserve national memory and tradition but also serve as powerful instruments for shaping attitudes and educating the younger generation. By analyzing their origin, structural features, and thematic functions, we show that proverbs are more than folkloric remnants—they are evolving expressions of cultural continuity and intellectual heritage that maintain their relevance in both oral and written discourse.

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