

The Concept of *Bas* (Head) as a Symbol of National Culture

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the concept of "Bas" (Head) as a fundamental ethnocultural phenomenon within the Karakalpak language and national identity. Drawing on the principles of linguoculturology and cognitive linguistics, the study moves beyond the biological definition of the "head" to analyze its role as a "cell of culture" – a unit that concentrates social status, spiritual values, and historical memory. Through a comparative analysis of Karakalpak, Kazakh, and Uzbek lexicographical sources, the author identifies the semantic polysemy of the term, noting its 13 distinct meanings in Karakalpak discourse. The research specifically examines rituals such as bas quda (head matchmaking), bas tartiw (serving the head as a culinary honor), and the symbolic protective functions of children's headwear. The findings demonstrate that Bas serves as a primary conceptual core in the Karakalpak worldview, symbolizing leadership, family unity, and social hierarchy while acting as a vessel for transmitting cultural codes from one generation to the next.

Keywords: Linguoculturology, concept, *Bas* (head), Karakalpak culture, somatism, ethnolinguistics, phraseology, national mentality.

INTRODUCTION

The interrelationship between language and culture, and the study of their individual and universal characteristics, has become a significant issue in modern linguistics. Along with the

development of linguoculturology, the notion of a "concept" has begun to occupy a central place in many studies. Conceptual research provides explanations for the influence of language on activity, as well as the differences and similarities between cultures.

In recent years, the term "concept" has been actively used in linguistics, particularly within the framework of cognitive and pragmatic research from an anthropocentric perspective. Within these fields, linguistic phenomena are studied in continuous connection with human thought, the spiritual world, and cultural worldviews. Concepts reflect a person's worldview, knowledge system, and social and cultural experience as manifested through linguistic tools.

RESEARCH METHODS

To provide a comprehensive analysis of the "Bas" concept, the following scientific methods were employed:

1. **Linguoculturological analysis:** This primary method was used to identify the relationship between the linguistic unit "bas" and the cultural values, customs, and traditions of the Karakalpak people.
2. **Comparative-lexicographical method:** A systematic comparison of the *Explanatory Dictionaries of the Karakalpak* (13 meanings), Uzbek (20 meanings), and Kazakh (23 meanings) languages was conducted to identify common Turkic semantic roots and unique regional variations.
3. **Semantic-cognitive mapping:** This method allowed for the categorization of the concept into three distinct layers: somatic-biological (anatomical), abstract-metaphorical (intelligence, leadership), and semiotic-cultural (rituals and social codes).
4. **Contextual and textual analysis:** Literary excerpts from Karakalpak authors (e.g., T. Kayipbergenov, Q. Matmuratov) and poetic works (I. Yusupov) were analyzed to observe the concept's function in artistic and "living" discourse.

5. **Ethnolinguistic observation:** The study analyzed specific social ceremonies (matchmaking, funeral rites, and hospitality rituals) to decode the symbolic meaning of the "head" as a marker of social hierarchy and spiritual protection.
6. **Etymological inquiry:** The research traced the origins of specific phraseological units and paremias (proverbs) to understand the evolution of the concept in the national mindset.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The term "concept" can be understood as the formation and origin of a specific idea in the human mind and its reflection through language. This, in turn, allows for identifying the correspondence between cultural-specific and linguistic meanings. For example, if we consider the concept of *bas tabaq* (the head/primary platter), for the people living in the territory of Karakalpakstan, this notion is perceived, above all, as the most prestigious dish, specifically prepared for the most honored guest. This concept is a manifestation of the local culture; therefore, the surrounding environment and social-ethical norms are of great importance in correctly understanding its content. Conversely, for people living in European countries, this may not hold the same significance. Because a concept is directly linked to national culture, it inevitably exerts an influence on the understandings that arise in the human mind.

Y. S. Stepanov defines a concept as the "cell of culture": "A concept is a unit of culture in which information about the world, man, values, and experience is concentrated" [1: 43]. From this perspective, Stepanov's characterization of a concept as a "cell of culture" has a profound scientific basis. This is because every concept is formed in connection with the specific worldview, values, and experiences of a given nation and is transmitted through language. As concepts become fixed within a language, they serve as the primary units that preserve collective culture within the minds of society's members.

From the viewpoint of its semantic structure, the concept *bas* (head) can be viewed, on one hand, in a somatic-biological sense – that is, as a primary part of the human body. On the other hand, it forms a linguistic representation of abstract-metaphorical notions such as intellect, consciousness, leadership, and authority. Thirdly, "bas" functions as a semiotic sign that holds a special place within the system of socio-cultural codes, traditions, and customs.

Lexically, the primary denotative meaning of the word "bas" is explained as the upper part of a human or animal organism – avital organ of the body that includes the brain, face, and skull. However, as a concept, "bas" is not merely a physiological object; it encapsulates symbolic, social, ethical, and cognitive meanings. Through the "bas" concept, numerous ideas related to human consciousness, thought, will, leadership, respect, and personality are expressed.

In the modern Karakalpak language, we can observe 13 distinct meanings of the lexeme *bas*, using the *Explanatory Dictionary of the Karakalpak Language* [2: 122] as a source:

1. The highest part of humans and animals, the location of the brain;
2. The uppermost tip or top of various plants, trees, or grasses;
3. The top or roof of a building, house, or structure;
4. The summit, peak, or highest point of a mountain, hill, tower, or other objects;
5. The beginning or initial stage of something;
6. The vicinity or surroundings of something, the side of an event;
7. A unit of measurement when counting quantity (per head/piece);
8. A superior in terms of service or function, one who performs management;
9. An individual person, an individual;
10. The main, fundamental, or largest part;
11. The blade, face, or primary part of an axe, mattock, hammer, or similar tools;
12. The thicker or rounded end of a stick, pole, or similar objects;
13. The source or upper reaches of a lake, river, canal, mountain, or spring.

In the *Explanatory Dictionary of the Uzbek Language* published in recent years, the word *bas* is discussed even more extensively, with 20 different meanings provided. There, not only the anatomical and social aspects of *bas* are reflected, but also its spiritual-psychological, metaphorical, and phraseological

applications [3: 590]. Similarly, in the *Explanatory Dictionary of the Kazakh Language*, the lexeme *bas* possesses an even richer semantic network, with 23 different meanings noted [4: 193]. Furthermore, I. Kenesbaev states that the word *bas* is an extremely productive phraseological dominant [5: 55-60]. *Bas* (the head) is the most valued part of a slaughtered animal, prepared by singeing and boiling. In other words, the head is the most respected gift presented to an honored guest. While the entire head of cattle, camels, or cows may be boiled, only the cheek portion (*sheke*) is typically served to an honored guest. In Kazakh tradition, there is a specific custom for distributing the parts of sheep or goat heads, such as the ears, palate, temples, eyes, and tail [6: 413].

The stable and multifunctional use of the *bas* (head) concept within national customs determines its significant place in the ethnocultural system. *Bas* is not merely a part of a person's physical structure; it is considered a symbol of their social status, spiritual world, and destiny. Therefore, examining the *bas* concept within the framework of national culture provides an opportunity to deeply understand the people's cognitive model, their archetypes of worldview, and its linguistic manifestation. In this article, we aim to provide a comprehensive linguoculturological analysis of the concept of "head" as reflected in the system of national-cultural customs and traditions specific to the Karakalpak people. The objects of research include phraseological units formed in the folk language, units expressing blessings and curses, ceremonial names related to celebrations and festivities, and stable collocations used in socio-domestic relations.

1. *The symbolism of the "bas" concept and customs in the national mindset*

Although the honorary robe (*mórelí shapan*) worn by the girl's brother acting as the **bas quda** (head matchmaker) is not worth the price of a cow, there are other minor matters settled through the visiting feasts that surpass wealth. (K. Sultanov)

Among Turkic peoples, and specifically among the Karakalpaks, the term *bas quda* holds a special status in social relations, expressing respect, representation, and responsibility between the representatives of two clans linked by marriage. This unit is widely reflected in ceremonial and cultural practice. *Bas quda* is an ethnocultural concept established in the matchmaking traditions of Turkic peoples. He is not merely the "eldest of the matchmakers," but is considered the symbolic leader of the entire ceremony, the one who gives consent, and the master of the word. Through this, the *bas quda* concept demonstrates the social hierarchy of the people, the mechanisms for regulating kinship relations, and ethnocultural values in preserving tradition.

Therefore, *bas quda* must also be studied as a social and familial unit. While the definition of *bas quda* has not been included in Karakalpak and Uzbek phraseological dictionaries, the ethnographic dictionary of the Kazakh language defines *bas quda* as the head of the family among matchmakers who have exchanged daughters, such as the groom's father, the bride's father, or grandfathers – the eldest among the matchmakers. During certain matchmaking traditions, the closest relative or the eldest among those present during one of the many visits is also considered the *bas quda* at that time. In Kazakh traditions, a robe (*sarpay*) is presented during matchmaking. Depending on social status, the clothing varies. If a horse or camel is given to the *bas quda*, various clothes are given to the other matchmakers based on their closeness of kinship. The presentation of clothing is considered a confirmed sign of the matchmaking agreement [6: 414].

The old man, who had been longing for even a tiny whim from his beloved since they **laid their heads on one pillow** (*bir dastıqqa bas qoyǵalı*), suddenly felt at ease. (T. Kayıbergenov).

In this context, *bir dastıqqa bas qoyıw* (laying heads on one pillow) primarily signifies becoming a family. In Karakalpak culture, the family is a sacred concept, encompassing values such as two young people building a life together and continuing their lineage. This phraseology is widely used in Karakalpak and other

Turkic languages as a symbol of marriage and familial loyalty. The expression emphasizes the lifelong companionship of a man and a woman, their mutual loyalty, and their unity. This is not a material union, but a spiritual one, representing the "lifelong partner" concept valued in ancient customs and the national mentality. Through this phraseology, marriage is depicted in the folk mind not merely as a legal relation, but as a sacred union and a cultural value. Similar forms exist in other Turkic languages, such as *bir yostiqaqqa bosh qo'yish* in Uzbek and *bir jastuqaqqa bas qoyiw* in Kazakh, with nearly identical meanings. In the phraseological systems of all three languages: *bas* (head) serves as a symbol of personality, destiny, and life; *dastuq* (pillow) serves as a symbol of home, peace, and domestic tranquility.

Finally, they **joined heads** (*bas qostı*) that night and became a household. (Alp Sultan)

Bas qosıw (joining heads) is an ethnolinguistic unit that defines the social life and cultural values of the Karakalpak people. It indicates not only the union of individuals but also the harmony of the entire community and family. Therefore, this unit allows for the decoding of a cultural-spiritual code, not just a linguistic one. According to the Explanatory Dictionary of the Karakalpak Language, *bas qosıw* also means to join ranks, to unite, to organize, to consult, to reach an agreement, and to cooperate [2: 385]. Thus, the phraseology "bas qosıw" has various semantic layers.

– If you **braid your head** (*basıñdı shatsañ*) with someone, you'll go on having children one after another; if God wants to give, He lacks nothing." (Sh. Seytov)

The phrase *basın shatıw* (braiding the head/tying the knot) is a phraseology expressing the national-cultural life of the Karakalpak people, meaning to get married and establish a family. Interestingly, in the *Explanatory Dictionary of the Kazakh Language*, the similar phrase *basın shayqadı* (shaking the

head) or related forms can mean to face betrayal, to be put in difficulty, to enter a dispute, or to cause harm [4: 196]. As we can see, the meanings of the phrase *bas shatıw* differ between the Karakalpak and Kazakh languages.

As the saying goes, '**one head is a head of trouble, two heads are a brave head.**' Otambet, who used to look only after himself, now thought of his bride after marrying Katyra. (Q. Matmuratov)

The proverb (paremia) *Bir bas – bále bas, eki bas – márt bas* is an ethnocultural concept reflecting the importance of partnership, unity, and family values in the folk worldview. The underlying principle is the folk maxim that "two heads are better than one" – that a person's life is meaningful and prosperous only when they are with a companion, rather than alone. This is a variant of the dialectal phraseology "one head is good, but two or three are better," carrying almost identical meanings [7: 101].

They say '**one head is a head of trouble**'; if I join with her, our heads will become two. (M. Nizanov)

2. *Headwear and customs related to the "bas": External signs of nationality*

In Karakalpak culture, headwear (*taqiya, qalpaq, sálle, oramal, shógirme, sáwkele*) is viewed not merely as an element of clothing, but as a marker of social status, age, gender, and even specific traditions.

The somatism *bas* (head) also appears in the ritual of "serving the head" (*bas qoyıw*).

They had the Kazakhs slaughter a yearling colt, They had the Kyrgyz slaughter a sheep, They had the houses erected and the **heads served**, The tradition is one of brotherhood. (I. Yusupov)

The Karakalpak people have a tradition of slaughtering a sheep and serving the head to in-laws (*quda-qudaǵay*), community leaders, and the most honored guests at festivities. In particular, for in-laws who are close relatives, cattle are slaughtered and the head is served as a supreme sign of respect.

The most esteemed part of the sheep is the head. Among all local ethnic groups, the head is presented to the most honored guest. Before the platter is offered, the ritual of "opening the path of the head" (*bastuń jolın ashıw*) is performed, where a longitudinal and transverse cut is made over the bridge of the nose. This ritual symbolizes the message to the guest: "The longitudinal path is yours; the transverse path is ours." After the guest holding the head has tasted it, it is offered to someone younger and eventually to the host, who passes it among all the guests in order.

According to beliefs related to customs and traditions, it is hypothesized that the serving of the head to the most honored guest stems from the understanding that "the head leads the person; a person enters the world with their head first," as well as the belief that the head represents the "master of the household or the leader of the people" [8: 65].

The Kazakh people also practice the ritual of *bas tartıw*. In this custom, the head of the animal slaughtered for a feast or guest reception is placed on a platter and presented to a valued person as a prestigious organ. Based on ancient beliefs that the head is the leading force of the world and creation, the tradition of presenting it to an elder, an honored guest, or a person of high status has long been established in the cultural environment [6: 414].

However, Sh. Walixanov, in his *Notes on the Kyrgyz*, notes a distinction: while among most Asian peoples the head is offered to the honored guest, among the Kyrgyz, "the tail and the hip (*jambas*) belong to the guest, while the head is considered a lesser dish" [9: 58]. Similarly, in Kyrgyz culture, the head is often given to the women and children near the hearth [10: 38]. Among the Kazakhs, the head is not given to a child whose father is still alive, based on the superstition that "if you eat the head, your father will die," and children are forbidden from holding it [11: 44].

He began to interpret his own dreams. 'A clean velvet cap – Headwear, what is this? This is, of course, wealth for our **head!** What are boots? Our path will be renewed; from now on, our path will be happy! And bread? Bread is sustenance and destiny! If I put

the bread in a basket, everyone would take a bite, so I tucked the bread into my bosom and pressed it to my **bawır** (liver/heart). That is, my brother Kaniyaz will be blessed with sustenance!" (Q. Matmuratov)

Headwear is an element of material culture that functions in traditional society as a defining marker of social, economic, regional, age, and gender status, possessing ethnocultural significance as a whole. National aesthetic taste, adaptation to the natural environment, and age-related or tribal characteristics are reflected in headwear. There is a custom of placing a premature baby into a hat and tucking it into a high place; since headwear is worn on the highest organ of the person, this signifies a wish for the infant to rise and prosper like the hat. Conversely, in Karakalpak cultural perception, sitting on a folded hat is believed to drive away the prosperity (*bereket*) of the home.

Bas tabaq (the primary platter) is typically served to in-laws, prestigious, educated, or talented community members, elders, and dear friends. Usually, a small animal – a sheep or goat – is slaughtered for a guest. In such cases, the primary platter includes the hip bone (*jambas*), the "old man's bone" (*ğarri jilik*), two flank ribs, two lumbar vertebrae, two spinal vertebrae, and the abomasum (*ultabar*). When large cattle are slaughtered, the platter for the in-laws includes the head (half the cheek), half the hip bone, and fatty ribs. The head is held by the eldest guest or another prominent person chosen by them.

Furthermore, regarding funeral traditions, there are ethnographic terms such as *basına qara jamılıw* (covering the head in black), which refers to mourning by wearing black clothes and a black headscarf [8: 86].

Other ethnographic rituals related to the "head" include:

1. **Covering the head with a scarf (*basına oramal jabıw*):** A sign of respect and modesty. In traditional society, a woman wearing a headscarf is an expression of ethical conduct and respect for elders. The scarf is a cultural marker of a woman's social status and family situation. For example, the ritual of putting a scarf on a bride symbolizes her acceptance into a

new family, the assumption of responsibility, and a change in her social role. Here, the "head" is conceptualized as honor and reputation, while the scarf acts as a symbolic shell protecting these values.

2. **Gifting headwear to men and in-laws:** Presenting a hat to in-laws or honored guests is a sign of respect, recognition of prestige, and a token of hospitality. The hat is a symbol defining a man's reputation and social standing. In this tradition, the "head" concept is associated with leadership, dignity, and bravery. In Karakalpak tradition, the custom of distributing nine caps (*taqiya*) to men during charity events or wedding ceremonies is still preserved.
3. **Attaching coins and beads to children's headwear:** The practice of attaching coins (*teńge*) and eye-beads (*kózmonshaq*) to the headwear of young children to protect them from the "evil eye" and negative energy is a manifestation of magical-apotropaic (protective) beliefs. In the folk mindset, the "head" is the center where the human soul and life force are concentrated. Therefore, protecting a child's head from negative external influences was considered of paramount importance. The coins and beads serve as symbolic defensive tools against ill intent and the "evil eye."

All the traditions mentioned above prove that the concept of *bas* (head) carries significant social and axiological weight in Karakalpak national culture. Through headwear and related ceremonies, society performs the functions of showing respect, defining status, preserving spiritual continuity, and providing ritual protection. Thus, in the system of Karakalpak customs, the "head" concept serves not merely as a somatic term but as a vital element of the cultural code and the conceptual core of the national worldview.

CONCLUSION

In summary, the concept of *bas* in Karakalpak national culture is a fundamental ethnocultural phenomenon that reflects the

integrity of human life, the organization of the social structure, and spiritual continuity. Studying this concept from a linguoculturological perspective provides an opportunity to deeply understand the nation's cognitive model, its archetypes of worldview, and its linguistic manifestation.

Broadly speaking, the "head" concept is firmly established in the linguistic consciousness of the Karakalpak people as a stable and meaningful core of the national cultural code. It stands as an essential conceptual unit that transmits cultural and spiritual information from generation to generation.

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