

FROM SOUND TO MEANING: COGNITIVE INTERPRETATION OF IMITATIVE WORDS  
IN ENGLISH AND KARAKALPAK PROVERBS

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ОТ ЗВУКА К СМЫСЛУ: КОГНИТИВНАЯ ИНТЕРПРЕТАЦИЯ  
ПОДРАЖАТЕЛЬНЫХ СЛОВ В АНГЛИЙСКИХ И КАРАКАЛПАКСКИХ ПОСЛОВИЦАХ

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TOVUSHDAN MA'NOGACHA: INGLIZ VA QORAQALPOQ MAQOLLARIDA  
TAQLIDIY SO'ZLARNING KOGNITIV TALQINI

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**Tayanch so'zlar:** taqlid so'z, talqin, kognitiv, maqol, ingliz, qoraqalpoq.

**Rezyume.** Maqolada ingliz va qoraqalpoq tillaridagi taqlid so'zlar kognitiv-fonosemantik nuqtayi nazardan o'rganilgan. Qiyosiy tahlil taqlidlarning universal tendensiyalari va o'ziga xos fonetik moslashuvlarni, shuningdek, maqollarda taqlidlarning konseptualizatsiyaga qo'shgan hissasini ko'rsatadi.

**Ключевые слова:** подражательное слово, интерпретация, когнитивное, пословица, английский, каракалпакский.

**Резюме.** В статье подражательные слова в английском и каракалпакском языках изучаются с когнитивно-фоносемантической точки зрения. Сравнительный анализ показывает универсальные тенденции и специфические фонетические адаптации имитаций, а также вклад имитаций в концептуализацию пословиц.

**Key words:** imitative word, interpretation, cognitive, proverb, English, Karakalpak.

**Summary.** The article examines imitative words in English and Karakalpak from a cognitive-phonosemantic point of view. Comparative analysis reveals universal tendencies and specific phonetic adaptations of imitatives, as well as the contribution of imitatives to conceptualization in proverbs.

**Introduction.** Humans process information from their surroundings by categorizing and organizing experience into distinct classes, groups, and conceptual structures that correspond to real-world phenomena. This cognitive ability allows individuals to interpret reality, form abstractions, and construct meaning through language. In this sense, cognition and language are deeply interconnected, as linguistic expressions reflect and shape human ways of thinking [6:1980]. Figurative language plays a significant role in this process, as it allows speakers to represent abstract ideas through concrete sensory experience.

Among various linguistic devices, proverbs occupy a special place in cultural communication. They encode collective knowledge, moral values, and social experience in a concise and memorable form. Proverbs function as cognitive models that simplify complex concepts, structure human thought, and transmit shared wisdom across generations. Through metaphorical and symbolic mechanisms, proverbs reflect how communities conceptualize relationships such as knowledge and ignorance, good and bad behavior, caution and danger.

The study of imitative words from a cognitive-phonosemantic perspective allows us to examine how different linguistic communities perceive and encode similar acoustic experiences [5:384]. A comparative analysis of English and Karakalpak proverbs reveals both universal tendencies in sound symbolism and language-specific phonological adaptations. This approach demonstrates how sound-based lexical units contribute not only to stylistic expressiveness but also to the conceptualization of human qualities, social relations, and moral categories in proverbial discourse.

**Methods.** This study adopts a comparative qualitative approach within the framework of cognitive-phonosemantic analysis. The research material consists of English and Karakalpak proverbs containing imitative lexemes, selected from published folklore collections and proverb dictionaries.

The selected proverbs were analyzed in terms of (1) contextual meaning, (2) cognitive associations of sound symbolism, and (3) conceptual function in expressing oppositional meanings such as knowledge versus ignorance and good versus bad behavior. The interpretation is based on the principles of cognitive linguistics and sound symbolism theory [3:654-672], with reference to relevant scholarly works in the field.

A cross-linguistic comparison was conducted to identify universal tendencies and specific linguistic features in the use of onomatopoeic words. The analysis aimed to determine how sound forms contribute to conceptualization and meaning construction in proverbial discourse in both languages.

**Results.** Imitative words occur in proverbs in the form of various parts of speech, but in most cases they function as verbs and nouns. The cognitive field of a proverb is formed on the basis of a figurative and rationally processed form of knowledge. For example:

1. *Aspandağı gawıq degen quw boladı,*

*Ğawqıldasa, dawısı jer jaradı* [1:210]

In this example, “ğawqıldasa” refers to a loud, echoing, and far-reaching sound. Cognitive characteristic: loudness is associated with visibility, strength, and social influence. The imitative sound conveys intensity and dominance, creating a feeling of strong presence and attention. Through

its acoustic effect, the word emphasizes that something loud becomes noticeable and cannot remain unnoticed.

This proverb illustrates the relationship between sound and influence. A loud voice symbolizes power, authority, and the ability to attract attention, while silence can represent weakness or lack of influence. The expression suggests that strong actions or statements, like a loud sound, spread widely and are heard by everyone. Conceptually, the proverb reflects the idea that prominence and intensity increase recognition and social significance.

English one: *You can hear a jackal howl from miles away* [4:298].

2. *Jaqsınıń barsań qasına,  
«Beri kel» dep shaqırar,  
Jamannıń barsań qasına,  
Ash jolbarıstay aqırar.* [1:159]

“Aqırar” refers to the roar of a tiger and the attitude of bad people. Cognitive character: *aqırar* is associated with a person's harsh punishment, persecution, or resistance, reminiscent of a tiger's roar, that is, its loud, frightening sound. A tiger's roar evokes instinctive fear, which indicates that the influence of evil people is exacerbated and associated with aggression [2:42-48]. In this proverb, the contrast between good and bad people is conveyed through vivid imagery. A good person welcomes others warmly and kindly, inviting them closer with the words “come here”. In contrast, a bad person reacts with hostility, metaphorically “roaring like an angry tiger” and driving others away. The use of the word “aqırar” in its figurative meaning strengthens the semantic structure of the proverb and highlights how moral qualities are interpreted through emotional and sensory experience. Through this metaphorical image, interpersonal relationships are conceptualized in terms of fear, kindness, and aggression.

A close English equivalent expressing a similar idea is: *A gentle answer turns away wrath, but harsh words stir up anger.*

3. *Duası qashǵan awızdan,  
Kesilgen sóz qaladı.  
Baxtı qaytqan gewdeden,  
Badırayǵan kóz qaladı* [1:166].

“Badırayǵan” means lightless, aimless, cognitive character: This word is related to the reflection of the inner state of the eye. “Badırayǵan” depicts lifeless, motionless, and meaningless eyes; that is, it signifies the loss of hope and purpose. Such a description, from a cognitive point of view, helps to understand a person's inner state through external signs. This proverb is based on the depiction of happiness and meaning through the image of a person. The metaphor “Badırayǵan kóz” depicts a person's depression and reveals the connection between external signs and the inner world. This is based on the general metaphorical concept that “the eye is the mirror of the soul”.

English proverbs also contain imitative words in metaphorical meaning. We analyze some:

1. *The squeaky wheel gets the grease* [7:252]. (*Jılamaǵan balaǵa emshek qayda*) Imitative element: **squeaky**. Cognitive property: The word “squeaky” describes the creaking sound of a wheel. This sound indicates that the wheel needs attention or repair. The cognitive property here is that noise or a complaint often leads to action. The proverb is based on the understanding

that more attention is given when one makes noise or expresses problems. This suggests a higher chance of receiving help by communicating one's needs. This confirms the cognitive bias that more prominent or urgent issues are considered to have greater priority.

The concept of “grease” is a metaphor for solutions or remedies. Just as lubricating a wheel helps it turn smoothly, addressing complaints or problems helps to resolve them and improves the situation. The proverb reflects a broader social understanding where visibility and assertiveness can influence outcomes. It describes a strategy of gaining attention and action by voicing one's needs or issues. Conceptually, the proverb contrasts the outcomes of action and inaction. A quiet wheel (or an unraised issue) may be ignored, whereas a squeaky wheel (or a voiced issue) receives attention. This conceptualization highlights the necessity of identifying problems to bring about change. The proverb suggests that actively communicating needs or problems is crucial for obtaining help or solutions, and is based on the cognitive recognition that visible issues are often given priority.

2. **Strike while the iron is hot.** [4:67] (Temirdi qızǵanda bas)

Imitative element: **strike**. Cognitive property: the “strike” simulator produces the sound of a hammer striking metal, which is a sharp, resonant noise. As a result of sound, something requiring attention or repair is felt, and the idea that problems that cause noise or talk can be solved is reinforced.

A proverb advises taking action at the most opportune moment, that is, when the opportunity is most advantageous. The sound of hot iron striking is related to the moment when the metal can be flexible and effectively shaped. Similarly, a proverb metaphorically indicates that one must act decisively when conditions are most favorable, emphasizing the need for time and promptness. Using imitative word in this proverb helps to reinforce the feeling of emphasizing the relevance and effectiveness of implementing its practical advice in a timely manner with complete information.

3. **Barking dogs seldom bite.** [7:325] (Úrgen iyt tislemeıdi.)

The word “barking” is a sound imitation, thw sound conveys the concept of fear and a relational attitude. A dog's barking inevitably serves as a warning and intimidation.

Cognitive character: In the proverb, the image of a “barking dog” is presented not as a real threat or a way of reporting, but as a mere threat and an image of meaningless exaggeration. A dog's bite can pose a threat and signify great danger, but in many cases, the threat from it doesn't actually lead to action.

Conceptually, in this proverb, the image of a “barking dog” is compared to people who talk a lot, frighten, but don't actually act. Threatening and threatening with words means being truly powerless. People who possess true strength speak less and act more decisively.

**Discussion.** The analysis demonstrates that onomatopoeic elements play a significant role in shaping the semantic and cognitive structure of proverbs across languages. Although they appear in different grammatical forms, they most often function as verbs and nouns, which allows them to directly encode actions and perceptual

experiences. This grammatical flexibility contributes to their effectiveness in conveying vivid imagery and experiential knowledge.

From a cognitive perspective, proverbs are not merely linguistic expressions but compressed units of culturally structured knowledge, where figurative meaning emerges through the interaction of sensory perception and abstract reasoning. Imitative words, in particular, serve as a bridge between acoustic experience and conceptual interpretation, enabling speakers to understand abstract social and moral ideas through concrete sensory cues.

A common conceptual pattern emerges across both languages: auditory imagery is used to structure abstract domains such as power, morality, urgency, and social interaction. This indicates that imitative words are not merely stylistic devices but also function as cognitive tools that facilitate understanding, memorization, and the transmission of cultural knowledge.

Moreover, cross-linguistic comparison shows that while specific lexical items differ, the underlying cognitive models are largely universal. Both traditions rely on sound-based imagery to represent attention, aggression, weakness, or effectiveness, suggesting that human cognition consistently draws on sensory experience to organize abstract thought.

**Conclusion.** The analysis shows that imitative words in English and Karakalpak proverbs perform not only an expressive but also a cognitive function. They help to transform sensory perception, especially sound, into conceptual meaning and moral evaluation. In proverbial discourse, such lexemes are used to characterize human behavior, social relations, and emotional states through figurative and culturally grounded associations. The comparison of the two languages reveals both common cognitive tendencies in connecting sound with evaluation and language-specific ways of encoding these meanings.

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