

GENDER-LINGUISTIC FEATURES OF ANTHROPOCENTRIC PROVERBS

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Abstract: This thesis explores the gender-linguistic characteristics of anthropocentric proverbs, focusing on how human-centered worldview and gender perception are encoded in proverbial expressions. Anthropocentrism in language places humans at the center of the universe, reflecting their values, experiences, and social hierarchies. Proverbs, as compact linguistic forms, embody cultural knowledge about gender roles, human relationships, and social behavior. The study examines the linguistic, stylistic, and cognitive mechanisms that shape gender representation in proverbs, emphasizing metaphorical structures and cultural semiotics in Uzbek and world paremiology.

Keywords: anthropocentrism, gender linguistics, proverb, worldview, metaphor, cultural linguistics, linguistic image of the world, stereotype.

Introduction

In recent decades, linguistics has shifted from structural paradigms to human-centered ones, giving rise to anthropocentric linguistics, which views language as a reflection of human cognition, mentality, and cultural values. This perspective focuses on how humans conceptualize the world through language.

Proverbs are among the most vivid linguistic manifestations of this anthropocentric principle. They are not merely aesthetic expressions but condensed forms of cultural experience that mirror the worldview of a given people. Each proverb encodes a model of human behavior, moral norms, and emotional attitudes — hence, studying proverbs means studying the human factor in language.

Within this framework, gender linguistics has emerged as a discipline exploring how language encodes and perpetuates gender distinctions. When analyzed together, anthropocentric and gender perspectives reveal how proverbs not only describe human traits but also classify them according to gendered expectations.

Thus, anthropocentric proverbs provide an ideal medium for understanding the intersection of language, culture, and gender.

The anthropocentric approach in linguistics assumes that human beings are both the creators and the interpreters of language. According to V. von Humboldt, “Language is the external manifestation of the spirit of a people.” This idea evolved into the modern concept of the linguistic picture of the world (*yazykovaya kartina mira*), where linguistic forms express human understanding of reality.

From this standpoint, proverbs can be seen as linguistic microcosms — miniature reflections of the human-centered worldview. Every proverb originates from human experience, depicting behavior, character, and emotion.

Gender, as a fundamental social category, is an inseparable part of anthropocentric analysis. As Robin Lakoff (1975) and Deborah Tannen (1990) argue, gender determines not only how people speak but also how they are spoken about. Proverbs, in this sense, are a linguistic mirror of gender ideology.

For example:

- “*A woman’s place is in the home.*”
- “*A man’s word is his bond.*”

These reflect anthropocentric values — the human experience — but also gender bias.

Anthropocentrism in proverbs manifests in several ways:

1. Human behavior as the central theme.

Nearly all proverbs are anthropocentric because they describe human traits — wisdom, laziness, patience, pride, etc. Example: “*Patience is a virtue.*”, “*Man proposes, God disposes.*”

2. Metaphorical personification.

Non-human elements are described through human qualities:

“*The walls have ears.*” or “*Time waits for no man.*”

3. Moral orientation.

Proverbs always contain implicit evaluation — what is good, what is bad, what is desirable for humans.

In Uzbek culture, the anthropocentric worldview is expressed through proverbs like:

- “*Erkak — elning suyanchi, ayol — oilaning yuragi.*”

(*A man is the pillar of the nation, a woman is the heart of the family.*)

This proverb reflects not nature or objects, but human essence — society built around male and female roles.

Gender-based anthropocentric proverbs form a special subgroup of paremiology, reflecting how society divides human qualities along gender lines.

In many traditional cultures, proverbs are used as moral instructions — they teach how men and women should behave. Consequently, gender stereotypes are encoded in linguistic form.

Examples from Uzbek:

- “*Erkak ishlar, ayol yashatar.*” (*The man works, the woman keeps life going.*)
- “*Ayol gapining mag‘zi – donolik.*” (*There is wisdom in a woman’s word.*)

Examples from English:

- “*A man is known by his deeds, a woman by her tongue.*”
- “*Behind every great man, there is a great woman.*”

In these expressions, language anthropocentrically centers humans as moral subjects, yet distinguishes them by gendered traits.

Stylistically, such proverbs rely on parallelism, contrast, and metaphor, representing gender complementarity or opposition.

The stylistic analysis of anthropocentric proverbs reveals several linguistic devices that express gendered meanings:

a) Metaphor and Symbolism

Metaphor is the key to anthropocentricity — it connects human traits to images of nature.

- Man: “mountain,” “lion,” “sun” — symbols of power, stability, and leadership.
- Woman: “moon,” “flower,” “river” — symbols of beauty, emotion, and nurture.

For instance:

- “*Erkak tog‘, ayol daryo.*” (*Man is a mountain, woman is a river.*)

Here, metaphor anthropocentrically translates social qualities into natural imagery.

b) Antithesis and Parallelism

Opposing clauses emphasize complementarity or contrast between male and female roles.

- “*Er — el boshlig‘i, ayol — uy boshlig‘i.*”

(*Man leads the nation, woman leads the home.*)

c) Irony and Pragmatic Evaluation

Some gendered proverbs contain mild irony, expressing criticism or humor.

- “*Ayolni sinab bo‘lmas, gapi shirin, siri chuqur.*”

(*A woman cannot be fully known — her words are sweet, her secrets deep.*)

The cognitive function of such stylistic forms is to structure human understanding — they simplify social complexity into symbolic contrasts.

Gender stereotypes embedded in proverbs can be divided into several conceptual domains:

1. Masculinity as activity and rationality:

- “A man’s word is his honor.”
- “Er yigit so ‘zida turar.” (A brave man keeps his word.)
- Femininity as emotion and morality:
- “A good wife makes a good husband.”
- “Ayol – oilaning yuragi.” (A woman is the heart of the family.)
- Complementary gender models:
- “Erkak ishlar, ayol yashatar.” (Man builds, woman sustains.)

These proverbs are anthropocentric because they speak not of abstract concepts but of human experience — how to live, act, and coexist.

However, many of them reflect patriarchal bias, where male qualities are prioritized. Modern linguistic thought encourages reinterpretation of these structures to promote equality while preserving cultural meaning.

To demonstrate universality and variation, we compare anthropocentric gender proverbs from several languages:

Culture	Proverb	Literal meaning	Gender implication
Uzbek	“Ayolning gapi bilan uy tuzilar.”	A woman’s word builds the home.	Woman = moral foundation
English	“A woman’s work is never done.”	Woman’s labor is endless.	Gendered labor roles
Russian	“Муж — голова, жена — шея.”	The husband is the head, the wife is the neck.	Complementary hierarchy
Chinese	“男主外，女主内.”	Man manages outside, woman inside.	Gendered division of labor

Despite differences, these all share anthropocentric focus — human roles, social morality, and interdependence.

Stylistically, they rely on metaphor and syntactic parallelism, illustrating how the same cognitive patterns appear across languages.

According to Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory, human thinking is metaphorical. Proverbs embody these conceptual metaphors that structure human knowledge.

Common metaphorical models in gendered proverbs include:

- MAN IS STRENGTH → “A real man stands by his word.”
- WOMAN IS HEART / BEAUTY → “A good woman makes a home warm.”
- LIFE IS A FAMILY STRUCTURE → “Man and woman are two wings of life.”

These metaphors are not linguistic accidents; they reflect collective cognition — the way human beings conceptualize reality. The anthropocentric essence lies in turning the world into a human-centered symbolic system.

In the era of globalization and gender equality, traditional proverbs undergo semantic and stylistic transformation.

Modern Uzbek society tends to reinterpret old proverbs with egalitarian meanings:

- Traditional: “*Erkak bosh, ayol oyog’.*” (*Man is the head, woman is the foot.*)
- Modernized: “*Erkak va ayol – hayotning ikki qanoti.*” (*Man and woman are two wings of life.*)

Such recontextualization preserves the anthropocentric human focus but changes the evaluative perspective — from hierarchy to harmony.

This linguistic shift reflects broader cultural changes and the adaptability of proverbial language to new social realities.

Proverbs are communicative tools — they perform pragmatic functions such as advising, warning, or teaching. The anthropocentric and gendered nature makes them emotionally charged and persuasive.

For example:

- “*Ayol aqlli bo’lsa, oila tinch.*” (*If a woman is wise, the family is peaceful.*)

This proverb pragmatically encourages emotional intelligence and harmony.

Anthropocentricity ensures that the proverb speaks from human to human, creating shared cultural meaning that strengthens group identity.

Conclusion

Anthropocentric proverbs are linguistic reflections of humanity’s self-perception. They represent the synthesis of human experience, emotion, and morality. When examined through the lens of gender linguistics, these proverbs reveal not only linguistic artistry but also deep social ideology.

Gendered anthropocentric proverbs in Uzbek and world cultures exhibit a consistent pattern of metaphorical humanization — depicting men and women through symbolic images drawn from nature, morality, and social roles.

While traditional proverbs often encode patriarchal stereotypes, their linguistic and stylistic beauty provides a valuable foundation for cultural identity. Reinterpreting them in the light of modern gender values enables a dialogue between tradition and progress.

Ultimately, anthropocentric proverbs demonstrate that language is a mirror of humanity, and through its metaphors, it tells the story of how men and women have understood themselves and each other throughout history.

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