

A Comparative Analysis of Gender Characteristics in English and Uzbek Proverbs Reflecting Husband-Wife Relationships

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a comparative analysis of gender characteristics in English and Uzbek proverbs reflecting husband-wife relationships. By examining these proverbs, the study explores how cultural norms, gender roles, and family dynamics are conveyed through linguistic expressions in both languages. Proverbs serve as a reflection of societal values, offering insights into marital roles, expectations, and power relations within the family structure. Through a detailed examination, the study highlights similarities and differences in the portrayal of gender within marital contexts, showing that both English and Uzbek proverbs emphasize the complementary roles of husband and wife, while also revealing traditional gender stereotypes. This analysis contributes to a deeper understanding of the cultural and linguistic representations of family life, offering a window into how marriage and gender roles are perceived in two distinct linguistic traditions.

Keywords: Gender characteristics, husband-wife relationships, marital roles, family dynamics, cultural norms, gender stereotypes, family values.

INTRODUCTION

It is clear that proverbs reflect a great deal of practical wisdom, life experience, and universal truths, offering valuable insights

into almost every situation in life. As Professor Wolfgang Mieder writes in “Introduction” part of his book “Proverbs: Handbook”: “The wisdom of proverbs has guided people in their social interactions for thousands of years throughout the world. Proverbs contain everyday experiences and common observations in succinct and formulaic language, making them easy to remember and ready to be used instantly as effective rhetoric in oral or written communication” (Mieder 2004). In his another book the scholar points out: “A couple of English proverbs even state that “All the good sense of the world runs in proverbs” and “Proverbs are the children of experience” (Mieder 1989: 80). There is no doubt that proverbs contain a good dose of common sense, experience, wisdom, and above all, truth about every imaginable situation of life. According to the findings of her research N. Abdullaeva mentions that “the Uzbek people are quite rich in proverbs and enjoy using them frequently in their regular both written and oral communication. Proverbs are a part of human history, they reflect the origin, culture, traditions, views, lifestyle and mentality of a particular nation” (Abdullaeva 2020). Therefore, it is our duty to preserve them among other types of tangible and intangible cultural heritage and deliver them to the next generation.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Starting the study of gender-related proverbs, we should refer to the statement of well-known Uzbek scholar Sh. Safarov that “language is a unique means of reflecting the existence of a person, a product of his activity” (Safarov 2008: 320). Indeed, linguistic units serve as a rich source of information about individuals, covering their appearance, character, intellectual and creative abilities, and social roles. Gender researchers particularly focus on linguistic units (in our case proverbs) that reflect a person's marital status. Supporting this perspective, G. Ergasheva states that a man's (or a woman's) family status plays a significant role in both languages under study (Ergasheva 2011: 25). “Family, family bonds and kinship relations form a nation's culture and show its peculiarities and assist to realize widely the

national, linguistic image of the world” (Salimova 2014). As the issue of family relations touch not only sociological science but also, cultural and linguistic ones, it is natural to approach to this problem from the perspectives of linguoculturology. Linguistic units possessing cultural-national features attract researcher’s attention due to their study of linguistic image of the world of a native speaker. Phraseological and paremiological units, which embody national-cultural worldview, obtain the role of cultural stereotypes (Raikes 2006).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Uzbek proverbs emphasize that a family is a structure built by husband and wife, and its stability and success depend on the equal participation of both parties:

Oila – qo‘shustunliayvon (Family – a porch with two pillars)
Oilatinch – yurt tinch (A peaceful family – a peaceful country)

A family is built on the foundation of a woman and a man. It is important for each of them to fulfill their duties, because if one pillar is not strong or collapses, the entire porch may be out of order. The stability of the family depends on the trust, respect, and joint work of husband and wife. The family’s importance in society is high and it is the starting point of peace and tranquility. Therefore, the above proverbs promote not only family values but also national unity.

English proverbs also contain sayings that emphasize spending time together in the family, communicating, and jointly resolving important issues:

The family that prays together stays together

Regardless of how perfect a family is, some unexpected and unpleasant events may occur:

Accidents can happen in the best-regulated families
Every family has a skeleton in the cupboard

Just as people are not perfect, it is natural for families, built with the best intentions, to sometimes have mistakes or problems. In any situation, patience, mutual understanding, and forgiveness are of great importance.

As mentioned earlier, a family is strengthened by the efforts of both parties. In particular, the following Uzbek proverbs indicate that men and women have equal importance in the family:

Er-xotin – qo‘shxo‘kiz (Husband and wife – a pair of oxen)

Eravra – xotinastar (Husband’s coat – wife’s lining)

English proverbs reflect husband-wife relationships in a broad sense, embodying ideas about marriage, love, cooperation, and various trials. In this context, the greater potential of a man is clearly visible in choosing a spouse:

Choose a wife by your ear rather than by your eye.

Take the wine of a good soil and the daughter of a good wife.

These proverbs emphasize that when choosing a wife, one should pay attention not to appearance, but to her speech, mind, and character; that decisions about choosing a wife or buying a weapon should be made independently; that these are extremely important and personal matters for human life, encouraging people to make their own important life decisions and be cautious in such matters. The role of considering upbringing and lineage when choosing a daughter is also mentioned, emphasizing that a person from a good family and environment has a better character. The last example, *Onasiniko‘rib, qiziniol* (Look at the mother, take the daughter), can be equivalent to the Uzbek proverb. Uzbek men also understand the need for careful consideration in this matter through the following examples:

Xotinnitanlabol, gulni – hidlab (Choose a wife, like a flower – by its scent)

Otolsangminibol, xotinsangko‘ribol (If you buy a horse, ride it; if you marry a wife, look at her)

The fact that English women are also quite cautious in this matter, that it is necessary to think long-term when making important decisions, which is extremely important for lasting partnership, is clearly reflected in the following proverb:

Choose your man as you choose your shoes – for long comfort and long wear

Uzbek proverbs, embodying the need for respect, affection, and mutual support in the family, show that a husband and wife completely define each other's inner and outer lives:

Xotinningchiroyerdan (A wife's beauty is from the husband)
Ernierqiladigan ham xotin, qaroyeqiladigan ham xotin (A wife makes a man a man, a wife makes barren land fertile)

Thus, a woman's beauty and inner peace depend on how well a man fulfills his duties. If a woman's wisdom and sound advice lead a man to success, her carelessness or negative character traits lead to failure.

In English culture, the idea that husband and wife complement each other, that one is created for the other, regardless of their positive or negative traits, reveals their high place in family life:

A man without a woman is like a ship without a sail
 A man without a wife is but half a man
 Wives must be had be they good or bad

A man without a woman is compared to a half-man, a ship without a sail, a saint or a devil, emphasizing that regardless of their positive or negative qualities, a wife plays a guiding and balancing role in a man's life.

Conversely, there are proverbs that humorously or ironically depict various difficulties in family life. The following proverbs historically embody stereotypes about family roles:

He that loses his wife and sixpence, has lost a tester
 A dead wife is the best goods in a man's house

These proverbs, expressing a harsh, sometimes ironic view of husband-wife relationships, mainly reflecting views from the past, show that men are dissatisfied with their family lives, and even that two things – a wife and financial loss – are equally unimportant.

Examples of conflicts between husband and wife, indicating that they are natural and temporary, are also found:

Er-xotinurushar, o'rtagaaxmoqtushar (Husband and wife quarrel, a fool gets in the middle)

Er-xotinningurushidokaro'molningqurishi (Husband and wife's quarrel is like a linen handkerchief drying)

The following English proverbs, highlighting the complex aspects of family life, mainly about the difficulties men face in marriage:

He that has a wife, has strife

A woman can throw out more with a spoon than a man can bring in with a shovel

These proverbs ironically depict the financial roles of men and women, the tendency of women to spend more or use more resources in the household, and the fact that marriage brings not only happiness but also hardship.

Proverbs based on the formula good “wife... – bad wife...” make up a large majority, showing that a woman's behavior and character determine not only her own but also the happiness and peace of her entire family:

Yaxshixotinuybo'stoni, yomonxotin – zimistoni (A good wife is a home's spring, a bad wife is its winter)

Yaxshixotin– umrboli, yomonxotin– jonzavoli (A good wife is life's blessing, a bad wife is life's suffering)

English proverbs about women as spouses, expressing positive and negative meanings, reflect society's attitudes towards marriage, highlighting the roles of women in family life. For example, a good wife is usually portrayed as a source of stability, honor, and happiness:

A worthy woman is the crown of her husband
A good wife and health is a man's best wealth

Such proverbs praise a kind, hardworking, wise, and virtuous wife, highlighting the woman who brings joy and prosperity. Conversely, a bad woman is portrayed as a source of disorder and problems:

A sloppy, wasteful woman will waste and carry out more in her apron than an ambitious man can haul in a wagon
Three things drive a man out of his house - smoke, rain and a scolding wife

Thus, these proverbs recognize that one of the main difficulties in a man's life is a quarrelsome wife, who can disrupt the peace of the home.

Some proverbs clearly show that even though the head of the family is the husband, the wife plays a decisive role:

The gray mare is the better horse
Men are born the slaves of women

As the good man says, so say we, but as the good wife says, so must it be.

These proverbs emphasize woman's important role in managing the family and maintaining order, sometimes portraying her as superior or stronger than a man, highlighting her strong influence on men's lives, and the dominance of their decisions, thoughts, and emotional impact on family life.

Women's primary duties are associated with household chores and childcare, emphasizing their constant and continuous performance of various responsibilities in the home. Conversely, men's work is time-bound, and they are primarily responsible for material provision. Thus, men are considered materially responsible, and women emotionally responsible for the family:

Xotinuybezakchisi, eruyko'makchisi (A wife is the ornament of the house, a husband is the helper)
Xotinuyningziynati, er – mehnati (A wife is the adornment of the house, a husband is its labor)

English proverbs also reflect this meaning:

A woman's place is in her home
Men build houses, women build homes

Examples of the need for a husband to constantly control and supervise his wife, and the negative aspects of excessive freedom given to a woman, are also noteworthy:

A woman, a cat, and a chimney should never leave the house
Never trust a woman, even if she has born you seven children
He that lets his wife go to every feast and his horse drink at every water, shall neither have good wife nor good horse

These proverbs clearly depict androcentrism, the dominance of men, and the interpretation of cruelty towards women, limiting them from the outside world, and generally justifying violence. In short, such interpretations are based on old stereotypes and contradict modern societal approaches.

Uzbek proverbs expressing family relationships strongly condemn polygamy, or having multiple wives:

Ikkixotinolibsan, birbalogaqolibsan (You have two wives, you have one misfortune)

Birqingaikkipichoqsig'mas, biruygaikkixotin (Two knives cannot fit into one sheath, two wives cannot fit into one house)

The proverbs emphasize that polygamy brings problems, deprives one of a peaceful life, and even leads to the destruction of the family. They remind us of life lessons and encourage the strengthening of family values. A number of proverbs raise the issue of co-wives (*kundosh*), and this is a constant source of suffering for both wives.

Kundoshliuydakundaaurush (Co-wife's house is a house of constant quarrels)

Kundoshboshingda tosh, ko'zingdayosh (Co-wife is a stone on your head, tears in your eyes)

Co-habitation is interpreted as a factor that disrupts family life and undermines stability.

In English culture, the first marriage is considered sacred, while subsequent marriages are condemned:

He that marries a widow and two children marries three thieves
The first wife is matrimony, the second company, the third heresy

Thus, the first marriage is considered genuine and acceptable, the second is for companionship, and the third is considered heresy. Marrying a widow is also negatively viewed, warning that subsequent marriages may be unsuccessful.

CONCLUSION

Uzbek and English proverbs emphasize the central role of the husband-wife relationship in maintaining familial stability and harmony. While Uzbek proverbs often highlight mutual cooperation and balance between spouses, English proverbs tend to reflect a more nuanced view of marriage, acknowledging both the challenges and rewards that come with marital life. These proverbs serve as a mirror of the respective cultures, reinforcing traditional gender roles and societal expectations while also offering subtle reflections on the complexities of marital dynamics. The role of women within these proverbs is particularly noteworthy. In both cultures, women are often depicted as key figures in sustaining family life, underscoring their significant emotional, moral, and practical contributions to the home. Although the portrayal of women in proverbs may reinforce traditional gender stereotypes, these expressions also reveal the high regard in which women are held within the context of marriage and family life. Furthermore, this comparative study sheds light on the evolving nature of gender perceptions in both cultures. While some proverbs continue to reflect conventional views on gender roles, others reveal shifting attitudes toward equality and partnership in marriage. Through this lens, we can observe how proverbs serve as cultural markers, preserving and transmitting societal values across generations.

while adapting to the changing social landscape. Overall, the study of these proverbs highlights the enduring relevance of language as a tool for expressing and shaping cultural values. By examining the gender dynamics portrayed in both Uzbek and English proverbs, we gain a deeper understanding of the cultural frameworks within which these proverbs were created, providing valuable insights into how societies view and define the roles of men and women in family life. As both languages and cultures continue to evolve, the proverbs analyzed in this study will remain an important part of the ongoing discourse surrounding marriage, gender, and familial relationships.

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