

Linguistic and Stylistic Features of Proverbs About “Mind”

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ABSTRACT

Proverbs are paremiological units that express a people’s worldview, life experience, and moral values in a concise yet profound manner. Among these, proverbs devoted to the concept of “mind” occupy a special place. These proverbs reflect generalized conclusions about human cognitive activity, thinking patterns, behavioral models, and social positions. Proverbs representing the notion of “mind” hold a central position in the paremiological systems of many languages. By expressing collective wisdom briefly and compactly, they encode cultural attitudes toward intellect, reasoning, consciousness, memory, and judgment. This article examines proverbs on the theme of “mind” in terms of their semantic, lexical, syntactic, stylistic, pragmatic, and cognitive aspects. The study demonstrates that proverbs on the “mind” are not only moral and educational tools but also linguistically rich structures that reveal how societies conceptualize human cognition. The article analyzes the lexical, semantic, syntactic, and stylistic features of proverbs about “mind,” exploring their expressive potential and communicative functions.

Keywords: *proverbs, mind, paremiology, linguistic and stylistic features, metaphor, semantics*

INTRODUCTION

The concept of “intellect” is one of the fundamental categories reflecting human reasoning, judgment, and conscious activity. This concept manifests extensively across various levels of language lexical, semantic, and stylistic. In particular, proverbs express the notion of intellect both directly and metaphorically. The concept of intellect has long

attracted the attention of philosophers, psychologists, and linguists. In language, the most vivid and culturally rich expressions of this concept are observed in proverbs. Proverbs related to “intellect” reflect society’s attitudes toward intelligence, wisdom, folly, prudence, memory, and reasoning abilities. From a linguistic perspective, proverbs addressing the theme of intellect are of special significance, as they link abstract cognitive concepts with concrete linguistic forms. Through metaphor, symbolism, and evaluative language, these proverbs transform invisible mental processes into culturally and materially comprehensible images.

The aim of this study is to analyze the linguistic features of proverbs encompassing the concept of intellect. These proverbs not only reflect the intellectual culture, life philosophy, and moral standards of a community, but also demonstrate the expressive and figurative potential of language. In this context, studying the linguistic and stylistic characteristics of proverbs concerning intellect represents a relevant scientific endeavor. The research delineates the concept of intellect on lexical, semantic, pragmatic, and cognitive levels and applies it systematically. Proverbs related to intellect are classified according to both direct and indirect expressive means, ensuring analytical coherence. The analysis goes beyond mere descriptive categorization, explaining the active role of metaphor and symbolism in shaping cultural cognition and social behavior. Specifically, intellect is presented as a path, a unit of measure, and an instrument, illustrating how individuals’ thinking and prudential behaviors are guided within a cultural framework. Consequently, through metaphor and symbolism, proverbs serve functions of social critique, didactic instruction, and encoding collective wisdom.

Materials and Methods

The materials of the study consist of selected Azerbaijani proverbs that reflect the concept of “intellect.” The chosen examples were reviewed to ensure the representation of semantic, stylistic, and pragmatic diversity. As the study’s material base, the selected Azerbaijani proverbs adequately reflect the concept of intellect in terms of semantic, lexical, syntactic, and stylistic variety. The analysis employed a combination of linguistic and

paremiological research methods. Lexical analysis was applied to identify the core vocabulary expressing the concept of intellect; semantic analysis was used to examine the meaning structures and metaphors within the proverbs; pragmatic and cognitive analysis assessed the communicative functions, didactic purposes, and cognitive effects of the proverbs on the audience; and the comparative method was employed to highlight features specific to universal human culture. This approach proved essential for systematically exploring how proverbs concerning intellect encode collective wisdom, ethical norms, and cognitive frameworks.

The integration of linguistic, paremiological, and comparative methods allows the study to uncover both nationally specific and potentially universal conceptualizations of intellect. This approach demonstrates that proverbs not only convey linguistic forms but also systematically reveal their cultural and cognitive functions.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The analysis yielded the following key findings:

1. Proverbs expressing the concept of “intellect” utilize lexical units representing the common language of the community. These expressions reflect collective knowledge and national characteristics.
2. Semantically, the proverbs generalize human cognition, thought patterns, and behavioral models. Proverbs related to intellect serve both ethical-normative and cognitive functions, carrying the intellectual and cultural codes of society.
3. Syntactically, the examined proverbs are concise, compact, and sometimes feature inversion or parallel structures. These characteristics enhance the rhythm and emphasis of the expression while facilitating the retention of meaning.
4. Metaphor, comparison, repetition, and other stylistic devices strengthen the aesthetic and didactic functions of proverbs. Through these means, collective wisdom is conveyed succinctly and effectively.

5. Proverbs possess pragmatic and cognitive significance. Proverbs on the theme of intellect do not merely provide advice or guidance; they also stimulate the listener's or reader's cognitive activity, thereby fulfilling both moral and pedagogical functions.
6. Azerbaijani proverbs reflect national values and cultural heritage while simultaneously demonstrating universal features. This underscores their importance in both preserving national identity and fulfilling a universal educational function.

Thus, the study demonstrates that proverbs dedicated to the theme of "intellect" function not only as didactic linguistic tools but also as complex structures reflecting the cognitive, behavioral, and cultural codes of the community. The findings of this study can provide a theoretical and methodological foundation for future research in the fields of paremiology, stylistic-linguistic analysis, and cultural studies. The primary focus on linguistic features implies that historical, socio-political, and contextual factors were not comprehensively addressed. This represents a limitation of the research, as the genesis of proverbs, the social environment, and their role in a historical context require broader analysis. Nevertheless, the results obtained through stylistic-linguistic analysis effectively demonstrate how the concept of "intellect" is expressed in paremiological units, revealing their semantic depth, metaphorical and symbolic structures, as well as how they encode social behavior and cultural cognition.

DISCUSSION

Virtually all world languages possess wise sayings or proverbs. Proverbs are not only a people's spiritual heritage and the artistic expression of a culture shaped over centuries, but also a living chronicle of a nation's intellect, reasoning, and wisdom (Ajoke, 2015). Scholars discussing proverbs have noted their linguistic aspects, highlighting that certain issues in the relationship between language and culture are reinforced by the ideas reflected in proverbs and their philosophical significance (Salikhova, 2024). Linguist C. Babayev analyzed 120 proverbs selected from anthologies, literary texts, and contemporary media, demonstrating that proverbs form unique stylistic patterns in linguistic structures through both grammatical and semantic features, which assume different stylistic roles in a cultural

context (Babayev, 2025, p.101). Interestingly, all researchers have regarded proverbs as manifestations of collective wisdom and popular intelligence, valuing them as vivid expressions of national culture, its originality and diversity, and as carriers of secrets of victories and defeats of imperial dynasties and great battles throughout history. Proverbs succinctly and concretely reflect various events in daily life, interpersonal and environmental relationships, personalities and emotions, strengths and weaknesses, thereby demonstrating the remarkable potential of language (Mieder, 2008, p.297). Studies have explored how semantic polysemy in proverbs is motivated through metaphorical structures, analyzing their meaning within the framework of cognitive metaphor theory (Lemghari, 2017). Scientific literature on proverbs also highlights the integration of cognitive linguistics and paremiology, allowing for comparative study of the universal and culturally specific structures of proverbs (Buljan, 2013).

Scholars note that combining cognitive linguistics with paremiological analysis reveals both universal and culture-specific elements. Linguistically, proverbs are primarily studied in terms of semantics, metaphor, syntax, and pragmatic functions (Rakhimova, 2022). Shalunts observes that proverbs exhibit both universal and national features through metaphorical and cognitive elements (Shalunts, 2024). Researchers comparing proverbs and phraseological units based on cultural connotation have noted the distinctive articulation of components in proverbs as an interesting and significant phenomenon (Mohammad, 2014, p.16). It has also been observed that the terms “proverb” and “saying” are used differently and possess distinct meanings within the lexical system of the language (Kilicheva, 2023). Proverbs concerning intellect provide insight into the thought patterns and behaviors of a community. Indeed, “proverbs provide the clearest, most concise, and most appropriate expression of humanities and society’s relationship with the world and nature, as well as of complex cultural meanings” (Promislo, 2012). Proverbs have persisted over time; their frequency in contemporary language varies, yet they reflect the enduring characteristics of mentality (Cotter & Hinkelman, 2019). Proverbs are exemplary in expressing a broad idea in a single phrase and drawing conclusions effectively (Spratt, 2005, p.29). As early as the

1920s, Durbin Rowland demonstrated that proverbs have a universally impactful quality for all people and are common to humanity (Rowland, 1926, p.89). Remarkably, their value does not diminish over time, as proverbs embody command, advice, wisdom, and morality (Yorio, 1980). Proverbs are a highly valuable source for understanding the spiritual life of a nation.

“Proverbs and sayings form a significant part of the linguistic landscape, reflecting the worldview of language users” (Nemirova, 2025). Researchers have emphasized that proverbs warrant special attention from ethnocultural and folkloristic studies, while also constituting a legitimate object of linguistic inquiry, specifically within the field of paremiology (Suprinovich, 2022, p.95). These valuable sayings, covering virtually all aspects of human life, are historical language facts with indeterminate origin and inexhaustible meaning. According to views on the dual structure of proverbs—consisting of a general conclusion and an additional explanatory or advisory component—the second part is left to the audience’s intellect, making it almost impossible to separate a proverb from a maxim (Dal, 2003, p.10). The concept of intellect in proverbs is presented not only as a cognitive ability but also as a criterion for correct behavior, life experience, and wisdom. For instance, proverbs such as “Wisdom resides not in age, but in mind” evaluate intellect as a quality independent of biological age (Melikova, 2016, p.66). In such expressions, intellect functions as a positive value, a distinguishing feature of humans, and a regulating factor in social relations. Intellect is one of the primary regulatory factors of human activity and social life. Although this concept is reflected across all levels of language, in proverbs it assumes a generalized and normative character. Through proverbs, the concept of intellect, as a product of collective wisdom, is presented not merely as an individual attribute but also as a social value. The prominence of the theme of intellect in proverbs indicates the importance that a community assigns to cognitive culture, reasoning, and judgment:

Ağillı kişi qışın qeydinə yayda qalar – A wise man prepares for winter in the summer.
Ağillı olan bir dəfə aldanar – A wise person is deceived only once (Proverb, 2004, p.25).

In proverbs, the concept of intellect serves as one of the fundamental cultural categories shaping a community’s worldview. Proverbs embedded in the collective

consciousness of societies reflect the values, traditions, and perspectives of their speakers (Mammadova, 2024, p.40). Here, intellect is not only knowledge or cognitive ability but also the result of life experience, highlighting acquired rather than inherited qualities. Such proverbs emphasize intellect as a primary factor determining one's position in society, valuing it above material possessions. Intellect is presented as a principal means of understanding the world:

Hər kəs öz aqlını bəyənər – Everyone appreciates their own intellect (Melikova, 2016, p.108).

Ağıl ağıldan üstün olar – Intellect surpasses mere cleverness (Melikova, 2016, p.117).

Puldan əvvəl ağıl lazımdır – Intellect is required before Money (Melikova, 2016, p.123).

Ağılsız qızdansa, kor oğul yaxşıdır – A blind son is better than a foolish daughter (Melikova, 2016, p.123).

Ağılsız uşağın olmağından, uşaqsız olmaq yaxşıdır – It is better to have no child than a foolish one (Melikova, 2016, p.125).

Proverbs on intellect play a significant role in shaping moral norms and behavioral guidelines. They illustrate the negative consequences of thoughtless actions and emphasize the importance of measured, responsible decision-making. Therefore, intellect is presented not only as a cognitive but also as a moral category. Proverbs are considered the highest form of metaphorical mapping (Mieder, 2010). Through proverbs, members of society are encouraged to think correctly and act wisely:

Bilmək- qonaqdır, ağıl- ev sahibi – Knowledge is a guest, intellect is the host (Melikova, 2016, p.66).

In proverbs, intellect serves as a primary means for regulating social relationships. It is presented as a quality that ensures societal acceptance, respect, and the attainment of leadership positions. These paremiological units also perform the function of social critique: foolishness is criticized, and wise behavior is held up as an example.

"Proverbs reflect not only social norms but also the life of an individual in all its complexity and contradictions. Positive traits and moral qualities are highly valued, while negative traits are severely censured" (Ziyodulloev, 2023, p.9).

Başda ağıl olması qızıldan qiymətlidir – Having intellect in the head is more valuable than gold (Melikova, 2016, p.40)

Ağillıya bir işarə bəsdir, ağılsıza başa salmaq lazımdır – A sign is enough for the wise, but the foolish must be explained (Melikova, 2016, p.41).

The theme of intellect in proverbs highlights the expressive and figurative capacities of language. Intellect is often presented metaphorically, enhancing memorability and impact. Wolfgang Mieder, considered the father of paremiology, regards proverbs as microtexts that serve as metaphorical bridges, conveying maximum meaning in minimal context and linking concrete linguistic images to abstract logical conclusions (Mieder, 2004). Communicatively, these proverbs function to advise, warn, evaluate, and facilitate inference. They enhance the persuasiveness of speech through their argumentative role. Proverbs on intellect are found in almost all cultures, demonstrating the universal value of the concept. Nevertheless, each nation's proverbs present intellect according to their cultural worldview and unique traditions. In Azerbaijani proverbs, intellect is often associated with prudence, patience, and life experience, reflecting characteristics specific to the national worldview: *Ağıllının ağılı başında, ağılsızın ağılı dilində olar – The wise have intellect in the head; the foolish, in their tongue (Melikova, 2016, p.40.)*

Proverbs on intellect express the concept both directly (intellect, consciousness, mind) and indirectly through lexical units. The use of “baş” (head) to mean intellect is metonymic and follows the principle of linguistic economy, creating semantic conciseness: *Baş ürəkdən su içər – The head drinks water from the heart (Proverbs, 2013, p.69).*

In such proverbs, the use of semantically related lexical units such as intellect – consciousness – thought – head increases the expressive power and enriches meaning. Most proverbs on intellect carry evaluative semantics. *“Semantically, proverbs employ metaphor, irony, hyperbole, and symbolism, often reflecting deeper conceptual metaphors” (Uralova, 2025).* In these proverbs, wise behavior is presented positively, while foolishness is portrayed negatively:

Ağıl ilə həyə ekiz qardaşdır, birini itirsən, o birini tapa bilməzsən – Intellect and modesty are twin brothers; lose one, and the other cannot be found. Ağıl qaldırır, nəfs yandırır – Intellect elevates and restrains desire. Ağıl saqqalnan olsaydı, keçidən böyük alim olmazdı – If intellect were in the beard, the

goat would not become a great scholar (Proverbs, 2013, p.28).
Ağılsız dostdan ağıllı düşmən yaxşıdır – A wise enemy is better than a foolish friend.
Ağlını eşşək ağlına verərsən, çəkər arpa zəmisin – If you give your mind to a donkey, it will carry it to the barley field (Proverb, 2004, p.26).

These examples show that paremiological units convey normative character, establishing behavior models accepted by society. In proverbs, antonymic pairs such as wise–mad, wise–foolish, wise–stupid, wise–ignorant are widely used, enhancing clarity and precision of expression:

Tapan ağıllı olar, itirən dəli – The finder is wise, the loser mad (Melikova, 2016, p.66).
Ağıllı düşmən ağılsız dostdan yaxşıdır – A wise enemy is better than a foolish friend (Melikova, 2016, p.164).
Ağıllı gördüyünü, ağılsız eşitdiyini söylər – The wise speaks of what he sees; the foolish of what he hears.
Ağıllı gözündən, axmaq sözündən bilinər – The wise is known by his eyes, the fool by his words.
Ağıllı işinə baxar, cahil dişinə – The wise looks to his work, the fool to his teeth.
Ağıllı işləyər, axmaq baxar – The wise acts, the fool observes.
Ağıllı kamal axtarar, cahil mal – The wise seeks perfection, the fool seeks possessions.
Ağıllı qoca arısından danışar, ağılsız qarısından – The wise speaks of the old bee, the foolish of his wife (Proverbs, 2013, p.30).

Stylistic Features and Semantic Fields of Proverbs on Intellect

Proverbs on intellect are generally formed as simple sentences with rich semantic content. Syntactic conciseness ensures their wide dissemination and frequent use in oral discourse. Many proverbs feature parallel syntactic constructions and internal rhythm. *“The linguistic stability of proverbs is based on their syntactic symmetry. The principle of ‘much meaning in few words’ is achieved through poetic devices such as rhyme, alliteration, and parallelism, which distinguish them from ordinary sentences and transform them into speech templates”* (Norrick, 1985). These features create stylistic harmony and enhance aesthetic impact: *Ağıllının əli işlər, ağılsızın dili – The wise work with their hands, the foolish with their tongue.* *Ağıllıya işarə, nadana kötək – A sign is enough for the wise, but the foolish require a blow* (Proverbs, 2013, p.30).

The main stylistic characteristic of proverbs on intellect is figurativeness. Intellect is sometimes represented as light, a path, a unit of measure, or a tool. Such metaphors serve to concretize abstract concepts. Raymond W. Gibbs Jr. and Herbert L. Colston note that proverbs operate according to the principle of cognitive economy, translating complex social situations into simple linguistic images, thereby concretizing abstract notions (Gibbs & Colston, 2012, p.65). In some proverbs, foolishness is criticized through ironic expression. This allows the message to be conveyed indirectly without overt censure, increasing stylistic flexibility:

Ağılsız baş ayağa dinclik verməz – A foolish head brings no rest to the body.
Ağılsız baş əlindən səfil ayaq nələr çəkər – From the hands of a foolish head, the poor feet suffer.
Ağılsız baş yiyəsinə donquz otardar – A foolish head feeds the master like a pig.
Ağılsızın iynəsi gödək, sapı uzun olar – A fool's needle is short, but its thread is long (Proverbs, 2013, p.30).

Thus, proverbs on intellect perform advisory, cautionary, evaluative, and inferential functions in speech. They serve as arguments in discourse, enhancing the persuasiveness of the speaker. Scholars suggest that proverbs have a dual semantic plane: they convey literal meaning (the situation, action, or event described in the sentence) and figurative meaning, derived from literal interpretation, which relates to evaluative and subjective-emotional significance (Yartseva, 2000, p.559). In linguistics, intellect is often conceptualized as a domain related to thinking, understanding, reasoning, memorizing, and decision-making. In paremiology, this domain is typically expressed through direct lexical units (ağıl – intellect, beyin – brain, baş – head, fikir – thought), metaphorical substitutes (ışıq – light, göz – eye, yol – path, alət – tool), and evaluative oppositions (müdrük-ağılsız – wise-foolish, iti-səthi – sharp-shallow). Proverbs thus function as a bridge connecting cognitive abstraction with everyday experience, making the concept of intellect accessible through familiar images and fixed expressions.

Proverbs on intellect can generally be grouped around several semantic fields:

1. Wisdom and intelligence:

Puldan əvvəl ağıl lazımdır – Intellect is required before Money (Melikova, 2016, p.123).

2. Foolishness and ignorance:

Ağıldan yüngül olanın yuxusu ağır olur – Those light in intellect sleep heavily (Melikova, 2016, p.81).

3. Judgment and prudence:

Yüz dəfə ölç, bir dəfə biç – Measure a hundred times, cut once (Melikova, 2016, p.97).

Əvvəl düşün, sonra danış – Think first, then speak (Proverbs, 2013, p.181).

4. Experience and learning:

Ağıllı arvad ara, ağılsız arvad vara qaçar – A wise wife acts with care, a foolish wife rushes into action.

Ağıllı arvad kamala, ağılsız arvad camala güvənər – The wise wife relies on perfection, the foolish wife on appearance.

Ağıllı bildiyin söyləməz, dəli söylədiyini bilməz – The wise do not speak what they know, the mad do not know what they speak (Proverb, 2004, p.25).

These semantic domains demonstrate the evaluative nature of proverbs on intellect. Most of these proverbs carry strong positive or negative evaluations: intelligence and wisdom are praised, while lack of intellect is criticized. This axiological orientation reinforces social norms and behavioral expectations. Many lexical units related to intellect exhibit polysemy. In numerous proverbs, intellect is associated with life experience, emphasizing the idea in folk philosophy that knowledge and wisdom are developed over time: *Ağıl başda, ləl daşda olar – Intellect is in the head, jewels are elsewhere.* *Ağıl başın böyüklüyündə deyil – Intellect is not in the size of the head.* *Ağıl da camaldan azar – Intellect comes from form, too* (Proverbs, 2013, p.28).

In proverbs, intellect is closely linked to cognitive ability, thought culture, behavioral norms, and social position, preserving the historical memory, life experience, and moral value system of a people:

Ağıl saqqalnan olsaydı, keçidən böyük alim olmazdı – If intellect were in the beard, the goat would not become a great scholar. Ağıl sözün gövhəri, söz ağılın cövhəridi – Intellect is the jewel of words, and words are the jewel of intellect (Proverbs, 2013, p.28).

As one of the oldest and most enduring forms of oral folklore, proverbs have persisted over centuries due to their ability to condense complex life experiences into concise and memorable expressions. "Paremiological language units serve both as independent syntactic units and as markers of collective memory. Their linguistic feature lies in their 'frozenness' and their ability to gain flexible meaning depending on the situation" (Grzybek, 2021). Within this rich tradition, the theme of "intellect" occupies a special place. Concepts such as thinking, understanding, prudence, and intelligence form the foundation of human life, and proverbs serve as a primary linguistic medium to evaluate and transmit these notions across generations. Proverbs are regarded as "expressions that reflect the linguistic landscape of a people, embodying the accumulated experiences of generations, and conveying a multi-layered and holistic depiction of the world through language relationships" (Maslova, 2001, p.5).

The importance of intellect in proverbs reflects a sustained interest in rational behavior, moral judgment, and intellectual abilities. By emphasizing intellect, proverbs guide individuals toward socially accepted patterns of thought and behavior. One reason for the significance of the theme of "intellect" is its connection with fundamental human values. In different cultures, intellectual skill is often considered superior to physical strength or material wealth. Proverbs frequently emphasize that wisdom ensures long-term success, whereas the lack of intellect leads to failure. Through such evaluations, proverbs present intellect as a central criterion for assessing human value and social respect. This characteristic elevates proverbs on intellect from simple observations to carriers of cultural ideals: *Ağıllı baş hər şeydən mənfəət götürər – The intelligent mind benefits from everything. Ağıllı bir dəfə aldanar – The wise are deceived only once.* (Atalar sözləri, 2013, p.28)

While some proverbs on intellect show cross-cultural similarities, each language embeds its own cultural values and worldview. Therefore, proverbs attract attention as

concise expressions that convey profound cultural and semantic meanings, highlighting interlingual differences and language-specific cultural features (Ashurova, 2024). The balance between universality and specificity makes these sayings valuable for comparative linguistic research. The wide distribution of proverbs on intellect across languages demonstrates their universal relevance and reflects human interest in reasoning, logical decision-making, and purposeful action. The significance of the theme of intellect in proverbs is reflected in its multifaceted functions. This theme plays a crucial role in preserving cultural values, shaping cognitive models, transmitting moral norms, and regulating social interactions. Proverbs on intellect reflect collective thinking, life philosophy, and linguistic creativity, forming one of the main pillars of the paremiological system. The values they convey critical thinking, wisdom, and moral discernment are relevant across all times and societies.

CONCLUSION

Proverbs on intellect occupy an important place in the Azerbaijani paremiological system. These proverbs are distinguished by their lexical richness, semantic depth, syntactic conciseness, and stylistic expressiveness. They reflect the intellectual experience, moral standards, and life philosophy of the people while expanding the expressive capacity of the language. Studying the linguistic and stylistic features of these proverbs is scientifically valuable for both paremiology and general linguistics. Proverbs related to intellect constitute a linguistically rich and culturally significant group of paremiological units. Primarily composed of simple sentences, these proverbs demonstrate semantic depth, metaphorical structure, lexical creativity, and pragmatic functionality, showing how language encodes collective cognitive experience. The linguistic features of these proverbs not only reflect society's attitude toward intellect and reasoning but also reveal universal mechanisms of human thought. The theme of intellect in proverbs holds a multifaceted role in both language and culture.

Consequently, studying this theme yields valuable insights into linguistic structure, cultural consciousness, and affirms the enduring significance of proverbs as carriers of collective wisdom. Researching proverbs on intellect is therefore important for cognitive linguistics, cultural linguistics, and paremiology.

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