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GENDER STEREOTYPES IN THE MIRROR OF PROVERBS: THE IMAGE OF WOMAN/MOTHER IN RUSSIAN AND UZBEK LINGUISTIC WORLDVIEWS

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Abstract

This study investigates gender stereotypes encoded in the paremiological funds of the Russian and Uzbek languages, with a particular focus on the image of woman and mother. Using a corpus of 120 proverbs and sayings (60 Russian and 60 Uzbek) selected through continuous sampling, the research applies a comparative linguocultural approach integrating conceptual, semantic-pragmatic, and critical discourse analyses. Three semantic groups were identified: (1) the sacred image of mother; (2) woman within family hierarchy and social roles; (3) ambivalent and restrictive stereotypes. The results reveal that both linguistic cultures construct the image of mother as a sacred, irreplaceable figure; however, Uzbek paremiology foregrounds the concept of *baraka* (divine blessing) and absolute moral authority, while Russian paremiology emphasises emotional bond and martyrdom. Regarding social roles, Uzbek proverbs prescribe strict behavioural codes for women through direct didactic imperatives, whereas Russian paremiology employs irony and pragmatic metaphor. Restrictive stereotypes are present in both traditions but differ markedly in degree and framing. The findings contribute to the cross-cultural understanding of gender representation in language and are relevant for linguoculturology, gender linguistics, and intercultural communication.

Keywords: gender stereotypes, linguistic worldview, paremiology, proverbs, woman image, mother image, Russian language, Uzbek language, linguoculturology, comparative analysis.

1. INTRODUCTION

Language is not a neutral medium of communication; it encodes, perpetuates, and transmits the value systems, social norms, and cultural attitudes of the community that uses it [1]. Among the most compact and revealing repositories of such encoded attitudes are proverbs — those "short sentences drawn from long experience" that crystallise collective wisdom and reflect the social order as perceived by a given culture [2]. The cross-cultural study of proverbs, therefore, offers a uniquely transparent window onto the ideological structures that govern everyday social life, including the construction of gender.

Gender linguistics has established that language plays a constitutive role in producing and reproducing gender inequality [3]. Proverbs, as formulaic units with high cultural authority and reproducibility, are particularly powerful vehicles for gender stereotyping. As Schipper's landmark cross-cultural study demonstrated, "proverbs about women reveal a great deal about how women are perceived, evaluated and kept in their place" across different societies [4]. Yet

comparative analyses of linguistically and culturally distinct yet geographically proximate traditions — such as Russian and Uzbek — remain underrepresented in the literature.

The *linguistic worldview* (*yazykovaya kartina mira / lisoniy olam manzarasi*) is understood as the culturally specific cognitive grid through which a speech community perceives and interprets reality [5]. The concept of *woman/mother* constitutes one of the central nodes in both Russian and Uzbek linguistic worldviews, yet its specific content, valuation, and the stereotypes associated with it have received no systematic comparative treatment. This study aims to fill this gap.

The research objectives are as follows:

(1) to identify and classify paremiological units representing the image of woman and mother in Russian and Uzbek;

(2) to analyse the linguocultural functions of these units within their respective linguistic worldviews;

(3) to determine universal and culture-specific patterns of gender representation in Russian and Uzbek paremiology.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Data Collection and Corpus

The empirical basis of the study comprises 120 paremiological units: 60 Russian and 60 Uzbek proverbs and sayings. The Russian corpus was drawn from Dahl's

authoritative *Explanatory Dictionary of the Living Great Russian Language* and Mokienko and Nikitina's *Large Dictionary of Russian Proverbs*. The Uzbek corpus was compiled from *O'zbek maqollari* (Uzbek Proverbs, Tashkent, 2007) and Safarov's annotated paremiology collection [6]. The selection criterion was the presence of lexical markers denoting woman or mother: *zhenshchina, baba, mat', zhena, doch'* for Russian; *ayol, xotin, ona, qiz, kelin* for Uzbek. Units containing any of these markers in a semantically central position were included. Each unit was logged with its standard form, contextual variants, and source reference.

2.2 Analytical Framework

The study employs a multi-method comparative linguocultural approach. Four complementary analytical procedures were applied:

(a) **Conceptual analysis** following Stepanov [7] and Wierzbicka [1], for tracing the cultural scripts and core values associated with womanhood and motherhood in each tradition;

(b) **Semantic-pragmatic analysis** following Teliya [8] and Karasik [9], for examining the evaluative and prescriptive functions of individual proverbs;

(c) **Comparative linguocultural method** following Maslova [5] and Vorobyov [10], for systematic cross-linguistic contrast;

(d) **Critical discourse analysis (CDA)** of the gender dimension, following Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power [11] and Cameron and Coates's framework for gender in language [12].

The corpus was first divided into three semantic groups on the basis of dominant thematic and axiological orientation. Each group was then analysed using the above methods. Findings were synthesised into a comparative typological table.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Group 1: The Sacred Image of Mother

The first and most numerous semantic group (comprising approximately 40% of the corpus in both languages) encodes the image of mother as a supreme, irreplaceable, and quasi-divine figure. This group represents the most universal finding of the study.

In Uzbek paremiology, the mother's status is articulated through explicit religious and metaphysical framing. Motherhood is linked to the concept of

divine blessing (*baraka*) and the gateway to paradise:

"Onaning duosi — jannat eshigi" (A mother's prayer is the gate to paradise).

"Ona yo'q joyda — baxt yo'q" (Where there is no mother, there is no happiness).

"Ona — muqaddas" (Mother is sacred).

Iskandarova observes that the Uzbek concept of *ona* (mother) functions as a *cultural ideograph* — a lexeme that encapsulates an entire system of values tied to spiritual protection, unconditional sacrifice, and moral authority [13]. The proverbs of this group position the mother not merely as a biological or social role, but as a cosmological anchor of the family's well-being. The mother's blessing (*duo*) is understood as a direct channel to divine grace, a conceptualisation deeply rooted in Islamic tradition.

Russian paremiology equally venerates the mother, but the framing differs significantly in its emphasis. While Uzbek proverbs stress the mother's sacred authority and spiritual power, Russian proverbs foreground emotional martyrdom and the irreplaceable nature of the maternal bond:

"Materinskoe serdtse v detyakh, a detskoe — v kamne" (A mother's heart is with her children; a child's heart is in stone).

"Net luchshe druzhka, chem rodnaya matushka" (There is no better friend than one's own mother).

"Materinskoe blagoslovenie i v vode ne tonet, i v ogne ne gorit" (A mother's blessing neither drowns in water nor burns in fire).

Mokienko notes that the Russian paremiological image of mother is characterised by a combination of sentimental elevation and tacit reproach directed at ungrateful children [14]. The mother is depicted as a self-sacrificing figure whose love is taken for granted, and the proverbs function as reminders of an irreversible moral debt. This contrasts with the Uzbek framing, where the mother's power is active and transformative rather than passively redemptive.

3.2 Group 2: Woman in Family Hierarchy and Social Roles

The second group (approximately 35% of the corpus) encodes prescriptions governing the behaviour, place, and role of women within the family and broader social structure. This is the group in which the most marked cross-cultural differences emerge.

Uzbek proverbs in this group articulate a clear and unambiguous behavioural code for women, expressed through direct didactic imperatives and positive models:

"Yaxshi xotin — er baxti" (A good wife is a husband's fortune).

"Ayol uyning ziynati" (Woman is the adornment of the home).

"Sabr — ayolning toji" (Patience is a woman's crown).

Safarov argues that in the Uzbek linguistic worldview, the concept of *yaxshi ayol* (good woman) is constructed around three core attributes: obedience (*itoat*), domestic competence, and moral purity [6]. The proverbs consistently encode woman's social value in relational terms — as wife, daughter-in-law, and mother — rather than as an autonomous individual. Bourdieu's concept of *symbolic violence* [11] is particularly applicable here: the subordinate position of woman is naturalised through the aesthetic framing of domestic virtues as *adornment* and *crown*, thereby making the patriarchal order appear not as a constraint but as an honour.

Russian proverbs addressing women's social roles display a greater degree of ambivalence. While they similarly endorse female domesticity, they also encode a more complex and sometimes contradictory understanding of the marital relationship:

"Muzh — golova, zhena — sheya" (Husband is the head, wife is the neck — implying the wife's informal power to direct).

"Babe doroga — ot pechi do poroga" (A woman's road is from the stove to the threshold).

"Zhena ne sapog, s nogi ne skinyosh'" (A wife is not a boot; you can't kick her off).

The first proverb is particularly noteworthy as it encodes a dual message: while affirming formal male authority, it simultaneously acknowledges female agency through the metaphor of the *neck* that turns the head. Permyakov identifies such *reversible proverbs* as a distinctive feature of Russian paremiology, where apparent endorsement of hierarchy conceals a recognition of its negotiability [15]. Cameron and Coates note that such ambivalence in gender proverbs reflects a linguistic culture's unresolved tensions around gender norms rather than their straightforward reproduction [12].

3.3 Group 3: Ambivalent and Restrictive Stereotypes

The third group (approximately 25% of the corpus) comprises proverbs that encode explicitly negative or restrictive stereotypes about women. This group is the most sensitive from a contemporary gender-critical perspective and requires careful analytical framing.

In Russian paremiology, restrictive stereotypes about women are typically mediated through irony or hyperbole, which serves to distance the text from direct misogynistic assertion while still reproducing the underlying gender ideology:

"Dlinny volos — korotky um" (Long hair, short mind).

"Molchi, baba, umnei budesh'" (Stay silent, woman, and you'll seem smarter).

"Kuriza ne ptitsa, baba ne chelovek" (A hen is not a bird, a woman is not a person) — archaic, historically documented.

Bochina's analysis of Russian paremiological style shows that irony and hyperbole function as *distancing devices* that allow a speech community to express ideologically charged content while maintaining plausible deniability through the conventions of humour [16]. The archaic proverb about the hen, while no longer in active use, is historically documented and reveals the depth of the misogynistic layer in the Russian paremiological archive.

Uzbek restrictive proverbs, by contrast, tend to be more direct in their prescriptive framing, relying on the authority of tradition rather than irony:

"Ayol kishi aql so'ramas" (A woman does not ask for reason/advice — she follows).

"Qizning ishi — qo'l-oyog'ini yig'ishtirib o'tirmoq" (A girl's business is to sit with folded hands — to be modest and passive).

Mahmudov notes that such proverbs in Uzbek function as

normative scripts that are internalised as part of the *odob* (code of proper conduct) system rather than experienced as external impositions [17]. This internalisation makes them particularly resistant to critical re-evaluation. It must be noted, however, that contemporary Uzbek society is undergoing significant transformation in gender norms, and many of these proverbs are increasingly viewed critically by younger generations.

3.4 Comparative Summary

Table 1. Comparative typological analysis of gender stereotypes in Russian and Uzbek paremiology

Dimension	Russian Paremiology	Uzbek Paremiology
Mother image	Emotionally sacred; self-sacrificing; moral debt of children	Cosmologically sacred; source of divine blessing (baraka); gateway to paradise
Social role	Domestic sphere with acknowledged informal power; ambivalent authority	Strict domestic code; adornment of home; relational identity only
Behavioural model	Implicitly prescribed through pragmatic irony and proverb ambiguity	Explicitly prescribed through direct didactic imperatives (odob code)
Restrictive stereotypes	Mediated through irony and hyperbole; distance via humour	Direct normative framing; authority of tradition; internalised as conduct norms

Key cultural concept	Emotional bond, martyrdom, pragmatic wisdom	Baraka, itoat (obedience), farz (duty)
Universal features	Sacred mother; irreplaceability; domestic as primary sphere	Sacred mother; irreplaceability; domestic as primary sphere

Source: compiled by the author based on comparative paremiological analysis

4. DISCUSSION

The results of this study invite discussion on three levels: the universal dimension of gender stereotyping in paremiology, the culture-specific mechanisms of its reproduction, and the methodological implications for cross-cultural gender linguistics.

At the universal level, the finding that both Russian and Uzbek paremiology construct the image of mother as a supreme sacred figure aligns with Schipper's cross-cultural survey, which identified the mother as the single most positively evaluated female role across world proverb traditions [4]. This universality suggests that the biological and social role of motherhood is transculturally valorised as a foundational category of human experience, and that language — irrespective of structural typology — encodes this valuation in remarkably similar ways.

However, the *mechanism* through which this valorisation is constructed differs significantly. The Uzbek tradition draws on a Islamic metaphysical framework that positions the mother's blessing as a literal spiritual force, connecting the domestic sphere to the cosmic order. The Russian tradition, shaped by Orthodox Christianity but also by a long history of secular folk culture, constructs the mother's sacredness primarily through emotional and relational categories — sacrifice, grief, unconditional love. This difference in the *cultural script* [1] of motherhood has practical implications: in Uzbek culture, dishonouring one's mother carries metaphysical consequences (loss of *baraka*), while in Russian culture the framing is more psychological (guilt, moral debt).

The culture-specific dimension is most evident in the proverbs governing women's social roles and behaviour. The application of Bourdieu's concept of *symbolic violence* [11] proves productive here: both traditions reproduce patriarchal norms, but the Uzbek tradition does so through explicit didactic authority backed by religious and communal sanction, while the Russian tradition employs a more indirect mechanism of irony and pragmatic framing. The Russian proverb *"muzh — golova, zhena — sheya"* is a paradigmatic example of what Permyakov calls a logically reversible paremiological unit [15]: formally it endorses patriarchy, but its ironic reading subverts it. No equivalent reversible structure was identified in the Uzbek corpus, suggesting a more monological gender discourse in Uzbek paremiology at the level of this text type.

It is important to contextualise these findings carefully. Proverbs are conservative linguistic artefacts that reflect historical social norms, not necessarily contemporary attitudes. Both Russian and Uzbek societies are undergoing rapid transformations in gender relations, and the paremiological archive should be understood as a repository of historical cultural memory rather than a description of present-day social reality. As Mieder cautions, "the existence of a proverb does not prove that its content is accepted as truth by contemporary speakers" [2]. Critical

linguoculturology must therefore maintain a distinction between the normative content encoded in proverbs and the actual beliefs and practices of living speech communities.

5. CONCLUSION

This study has provided a systematic comparative linguocultural analysis of gender stereotypes in Russian and Uzbek paremiology, with a focus on the image of woman and mother. On the basis of a corpus of 120 paremiological units, three semantic groups were identified and analysed: the sacred image of mother, woman within family hierarchy, and ambivalent/restrictive stereotypes.

The key findings can be summarised as follows. Both traditions universally construct motherhood as a sacred and irreplaceable role. However, Uzbek paremiology anchors this sacredness in Islamic metaphysics and the concept of baraka, while Russian paremiology frames it through emotional martyrdom and unconditional love. In the domain of social roles, Uzbek proverbs prescribe women's behaviour through direct didactic imperatives grounded in the odob code, while Russian proverbs employ irony and ambivalent framing that occasionally allows for implicit female agency. Restrictive stereotypes exist in both corpora but are more directly stated in Uzbek paremiology and more ironically distanced in Russian.

These findings have several practical implications. For linguoculturology and gender linguistics, they demonstrate the value of comparative paremiological analysis as a method for revealing hidden value systems. For intercultural communication, they highlight the need for cultural competence in understanding how gender norms are encoded at the level of idiomatic language. For translation studies, they raise important questions about the ethics of translating gender-stereotyping proverbs between languages.

Future research should expand the corpus to include dialectal and regional variants, investigate the diachronic evolution of gender proverbs in both traditions, and complement the textual analysis with sociolinguistic data on how contemporary speakers perceive and use — or consciously reject — these proverbs. A multimodal extension examining the reproduction of paremiological gender stereotypes in digital media would also constitute a valuable contribution to the field.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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