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SEMANTIC FIELDS REPRESENTING THE CONCEPT OF 'TIME' IN ENGLISH FOLK PROVERBS

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Abstract: This article examines the semantic representation of the concept of "Time" in English folk proverbs from a linguistic and cultural perspective. Proverbs constitute an important part of folk wisdom because they preserve and transmit collective experience, values, and attitudes toward life. The analysis demonstrates that the concept of time in English folk proverbs is structured through five major semantic fields: time as economic value, time as opportunity, time as a healing force, time as a moral evaluator, and time as a natural cycle. These semantic fields reveal that time is conceptualized not simply as a chronological measure but as a dynamic cultural phenomenon influencing human behavior, decision-making, responsibility, emotional experience, and worldview. The study employs semantic, conceptual-metaphorical, linguocultural, and classification methods. The findings show that the semantic fields frequently overlap, demonstrating the multidimensional nature of the concept. English proverbs consequently present time as a valuable resource, a limited opportunity, a source of psychological recovery, a measure of responsible behavior, and a natural rhythm of life. The study contributes to the understanding of how temporal experience is encoded in English paremiological units and provides a basis for further comparative research into the representation of the concept of time in English and Karakalpak proverbs.

Keywords: concept of time, semantic field, English folk proverbs, paremiology, conceptual metaphor, linguocultural analysis, temporal experience, cultural cognition.

Introduction and literature review

Language represents one of the principal means through which human beings perceive, conceptualize, and interpret reality. In this process, proverbs occupy a particularly important position because they preserve collective knowledge, cultural values, historical experience, and socially accepted patterns of behavior. Therefore, the study of proverbs provides an opportunity not only to identify linguistic meanings but also to investigate the cultural concepts encoded in a particular language [3].

The concept of "Time" represents one of the most universal yet culturally variable concepts in human cognition. Every individual experiences time, but different linguistic communities may conceptualize and verbalize temporal experience in different ways. Time can be represented as a measurable phenomenon, a valuable resource, an opportunity, a force of change, a healing process, or a natural cycle.

The relationship between language and conceptualization has been extensively examined within cognitive linguistics. Lakoff and Johnson argue that abstract concepts are frequently understood through conceptual metaphors grounded in human experience [1].

Their discussion of temporal metaphors demonstrates that Western cultures frequently conceptualize time in terms of money, resources, and valuable commodities [1]. Such conceptualizations can also be observed in English proverbs, particularly in expressions emphasizing the value and limited nature of time.

Paremiological research is also important for the present study. Mieder considers proverbs significant forms of folk wisdom that reflect collective experience and cultural knowledge [2]. Proverbs are concise linguistic units, but their semantic structures may contain complex social and cultural meanings. Consequently, the analysis of proverbs can reveal culturally established attitudes toward human behavior and social values.

The semantic and cultural interpretation of English proverbs is also facilitated by major paremiological reference works. The Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs, edited by Jennifer Speake, provides extensive information concerning English proverbs, their meanings, usage, and historical development [4].

The present study focuses specifically on the semantic organization of the concept “Time” in English folk proverbs. The analysis is based on the observation that temporal expressions in English proverbs form several interconnected semantic domains rather than representing a single unified meaning. The principal semantic fields identified in the research are time as economic value, time as opportunity, time as a healing force, time as a moral evaluator, and time as a natural cycle [5].

Materials and methods

The research material consists of English folk proverbs representing different aspects of the concept of “Time.” The analyzed examples include such proverbs as “Time is money,” “Lost time is never found again,” “Take care of the minutes and the hours will take care of themselves,” “Strike while the iron is hot,” “Opportunity knocks but once,” “Make hay while the sun shines,” “Time heals all wounds,” “A stitch in time saves nine,” “Better late than never,” “There is a time for everything,” and “Every tide has its ebb.”

The study employs several complementary methods of linguistic analysis. The semantic analysis method is used to identify the central meanings of the proverbs and to classify them according to their dominant semantic characteristics. The conceptual-metaphorical method is applied to determine the metaphorical models through which the abstract concept of time is represented. The linguocultural method is used to reveal cultural attitudes and values encoded in temporal proverbs. Finally, the classification method allows the analyzed units to be organized into five major semantic fields.

Particular attention is given to the fact that semantic fields are not strictly isolated. Some proverbs simultaneously express two or more aspects of temporal experience. Therefore, the analysis considers both the dominant semantic meaning of each proverb and its potential relationships with other semantic fields.

Results

The analysis reveals that the concept of “Time” in English folk proverbs is organized around five principal semantic fields: time as economic value, time as opportunity, time as a healing force, time as a moral evaluator, and time as a natural

cycle [5]. These fields complement one another and collectively demonstrate the multidimensional character of temporal conceptualization.

1. Time as economic value

One of the most prominent semantic fields represents time as an economic value or resource. Proverbs such as “Time is money,” “Lost time is never found again,” and “Take care of the minutes and the hours will take care of themselves” conceptualize time as something precious that must be managed carefully [5].

In these proverbs, wasting time is associated with losing valuable resources. The expression “Time is money” establishes a direct conceptual relationship between temporal and economic value. Time becomes measurable, limited, and irreversible. This interpretation corresponds to Lakoff and Johnson’s observation that Western conceptual systems frequently understand time through economic metaphors [1].

The semantic field consequently reflects cultural attitudes emphasizing productivity, efficiency, discipline, and rational use of available time. An individual who uses time effectively is implicitly represented as responsible and capable of achieving success.

2. Time as opportunity

The second major semantic field conceptualizes time as an opportunity or a limited window for action. Proverbs such as “Strike while the iron is hot,” “Opportunity knocks but once,” and “Make hay while the sun shines” emphasize the importance of acting at the appropriate moment [5].

In these examples, time functions as a decisive factor in human activity. An opportunity may appear only for a limited period, and failure to act at the appropriate moment may result in its disappearance. Consequently, these proverbs encourage awareness, initiative, readiness, and timely decision-making.

The proverb “Make hay while the sun shines” is particularly significant because it combines several semantic dimensions. It represents time as an opportunity while simultaneously connecting human activity with natural conditions. Thus, economic value, opportunity, and natural cyclicity may coexist within a single paremiological unit.

3. Time as a healing force

The third semantic field represents time as a healing and transformative force. Proverbs such as “Time heals all wounds,” “After rain comes fair weather,” and “This too shall pass” express the idea that difficult emotional experiences gradually become less painful over time [5].

Here, time is metaphorically presented as a natural remedy. It provides psychological relief and creates the possibility of emotional recovery. Unlike the economic representation of time, this semantic field does not focus on productivity or efficiency. Instead, it emphasizes patience, endurance, hope, and gradual transformation.

This conceptualization demonstrates that time is experienced not only quantitatively through minutes, hours, and years but also qualitatively through

human emotions and personal experience. Time therefore becomes an active force capable of transforming an individual's emotional condition.

4. Time as a moral evaluator

The fourth semantic field presents time as a measure of responsibility, wisdom, preparedness, and appropriate behavior. The proverb "A stitch in time saves nine" emphasizes the importance of addressing a problem before it becomes more serious, whereas "Better late than never" suggests that delayed action may still possess positive value [5].

In these proverbs, temporal behavior is associated with moral evaluation. Acting at the appropriate time demonstrates responsibility and foresight, while unnecessary delay may result in negative consequences. Time therefore functions as an informal social standard against which human behavior can be evaluated.

This semantic field demonstrates that English folk proverbs do not merely describe temporal relations; they also prescribe behavioral norms. They encourage individuals to be punctual, prepared, responsible, and attentive to the consequences of delay.

5. Time as a natural cycle

The fifth semantic field represents time through natural cycles, rhythms, seasons, and changes. Proverbs such as "There is a time for everything" and "Every tide has its ebb" illustrate the idea that life proceeds through different stages and that change is an inherent feature of temporal existence [5].

In this semantic domain, human beings are represented as participants in natural processes that cannot always be controlled. Time is therefore associated with growth, renewal, transition, maturation, and change.

This interpretation encourages acceptance of the natural order of life. Instead of attempting to control every temporal process, individuals are encouraged to adapt to changing circumstances and recognize that different periods of life have different purposes.

Conclusion and recommendations

The research demonstrates that the concept of "Time" in English folk proverbs represents a complex linguistic and cultural phenomenon. The analysis identifies five principal semantic fields: time as economic value, time as opportunity, time as a healing force, time as a moral evaluator, and time as a natural cycle.

The first semantic field presents time as a scarce and valuable resource and emphasizes its effective use. The second conceptualizes time as a limited opportunity and highlights the importance of timely action. The third represents time as a healing force that provides emotional relief and hope. The fourth associates temporal behavior with responsibility, wisdom, punctuality, and preparedness. The fifth connects time with natural cycles and emphasizes adaptation to change.

The findings indicate that English folk proverbs conceptualize time not merely as chronological duration but as a cultural construct that influences human decisions, behavior, emotional experience, and worldview. The interaction of the five semantic fields demonstrates that English proverbial wisdom balances productivity with

patience, action with acceptance, and practical behavior with philosophical reflection.

For further research, a comparative analysis of the concept of “Time” in English and Karakalpak proverbs is recommended. Such research could identify similarities and differences in the conceptualization of temporal experience across the two linguistic cultures. Further investigation of metaphorical models, phraseological units, grammatical representations, and culturally specific temporal expressions could also contribute to a more comprehensive linguocultural description of the concept.

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