

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF GENDER REPRESENTATION IN EMPATHY-RELATED PROVERBS IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK LANGUAGES

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18641819>

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Annotation

This article explores the representation of gender in empathy-related proverbs in English and Uzbek from a linguocultural and cognitive perspective. Proverbs function as repositories of collective experience and cultural ideology, reflecting social expectations regarding emotional behavior and interpersonal relations. By analyzing metaphorical structures, imagery patterns, and implicit gender markers, this study demonstrates how empathy is conceptualized differently in the two linguistic traditions. The findings suggest that English proverbs often frame empathy within individual emotional control and moral responsibility, while Uzbek proverbs emphasize relational harmony, communal solidarity, and family-centered compassion. The research highlights how metaphor and imagery reinforce culturally embedded gender norms and contribute to the formation of social identity through language.

Keywords

Empathy, gender representation, proverb studies, linguocultural analysis, metaphor, imagery, stereotype, paremiology, comparative linguistics.

Introduction. Language is not merely a communication tool, it is a reflection of cultural consciousness. Proverbs, as part of paremiological heritage, preserve the moral, ethical, and emotional codes of a society. They represent collective experience and encode traditional expectations concerning behavior, social hierarchy, and gender roles. Empathy, understood as the ability to share or understand another person's emotional state, occupies a central place in social interaction. Cultural norms determine how empathy should be expressed and by whom. In many societies, emotional sensitivity has traditionally been associated with femininity, while emotional restraint has been linked to masculinity. These

perceptions are often embedded in proverbs, which subtly transmit gendered assumptions across generations.

The present study aims to explore how empathy-related proverbs in English and Uzbek linguistically construct gender identities through metaphorical and symbolic representation. The analysis is grounded in cultural linguistics, gender studies, and conceptual metaphor theory.

Main Part. Empathy is not a purely universal phenomenon, it is culturally shaped. Each linguistic community interprets compassion, emotional support, and solidarity through its own symbolic system. Proverbs reveal these cultural interpretations by associating empathy with certain images such as the heart, warmth, tears, burden, shelter, or healing. In English cultural tradition, empathy is often conceptualized as an inner emotional state linked to the “heart.” The heart metaphor emphasizes individuality and personal emotional experience. Emotional expression is frequently framed as something that must be controlled, balanced, or appropriately displayed. This conceptualization reflects broader Western values of individual responsibility and self-regulation. In Uzbek linguistic culture, empathy is frequently associated with collective life. Imagery of shared burden, warmth of family, unity, and moral duty appears in many traditional sayings. Emotional support is portrayed not only as a personal feeling but also as a social obligation embedded in family and community relationships. This demonstrates the strong collectivist orientation of Uzbek culture.

English proverbs often portray women as emotionally sensitive, nurturing, and capable of comforting others. Femininity is symbolically connected with softness, tenderness, and healing presence. At the same time, masculinity is frequently linked to emotional strength, endurance, or restraint. Such representations reinforce the idea that empathy is more naturally aligned with female identity. However, English proverbs also contain ambivalent portrayals. Emotional expressiveness in women can sometimes be depicted as excessive or irrational, while emotional restraint in men may be praised as maturity or strength. This duality reflects historical tensions in gender ideology within English-speaking societies. Metaphorically, empathy in English proverbs is often framed through imagery of wounds and healing, storms and calmness, or light and darkness. These images symbolize emotional turbulence and relief, positioning empathy as a restorative force.

Uzbek proverbs frequently connect empathy with family structure and social cohesion. Women are often represented as the emotional center of the household, embodying compassion and moral guidance. The mother figure, in particular, is strongly associated with unconditional care and understanding. Men, in contrast,

are often depicted as protectors and providers. Their empathy is shown through responsibility and action rather than overt emotional expression. This suggests that in Uzbek proverb tradition, gendered empathy is expressed through different social functions rather than contrasting emotional capacities. Imagery in Uzbek proverbs often includes warmth, shelter, shared bread, and collective support. These symbols emphasize interconnectedness and communal life. Empathy is portrayed as a binding force that maintains harmony within the family and society.

From the perspective of conceptual metaphor theory, abstract concepts such as empathy are understood through more concrete experiences. In English proverbs, empathy may be conceptualized as “healing”, “softening” or “opening the heart”. In Uzbek proverbs, it may be framed as “lightening a burden”, “sharing pain” or “warming the soul”. These metaphorical models are not random. They reflect deeper cultural worldviews. English metaphors often highlight individual psychological experience, whereas Uzbek metaphors stress relational bonds and shared emotional responsibility. Gender representation is embedded within these metaphorical frameworks. When empathy is metaphorically linked with warmth and nurturing, it is culturally aligned with femininity. When it is connected with strength and endurance, it becomes associated with masculinity.

The comparative analysis demonstrates that proverbs serve as subtle mechanisms of socialization. Through repeated exposure to culturally accepted sayings, individuals internalize gender expectations concerning emotional behavior. Language thus participates in shaping social identity. While both English and Uzbek traditions contain gendered patterns, the intensity and form of these representations differ. English proverbs often reflect individualistic moral lessons, whereas Uzbek proverbs highlight collective values and interdependence. Understanding these linguistic constructions is important for intercultural communication, translation studies, and gender research. Misinterpretation of proverb imagery can lead to misunderstanding of cultural attitudes toward emotion and gender roles.

Empathy-related proverbs do not function only as descriptive statements; they also perform pragmatic functions in communication. They may be used to console, advise, criticize, or morally instruct someone. In English discourse, such proverbs often serve as indirect emotional guidance, encouraging personal reflection. In Uzbek discourse, they frequently function as tools of social regulation, reminding individuals of their moral duty toward others. Another important aspect is the degree of explicit gender reference. Some proverbs directly mention “woman,” “mother,” or “man,” while others encode gender implicitly through stereotypical roles.

Conclusion. The study reveals that empathy-related proverbs in English and Uzbek encode culturally specific models of gender representation. In English, empathy is frequently framed within individual emotional experience and moral self-control, with femininity strongly associated with tenderness and care. In Uzbek tradition, empathy is embedded within family and community structures, where both genders contribute to emotional harmony through culturally defined roles. Metaphor and imagery play a crucial role in shaping these representations. Through symbolic language, proverbs transmit deeply rooted cultural norms and gender ideologies. Therefore, the analysis of empathy-related proverbs not only enriches paremiological research but also deepens our understanding of the interaction between language, culture, and gender identity.

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