

Linguocultural Analysis of the Concept *Bawır* (Liver)

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a comprehensive linguocultural analysis of the concept bawır (liver) within the Karakalpak language and the broader Turkic cultural context. While biologically serving as a vital internal organ, the "liver" in the Karakalpak worldview functions as a complex axiological unit representing kinship, emotional intimacy, and spiritual integrity. Through a comparative study of explanatory dictionaries in Karakalpak, Uzbek, and Kazakh languages, as well as the analysis of literary examples from authors like T. Kaipbergenov and A. Bekimbetov, the study explores the dual nature of this somatic unit. The research identifies six primary semantic layers: literal-biological, friendship/closeness, emotional-psychological, geographical/spatial, parental/offspring, and inter-ethnic brotherhood. The findings demonstrate that the concept bawır is a foundational element of the Karakalpak conceptsphere, illustrating the transition from a somatic anatomical model to a profound metaphorical and symbolic cultural system.

Keywords: Linguoculturology, concept, somatism, *bawır*, Karakalpak language, mentality, kinship, semantic layer, metaphorical model

INTRODUCTION

In modern linguistics, the study of the relationship between language and culture has shifted toward the analysis of “concepts” – complex units that encapsulate the historical

memory, values, and national identity of a people. Among these, somatic concepts (terms related to the human body) occupy a unique position. They do not merely describe anatomical structures but serve as a canvas upon which a nation projects its emotions, ethical standards, and worldview.

In the Karakalpak language, the concept *bawır* (liver) is particularly significant. Unlike the Western European cultural tradition, which often prioritizes the “heart” as the sole seat of emotion, Turkic cultures – and Karakalpak culture in particular – ascribe deep spiritual and relational weight to the liver. This article aims to decode the multi-layered meanings of *bawır*, moving beyond its biological function to understand its role as a symbol of kinship (*qanalas*), compassion (*bawırman*), and geographical belonging. By examining the etymological roots and cultural rites associated with this term, such as the *quyriq-bawır* tradition, we can gain deeper insight into the national mentality of the Karakalpak people.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To achieve a holistic understanding of the «*bawır*» concept, this study employs a multi-disciplinary research framework:

1. **Descriptive method:** Used to categorize and define the various semantic layers of the concept as it appears in contemporary Karakalpak usage.
2. **Comparative-linguistic analysis:** A systematic comparison of *bawır* and its equivalents in the Explanatory Dictionaries of the Karakalpak, Uzbek, and Kazakh languages. This helps identify unique cultural nuances and gaps in lexicographical representation.
3. **Contextual-semantic analysis:** Examination of literary excerpts from Karakalpak prose and poetry (e.g., the works of A. Bekimbetov and Sh. Seytov) to observe the concept in “living” speech and its metaphorical transformations.
4. **Etymological inquiry:** Investigation into the historical roots of the term and its cross-linguistic parallels (e.g., Slavic and

Old Turkic) to trace the evolution of the concept from a physiological sign to a cultural symbol.

5. **Linguoculturological interpretation:** Analyzing social rites (such as the *bawır qáde* matchmaking tradition) to determine how linguistic units reinforce social structures and national values.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Language and culture are inextricably linked; the worldview, values, customs, and national mentality of every nation are primarily manifested in linguistic units, particularly in concepts. The notion of a «concept» occupies a special place in linguoculturology, one of the modern branches of linguistics. A concept is a complex linguistic and cultural unit that encapsulates the national-cultural experience, historical memory, and values of a people.

Somatic units do not merely express anatomical concepts; they also possess the quality of reflecting a nation's worldview, emotions, and cultural values. For example, the “heart” (*júrek*) is a symbol of love, courage, and kindness; the “liver” (*bawır*) serves as a symbol of closeness, affection, and loyalty; and the “eye” (*kóz*) is used as an expression of wisdom and observation.

Thus, as a result of the discrete nature of language, the human being and their conceptual world are depicted in language as distinct segments. These segments – expressed in somatic concepts – constitute essential parts of a nation's thought process. Through them, alongside the physical structure of a human, their spiritual and emotional states are revealed.

Natural environment, traditions, stages of historical-cultural development, and national values appear as significant factors in shaping the national-cultural and emotional-imaginary world of every society. Therefore, each nation's model of perceiving the world demonstrates unique characteristics alongside general typological aspects. For this reason, B. Kulbayeva defines the concept of *bawır* as follows: “The concept of 'bawır' shows which values a nation considers important, as well as their inner world and cultural mindset” [1: 155].

This lexeme possesses a multi-layered semantic structure covering medical-biological, everyday, and moral-ethical spheres; this circumstance serves as an important source in revealing the national-cultural characteristics of the *bawır* concept.

The concept of *bawır* (liver/kindred), while being one of the somatic organs of the human body, is considered an ancient linguistic concept in the language and culture of Turkic peoples, carrying spiritual, emotional, and philosophical content. Although this concept biologically signifies a source of life and a vital part of the body, in the national mindset, it has transformed into a symbol of spiritual purity, affection, loyalty, closeness, and human integrity.

The broad meaning of the *bawır* concept is linked to its dual nature: its “biological” and “linguocultural” content. As an organ representing the source of life, it is the primary organ that purifies the blood and sustains human life; culturally, it expresses humanity, kinship, closeness, sincerity, and love. From this perspective, the concept of *bawır* is viewed as a universal unit that reflects the world through language, consolidating the human worldview, emotional sphere, and cultural values.

In the general cognitive system of Turkic languages, every organ of human anatomy is not limited solely to its physiological function but is also burdened with specific symbolic and linguocultural meaning [2: 58]. Among these, the liver holds particular significance.

1. In the Karakalpak language, the use of the word *bawırım* (my liver/my brother) to mean “kinsman” or “close person” is not an accidental semantic phenomenon. There is an interconnectedness between the anatomical meaning and the figurative (symbolic) meaning of the *bawır* concept. For example:

Anatomically: The liver is considered the primary source of life in human existence. This organ is the heaviest and largest gland in the human body. Neither humans nor animals can survive without a liver. The liver is an organ that stores blood; it holds approximately 20% of the blood and can redirect it back into circulation when necessary. During the embryonic period,

this organ participates in blood-forming processes, creating conditions for the formation of hemoglobin and blood elements. Thus, the liver is a fundamental organ providing life not only at a physiological level but also at an “ontogenetic” level. Furthermore, the biochemical and physiological functions of the liver are closely linked to the bile duct. One-seventh (1/7) of the heat (energy) in the human body is distributed from the liver [3: 300].

Since the “bawır” is an organ that gathers blood within itself, it has been understood as a primary sign of kinship through the concept of being “blood-related” (*qanalas*). Accordingly, the formation of the lexeme *bawır* as one of the terms expressing kinship relations is a manifestation of natural semantic laws. Example:

Begis, understand, my brother (bawırım), to an ant even a drop of water is a sea. To Teremurat suwpi, the city of Kungrad is like a kingdom! (T. Kaipbergenov, *The Incomprehensible*).

The etymology of the term *печень* (*pechen*) in the Russian language is also linked to symbolic concepts to a certain extent. According to etymological data, the root of this word traces back to the Old Slavic lexeme *печь* (hearth/stove, the place where fire is lit). The roots *печь* and *пек* signify “to heat” or “to distribute warmth.” In the ancient Slavic worldview, the hearth was perceived as the primary symbol of warmth, vitality, and life energy [4: 286].

These scientific characteristics of the liver coincide with the understandings found in the ancient everyday consciousness of the people. One such instance is the function of the liver as a «warmth-producing part» and a mother’s love for the child created from her own blood; pressing the child affectionately to her “right liver” (right side/breast) demonstrates a situation that is uniquely warm and pleasant for the child as well. Example:

In that moment, my wife took the weak infant, who was soiled with sand, into her hands and pressed him to her **bawır** (chest/liver), and placed her breast into the mouth of the babe who had not yet tasted

first milk. The infant, who had been choking with cries, immediately stopped weeping as he instinctively sucked the milk of motherly affection. (A. Bekimbetov, *Echo in the Desert*).

2. The word *bawırım* as a concept also appears in the sense of “child” or “offspring”. Example:

After a while, he opened his eyes, looked at the sun, and said, 'My **bawır** (my child), my **bawır**, so you do exist!' as he stroked his son's forehead. (A. Bekimbetov, *Relatives*).

Based on the points mentioned above, the liver is the warmest organ in the human body; therefore, we refer to a person who possesses a closeness and warmth to us as *bawırım*. Example:

Ismail had sensed it in time; however, the fact that Genjemurat aga drew him to his **bawır** (embraced him) like his own child prevented him from surrendering to any [negative] sensitivity. (M. Nizanov, *Who Has Not Been in Love*)

In this context, the notion of *bawır* encompasses not only biological functions but also psychological relationships such as emotional closeness, mercy, compassion, and the act of drawing someone near. Figurative expressions in the Karakalpak language such as *bawırman* (compassionate/brotherly), *bawır basıw* (to become attached), *bawırına jaqın* (close to one's heart/liver), and *bawırına tartıw* (to embrace/draw close) prove the wide emotional-cultural scope of this concept.

3. The concept of *bawır* as a sign of tribal belonging, close kinship, and brotherhood: According to elders among the people, in the culture of nomadic peoples, *bawır* was considered a concept of collective closeness among people who ate the meat of the same animal, shared food from one pot, and lived under one tent. In their traditions, sharing and eating the liver of a single animal was a sign of friendship, an oath, or a kinship agreement. Eating from one liver meant belonging to one family or one tribe. From this, *bawır* turned into a symbol of kinship and closeness.

In the present day, we use the word *bawır* in both senses, but the cultural meaning often outweighs the anatomical one. This is how culture influences our language. The tradition of *bawır qáde* (the liver rite), which is preserved in our modern customs, serves as evidence of this. Thus, the tradition of *bawırlasıw* (becoming brothers) signifies two people entering into a relationship as close as blood relatives.

For instance, the spiritual and cultural life of the people is profoundly reflected in the Kazakh epic poem 'Alpamys Batyr'. This epic portrays customs and traditions common not only to the Kazakh people but to all nomadic nations:

Two lords beloved by my Creator, your good intentions have gladdened my soul! Let this promise of yours not be merely one of many words departing the mouth; therefore, grease your lips by eating **quyriq-bawır** (tail fat and liver). Prove your kinship by touching chests (*tós tiygiziw*). Witness the sincerity of your hearts by spreading flour on your faces. Let these three flawless traditions be a sign of manhood and an oath of loyalty! Hearing the mother's words, the people supported them with joy. The two fathers-in-law ate the tail fat and liver, touched chests, and spread flour on their faces. To the people who witnessed it, this felt like a grand ceremony in itself – a tradition to serve as an example for future generations. From that time on, the traditions of becoming 'waist' in-laws (*bel quda*) or 'cradle' in-laws (*besik quda*), eating **quyriq-bawır**, joining chests, and spreading flour on the face as proof of kinship were established as customs passed from generation to generation. [5: 320]

In her research, K. Usenova describes the *bawır qáde* (liver rite) tradition of the Karakalpak people as follows:

In the process of matchmaking, there is a tradition called 'eating the liver.' Two platters of chopped sheep's liver are placed before the matchmakers who represent both sides. The bride's father first offers the liver to the matchmakers to taste, and then they eat it themselves. This signifies that the two sides have truly become 'liver-kin' and relatives. The matchmakers then place money in the platters as a ritual gift (*qáde*). [6: 65]

Furthermore, concepts such as *bawirlasiw* (becoming brothers), *bawir basiw* (becoming attached), and *bawirina basiw* (to press to one's liver/embrace) refer to people who, despite having no blood relation, interact like the closest of relatives. They are individuals who share the burdens of both «the wedding under the canopy and the death in the soil» (life's joys and sorrows) like true kin. Example:

Even the wealthy, who normally wouldn't waste a bullet on Jarakpan, forgot yesterday's enmity and kissed his forehead as if he were a **bawir** (brother) who had restored their collective honor. (A. Sadykov, *The Nightingale Without a Garden*).

Her voice, calling me 'my bright star, my only one' while pressing me to her **bawir** (chest), still rings in my ears from that time» (J. Aymurzaev, *The Heart of an Orphan*).

Since the geographical location, historical development, and cultural life of the Karakalpak people are closely linked with the Uzbek people, it is necessary to mention the meanings provided in the explanatory dictionaries of the Uzbek language when defining the content of the *bawir* concept. In the *Explanatory Dictionary of the Uzbek Language*, the concept is explained through three primary meanings:

1. An internal organ in the human and animal organism that produces bile and ensures metabolism;
2. An animal organ consumed as food (a dish name);
3. The closest person, a companion as close as a relative; also used in the sense of a child [7: 81].

Similarly, the *Explanatory Dictionary of the Karakalpak Language* also identifies three meanings:

1. **Bawir I** – the largest gland/organ in the internal organism of all humans and living creatures that secretes bile.
2. **Bawir II** – blood relatives, kinsmen, or people with close family ties.

3. **Bawır III** – 1) The side or slope of something; 2) The space between the arms and legs, the front side, or the flank of humans and animals [8: 25].

In the *Explanatory Dictionary of the Kazakh Language*, the meaning of the *bawır* concept is defined in a very extensive manner:

1. The largest digestive gland of humans and animals, participating in the processes of digestion and metabolism in invertebrates.
2. An internal organ participating in physiological and biochemical processes vital for life, such as digestion, hematopoiesis, and metabolism in the human organism.
3. The internal side of an animal's body structure where the liver is located; the armpit area.
4. The human embrace (bosom).
5. The hollow or sheltered side opposite the outer side of mountainous, hilly, or elevated areas; the slope or foot of a hill.
6. The fertile bank or shore of a lake or river.
7. (Culinary) An internal organ of an animal used for food.
8. (Figurative) The inner side of objects such as rings, bracelets, or whips.
9. (Figurative) The lower part of technical tools such as cars, tractors, combines, or tanks that touches the ground [9: 208].

When comparing the *bawır* concept in the *Explanatory Dictionary of the Karakalpak Language* to those of the Uzbek and Kazakh languages, we observe that its semantic scope is somewhat narrower. In both Uzbek and Kazakh, the word *bawır* is explicitly listed with the meaning of “an animal organ consumed as food” (a dish name). If the Karakalpak dictionary also included terms like *bawır quwırdaq* or *bawır kábab*, the concept would be more fully revealed as a term reflecting the people's cultural lifestyle and traditional food culture. In lexicography, we must take into account the cultural-semantic layers of linguistic units.

Example: In K. Mambetov's novel *The Displaced People* (Posqan el):

All your troubles won't last a single day. What could be better than making liver kebabs (**bawirdan kábab**) and eating them at the head of a spring? All the traveling sultans are thinking only of that.

In her scientific article, M. Gadoeva analyzes the semantic layers of the word *jigar* (liver), noting its figurative characteristics in the Uzbek language and citing the following meanings:

1. **Literal meaning:** liver.
2. **Figurative meaning:** a) the front part of the body from the neck to the stomach (chest, breast); b) embrace (protection, shelter, side); v) a large, sprawling area or space (vortex, embrace); g) the side or slope of a geographical area.
3. **Poetical meaning:** heart, soul, mind.

Furthermore, the author notes that in modern Uzbek, stable phrases formed with the word *bawir* – such as mountain slope (*taw bawiri*), city center (*qala bawiri*), “the embrace of peace,” “the embrace of space,” “to take into one's embrace,” “to press to one's bosom,” “bleeding heart/liver,” “cold-hearted,” “black-hearted (cruel),” “hard-hearted,” “broad-minded,” “to be heartbroken,” “to grieve,” “to be incomplete/bereaved,” “to be whole,” “to have a scarred heart,” “liver kebab,” and “to raise one's head/recover” – are widely used [10: 83].

M. J. Tagayev and M. S. Chinlo also analyzed the national-cultural content of the *bawir* concept using examples from Kyrgyz, Russian, Arabic, and Dungan languages, viewing it as an important linguocultural concept expressing kinship and emotional meaning. The researchers analyze the concept as a symbol of human feelings, kinship, compassion, and moral values across different peoples. According to the authors, the *bawir* concept occupies a significant place in the national consciousness not only as a biological organ but also as an **axiological unit** reflecting the human inner world and national mentality [11: 111-117].

The national mentality and cultural world of a people are reflected through the study of concepts. This is because concepts serve as a unique manifestation of national-cultural traditions, customs, social relations, and the people's worldview. Every national language possesses its own "conceptosphere," which consolidates the most significant values of the people's life. In the Karakalpak language, the concept of *bawır* forms a layer with a distinctive content. On one hand, it denotes a «blood relative», while on the other, it has transformed into a symbolic notion expressing an emotionally close, beloved, and esteemed person. As a semantic field in the language, this concept consists of several primary layers through which the national-cultural manifestation of the connection between man and the world is formed. These can be studied by dividing them into the following groups:

1. *The literal meaning of the "bawır" concept*

In its literal sense, the *bawır* concept refers to the internal organ in the human and animal organism that produces bile and ensures metabolism; it is viewed as a vital sign of life. Example:

The doctor said that traveling long distances by car put a strain on the heart, and especially on the **bawır** (liver). He knew that he had undergone surgery for this many years ago. (K. Karimov, *The Thirteenth Village*).

2. *"Bawır" as a concept of friendship and closeness*

In this context, we can observe the use of *bawırım* (my brother/my dear) addressed to a close friend or someone dear to oneself. Example:

When I raised my head and looked, my **bawırman** (compassionate/brotherly) friend and fellow villager Amet Orazbaev was standing at the threshold. Suddenly, my heart overflowed like a river, and my friend and I became inseparable. (A. Bekimbetov, *A Brave Man's Story*).

Not long after the guest left, he said to Kosbergen's son: 'My **bawırım**, do not believe what I said the other day. Take care of

yourself and move away from there'. (Sh. Seytov, *Aktuba in the Bad Bay*).

In the first example, the meaning of the phrase *bawırım dostum* (my brotherly friend) elevates friendship above the level of a simple social relationship, valuing the friend as a blood relative. Here, the concept consolidates meanings of closeness, trust, and kinship. In the second example, an elder addressing a younger person as *bawırım* demonstrates cultural and ethical respect, characterized by care and compassion. This usage appears as a form of humane relationship expressing a warm fatherly or brotherly attitude.

3. “Bawır” as an emotional-psychological concept

This represents the «liver» as the center of emotions. For instance, phrases like *bawırı kúydi* (his liver burned/he grieved) or *bawırı ezildi* (his liver was crushed/he felt deep pity) signify emotional states such as sorrow, grief, and compassion. Example:

Instead of answering, Aydos – who lay in distress, his **oy-bawırın jep** (consumed by inner anxiety) – laughed convulsively. (T. Kaipbergenov, *The Unfortunate Ones*). Note: “Oy-bawırın jew” refers to a state of being deeply agitated, restless, and overcome by intense internal feelings.

The sheikh, whose **bawırı qamılğan** (heart/liver was constricted) by the actions of these stubborn beys, could not bear the sight; he wiped his face with the brim of his hat and coughed 'oho-oho' to wake them. (T. Kaipbergenov, *Mamanbiy*).

Even though Murat Sheikh sent his envoy with words that would **make one's liver melt** (*bawırı erigendey*), Irysqu Beys, far from softening, gave an even sharper answer than before. (T. Kaipbergenov, *Mamanbiy*).

In the first example, *bawırı qamılıw* is a fixed expression denoting a person's internal constriction or suffering from a certain situation. In the second example, *bawırı eriw* (the melting of the liver) signifies a person's internal softening, the awakening of mercy, or being moved by someone's words or actions.

4. “*Bawır*” as a cultural layer of territory and place

The *bawır* concept reflects the people's worldview and their model for perceiving the environment. For example, in the Karakalpak language, phrases such as *taw bawırı* (the slope/breast of a mountain) and *qala bawırı* (the heart/center of a city) express spatial or locational meanings, demonstrating the language's transition from a somatic model to a cultural-metaphorical one. This reflects the cultural understanding of the connection between man and the world. Example:

Many poppies grow on the slopes of the mountain (**taw bawırındaǵı**). However, they do not last long due to the lack of rain. (K. Mambetov, *Turkistan*)

Upon turning, he circled them once by crawling along the ground (**jer bawırlap**), then lay down peacefully, pressing his **bawır** (chest/belly) against the stone platform. (S. Saliev, *Galactic Heart*).

In this excerpt, *bawır* is used as a somatic lexeme in a physical-spatial sense. The phrases *jer bawırlaw* (crawling/clinging to the earth) and *bawırın beriw* (pressing one's chest to something) indicate the character's instinctive movement and defensive posture.

We feel as though we shall never fall, planting our soles firmly against the **bawır** of Mother Earth (**ana jer bawırına**)». (S. Ismailov, *Galactic Heart*).

In this sentence, the phrase “the *bawır* of Mother Earth” is constructed on the basis of a conceptual metaphor, where the somatism *bawır* gives the earth an anthropomorphic character. Here, *bawır* appears as a symbol of stability, trust, and life support, reflecting the spiritual and physical connection between man and the earth.

5. “*Bawır*” as a concept for «child» (offspring)

Even if I say 'don't suffer,' can you stay without suffering? Of course you will suffer; how can you not suffer when a part of your **bawır** (liver/self) is being torn away? A child is your own **bawır**

eti (the flesh of your liver)!» (Sh. Seytov, “Aktuba in the Bad Bay”).

Phrases like *bawırınıñ bir jaǵı julıñıp* (a part of your liver being torn out) and *bala degen bawır etiñ* (a child is the flesh of your liver) demonstrate that a child is of vital importance to a parent, and that a child's grief is perceived by the parent as a physical wound to their own body. This excerpt clearly illustrates the family values and emotional perspective characteristic of Turkic peoples, deeply revealing the linguocultural and semantic potential of the *bawır* concept.

Do you truly not regret having mercy on the child who came from your **bawır** (womb/self) and the partner with whom you have shared many years? (A. Bekimbetov, *Relatives*).

6. “*Bawır*” as a concept of friendship and kinship between nations

Yours is an example for generations; the youth take lessons from wisdom, bravery, and beauty, and protect their good land. But ours is a disappointment of both the past and the present; thank you, my Kazakh **bawırım** (brother)! (T. Kaipbergenov, *The Unfortunate Ones*).

In this example, the *bawır* concept serves as a conceptual foundation uniting friendship between nations, ties between peoples, and a common cultural space. In this context, the word is used in an expanded sense, representing not the inner feelings of an individual, but a collective consciousness of unity, brotherhood, mutual responsibility, and spiritual closeness.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the *bawır* concept reflects the people's worldview, family values, emotional-psychological states, and cultural traditions. Furthermore, this concept proves the transition of the language from a somatic model into a metaphorical and symbolic

space, defining the national-cultural nature of the connection between man and the world. Thus, *bawır* is a significant linguocultural unit that occupies a special place in the conceptsphere of the Karakalpak language and profoundly reflects the national mentality.

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