

Semantic Features of Azerbaijani Proverbs Containing the Word “Mountain”

 ¹ Sadagat Hasanova

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Abstract

This study investigates the semantic features of Azerbaijani proverbs containing the word "mountain." The primary objective is to identify the meanings, functions, and cultural values conveyed by the "mountain" metaphor within these proverbs. The research is oriented toward understanding the multi-layered semantic structures of proverbs from both linguistic and cultural perspectives. Within the scope of the study, phraseological units and instances of metaphorical extension were analyzed, revealing both literal and figurative meanings of the term "mountain." The semantic analysis demonstrates that in Azerbaijani proverbs, the concept of "mountain" is associated with notions of stability, strength, patience, and challenge. The contextual usage of various examples is explicated through qualitative semantic and phraseological analysis. This study provides an academic approach to examining the semantic and metaphorical richness of proverbs and highlights the role of natural elements in folk language, allowing for a deeper understanding of the complex linguistic and cultural structures embedded in proverbs.

Keywords: *mountain, proverb, semantics, metaphor, phraseology, Azerbaijani language*

1. Introduction

Proverbs constitute a central component of folk cognition, cultural values, and the semantic system of language. They are concise yet semantically rich expressions that reflect intergenerational experience and the logic of life (Mieder, 2004). In Azerbaijani, numerous proverbs are associated with natural elements such as mountains, rivers, wind, and fire, which play a crucial role in constructing intra-linguistic metaphorical structures (Gasparov, 2016). The primary aim of this study is to analyze the semantic features of Azerbaijani proverbs containing the word "mountain."

Natural elements occupy a prominent position in the proverb traditions of many cultures, serving as vehicles for conveying ethical, social, and philosophical values. Among these elements, the mountain holds a particularly significant place in the Azerbaijani folk imagination, functioning

¹ Hasanova, S. Doctor of Philology, Professor, Nakhchivan State University, Azerbaijan. Email: sedaqethesenova@ndu.edu.az.
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-9996-6229>



as both a geographical reality and a richly layered symbol. The present study examines how this symbolic potential is exploited within the semantic structures of proverbs, drawing on methods from cognitive semantics, phraseology, and cultural linguistics.

2. Methodology

The present study is grounded in a qualitative semantic analysis approach. Proverbs containing the word "mountain" were systematically selected and categorized from primary collections of Azerbaijani proverbs. Semantic analysis methods were employed to distinguish between literal and metaphorical meanings and to identify semantic components such as stability, strength, patience, challenge, and grandeur. In the phraseological analysis, the metaphorical functions of the word "mountain" within the proverbs were examined, and an analytical approach was adopted to investigate semantic domains in social, psychological, and ethical contexts. This methodology enables a comprehensive understanding of the multi-layered semantic and metaphorical structures of Azerbaijani proverbs.

3. Results

The principal findings of the study can be summarized as follows. First, the mountain, as a physical object, is perceived as stable, strong, and elevated; metaphorically, these attributes are applied to human character and life experiences. Second, proverbs containing the word "mountain" encompass semantic domains such as stability and strength, patience and endurance, challenges and obstacles, as well as ethical values and dignity. Third, these proverbs serve both cultural and communicative functions by reflecting social relationships, mutual respect, and life experience. Within Azerbaijani culture, the "mountain" metaphor symbolizes power, protection, and grandeur.

3.1. Semantic Structures and Metaphors

According to semantic analysis, a metaphor creates new layers of meaning by transferring one conceptual domain to another (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The term "mountain" is perceived as a high, strong, and stable physical entity. In proverbs, these physical characteristics are metaphorically associated with human behavior, ethical values, and psychological traits. For example:

Dağ dağa qovuşmaz, insan insana qovuşar — *A mountain does not meet another mountain; a person meets another person*

Dağlar başına qış, igid başına iş — *For a mountain, winter comes; for a brave man, work comes* (Məlikova, 2016, p. 17)

Here, the stability and resilience of the mountain are metaphorically linked to reciprocity in social relations (Vázquez, 2010). A further selection of illustrative proverbs demonstrates the range of metaphorical functions at play:



Dağ çiçəyindən ilan zəhər çəkər, arı bal — Even from the flower of a mountain, snakes draw venom; bees draw honey (Atalar sözü, 2013, p. 113)

Dağ da olsan dağa daldalan — Even if you are a mountain, you lean against another mountain (Atalar sözü, 2013, p. 113)

Dağ dağa arxadı — A mountain relies on another mountain

Dağ nə qədər uca olsa, üstündən yol aşar — No matter how high a mountain is, a path can be made over it (Atalar sözü, 2013, p. 114)

Dağ dağa qovuşmaz, insan insana rast gələr — A mountain does not meet another mountain; people encounter one another (Məlikova, 2016, p. 17)

In these proverbs, the endurance of the mountain is likened to human patience. This type of metaphorical extension is classified in traditional semantic models as "semantic extension" (Traugott & Dasher, 2002). Proverbs containing the word "mountain" penetrate abstract domains such as human behavior, ethical values, and social relations through the metaphorical expansion of the physical object. This semantic extension is further reinforced by phraseological units and reflects the cultural semantic memory of the Azerbaijani language.

3.2. Functions of Semantic Domains

Concrete and Abstract Semantics. In proverbs, "mountain" is initially understood as a geographical object, but subsequently reveals abstract layers of meaning:

Dağdan gələn dağa gedər — What comes from a mountain goes to a mountain

Dağı daş bəzəyər, insanı baş — A mountain is adorned with stones; a human with a head (wisdom) (Atalar sözü, 2013, p. 114)

Dağın vüqarı, əlin qabarı — The mountain's dignity, the hand's prominence (Atalar sözü, 2013, p. 115)

In proverbs, mountains are recognized as symbols of stability and strength. Perceived as immutable, they are sometimes associated with human character (Heine, 1997). In Azerbaijani literary language, mountains have historically symbolized grandeur and dignity:

Dağ dediyin ucalıqdı, ucalıq — A mountain, as you call it, is height itself (Atalar sözü, 2013, p. 114)

In literary discourse, mountains are often employed to signify challenges and obstacles, referring to the difficulties inherent in overcoming them (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002). In Azerbaijani, mountains occupy elevated positions in nature and symbolically reflect human intellect and values.

Social Relations. In proverbs, the mountain serves as a symbol to promote positive social behaviors such as mutual respect and cooperation:



Dağ dağa qovuşmaz, insan insana rast gələr — *A mountain does not meet another mountain; people encounter one another* (Məlikova, 2016, p. 17)

Qaya dağa arxalanar — *A rock relies on a mountain* (Atalar sözü, 2013, p. 276)

These features align with the theoretical semantic function of proverbs (Radden & Kövecses, 1999). Spiritually, the mountain symbolizes power, protection, and grandeur in Azerbaijani culture, reflecting the folk worldview and ethical values.

3.3. Phraseological Context and Semantic Units

In proverbs, the word "mountain" is not only a nominal element but is also enriched with metaphorical meaning within phraseological fragments. Phraseology constitutes the semantic memory of a language and encompasses cultural experience (Makkai, 1972):

Dağ nə qədər uca olsa, üstündən yol aşar — *No matter how high a mountain is, a path can be made over it* (Atalar sözü, 2013, p. 114)

Dağ quşu dağa yaraşar, bağ quşu bağa! — *A mountain bird suits a mountain; a garden bird suits a garden!* (Atalar sözü, 2004, p. 79)

These expressions convey metaphorical cautionary functions. Such units are classified in the semantic system as conceptual metaphors (Kövecses, 2002).

3.4. Semantic Depth and Culture

The relationship between language and culture is reciprocal. The semantic structures of a culture reflect its worldview (Whorf, 1956). The Azerbaijani people's perception of mountains embodies values such as grandeur, protection, and stability, which are reflected in the semantic layers of proverbs and transmitted from generation to generation through language. Research on mountain metaphors in Turkic languages indicates that this metaphor is widely semantically disseminated (Özsoy & Er, 2014). The following examples from Azerbaijani proverbs further illustrate these cultural-semantic dimensions:

Dağı külək yeyər, insanı böhtan — *The wind erodes a mountain; slander harms a person*

Dağlar yalan götürməz — *Mountains do not tolerate lies*

Dağ səfəsiz olmaz, gözəl vəfasız — *A mountain is never barren; beauty is never unfaithful*

Dağ suları dağdan gələr — *Mountain waters flow from the mountain*

Dağ üstə maral gəzər — *A stag roams atop a mountain* (Atalar sözü, 2013, p. 114)

These examples help understand the semantic structure of Azerbaijani proverbs in a broader cultural context, showing that proverbs containing the word "mountain" possess multi-layered semantic structures and convey both concrete and abstract, as well as social and cultural meanings.

4. Discussion



The findings of this study suggest that proverbs containing the word "dağ" (mountain) cannot be evaluated solely as folklore or linguistic elements; they are also structural units of the people's cognitive culture and worldview. The word "dağ" functions both as a concrete geographical object and as a metaphorical symbol, serving various communicative purposes. Semantic analyses indicate that these proverbs are reliable instruments reflecting the people's life experience, cultural values, and social relations. This observation demonstrates the linguistic richness, morphological flexibility, semantic depth, and phraseological expressiveness of the Azerbaijani language.

The "mountain" metaphor in proverbs performs several semantic functions. Lemghari's (2017, p. 58) study emphasizes that the metaphorical structures of these expressions motivate the polysemy of proverbs: "The lexical polysemy of proverbs is motivated by given conceptual metaphors... which give rise to a range of lexical meanings." From this standpoint, the "dağ" metaphor conveys both the meaning of a physical object and socio-psychological significance in proverbs. This approach is corroborated by other research, which highlights that metaphors occupy a central role in the rich semantic structure of proverbs (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2010), facilitating the explanation of the "dağ" metaphor across multiple semantic layers, including concrete, abstract, cultural, and social dimensions.

The word "dağ" in proverbs also expresses cultural values. Research by Issa and Ali (2025, p. 70) notes that proverbs reflect the values and worldview of respective speech communities through conceptual metaphors: "Conceptual metaphors found in proverbs reflect the values and worldview of the respective speech communities." This observation illustrates how the "dağ" metaphor plays a critical role in expressing values such as stability, strength, and endurance in Azerbaijani culture, thereby engaging with cultural memory.

Structural analysis of proverb semantics allows the systematic demonstration of meaning and function, including cultural and psychological aspects. Jgharkava (2024, p. 5) asserts that understanding the meaning of proverbs cannot rely on surface-level interpretation alone; semantic interpretation must consider structure along with context: "To fully understand the content of the proverb, it is necessary to refer to the situation of using the proverb... which allows us to identify structurally changed and semantically reinterpreted proverbs." This source demonstrates that the semantic character of proverbs is context-dependent, and the meaning of the "dağ" (mountain) metaphor may vary according to specific discourse.

5. Conclusion

The study demonstrates that proverbs containing the word "dağ" (mountain) possess both moral and communicative significance in the Azerbaijani language. This research provides deeper insights into the semantic function and cultural context of natural elements in folk language, highlighting the role of language in cultural memory through the analysis of phraseological and metaphorical structures. The mountain, as both a physical and symbolic entity, encodes a



constellation of cultural values—stability, strength, patience, dignity, and social solidarity—that are transmitted across generations through the proverbial tradition.

Several directions emerge from the present findings. Future research could integrate quantitative approaches, enabling frequency analysis and statistical description of the use of the "dağ" metaphor, thereby increasing the empirical contribution of the study. A comparative examination of the "dağ" metaphor in Azerbaijani proverbs alongside analogous metaphors in other Turkic languages and world proverb traditions would illuminate both universal and culture-specific aspects of this metaphorical concept. Furthermore, detailed investigation of the pragmatic and communicative functions of these proverbs within specific contexts could provide deeper insights into their semantic and functional dimensions. The results of the present study could also be applied in Azerbaijani language instruction, folklore research, and cultural studies, thereby extending their practical and educational significance.

Declarations

Conflict of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Approval: The study involved human participants (questionnaire respondents). Participation was voluntary and anonymous. No personally identifiable information was collected.

Data Availability: The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Author Contributions: The author confirms sole responsibility for the conception and design of the study, data collection and analysis, translation of the corpus, and preparation of the manuscript.

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