

The Concept “Wolf” in Kazakh Language: Traditional Conceptualisations

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Abstract

The current article attempts to analyze the concept of “wolf” and its conceptualisations by native Kazakh people through the study of Kazakh idioms, set expressions, proverbs, sayings, and quotations with this component. The objective was to conduct the conceptual analysis in order to discern figurative-associative and evaluative meaning of the concept “wolf”. By presenting the cognitive model of this concept in the linguistic consciousness of the Kazakhs, its conceptualisation is demonstrated, the associative nature of the concept “wolf” and its universal, ideological and ethnocultural features are manifested. It was found that the concept “wolf” has various conceptualisations, reflecting the Kazakhs’ naive national-linguistic picture of the world and evokes interpretations with positive and negative connotations as well.

Key words: concept, wolf, conceptualisation, linguistic, cultural, Kazakh, worldview

Introduction

Although the objects and phenomena of the surrounding world are common to all people, each nation perceives these objects and phenomena in accordance with its worldview and character. The national outlook, national self-consciousness depend on the geographical position of each nation, its climate, spiritual culture. All political, social, cultural, spiritual, and historical changes in society are reflected in the language. According to Kaidar (2009), the most reliable and powerful force for the sustainable development of people is not only the language as a means of communication, but also its heritage and cumulative ability which transmits the knowledge about ethnic history, folk wisdom, national traditions and culture, the heritage of ancestors from generation to generation. Therefore, in a civilized society language is considered as one of the priceless human values.

This interrelation of language and culture has been the object of Ethnolinguistics until the term “Cultural Linguistics” was suggested by Sharifian (2017, p. 2) to refer to recently developed discipline that “explores the relationship between language and cultural conceptualisations”.

The current article attempts to analyze the concept “wolf” and its conceptualisations by native Kazakh people through the study of Kazakh idioms, set expressions, proverbs, sayings, and quotations. By presenting the cognitive model of the concept “wolf” in the linguistic consciousness of the Kazakh people, its conceptualisation in the traditional linguistic consciousness is demonstrated, the associative nature of the concept “wolf” and its universal, ideological and ethnocultural features are manifested. The objective is to analyze the national-linguistic picture of the world on the basis of the Kazakhs’ worldview

of this zoonym, to identify issues of development of the zoonym towards the level of the concept.

Linguistic considerations of the concept “Wolf”

Although the concept “wolf” has been well researched in the field of literature (Abdiqalyq et al., 2021; Burnakova & Tsydenova, 2015; Khaybullina et al., 2018; Khazahkovich, 2009; Khusnullina, 2014), it has scarcely been studied linguistically (Gishkaeva et al., 2017; Jetibai et al., 2018). Even the linguistic studies are primarily based on the materials from folklore and belles-lettres and present interesting results contributing to Cultural Linguistics. For instance, the contextual semantic analysis of the zoonym “wolf” in Russian, English, Spanish, and Chechen languages, conducted by Gishkaeva et al. (2017) has revealed “valuable information that allows creating the national and psychological portrait of a linguistic identity”. More specifically, the research enabled to identify comparable and non-equivalent conceptualisations of the lexeme “wolf” with positive and negative connotations used by speakers of all four languages.

Karasik (2001, p. 99) points out that the cultural concepts in linguistic research should be based on the scientific data from Cultural studies, History, Psychology, Ethnography. Similarly, Sharifian (2017) considers that cultural conceptualisations may be instantiated in “cultural art, literature, cultural events, folk songs...” (p. 6). Therefore, in this study, we will use not only dictionaries of idioms and proverbs for analysis but lean upon some literary and ethnographic materials as well.

According to Stepanov (2004, p. 40), the concept is “a micromodel of culture”, it generates it and is generated by it. Being a “clot of culture”, the concept has extra-linguistic, pragmatic, and cognitive information. Thus, the analysis of the concept “wolf” might contribute to deeper understanding of Kazakh culture and worldview.

The conceptual study makes it possible to identify the cultural and national image of the world, preserved in the ethno-lexicon and phraseology of any language. In linguistics, the term “concept” first appeared in the first half of the twentieth century in connection with the study of the problems of representing environmental phenomena through the language system. In scientific works there are various definitions of the concept. Telia (1996, p. 78) defines concept as “a set of information related to a particular object” whilst Kubryakova et al. (1997, p. 28) explains that “the concept is a semantic unit of the image of the universe formed in the human mind”.

Forming the idea that “a concept is a cognitive unit that reflects reality in the mind of a person”, Kaliuly (2009, p. 19) argues that each ethno-cognitive symbol has its place in the national conceptual system, the development of concepts in the mind of an individual varies depending on the level of background knowledge about the world, some other object or phenomenon.

The system of concepts in any language is stored in the form of a set of information about the environment. This set of information creates a linguistic picture of the world. We can say that in the development of Cognitive Linguistics, there are two main directions in the study of conceptual problems.

The first direction is the linguocultural direction. For example, Akhmetzhanova (2016), Mankeeva (2014), Maslova (2004), Vezhbetskaya (1996) consider the concept from the point of view of Cultural Linguistics. The general conclusion of these researchers is the recognition of the concept as a cultural phenomenon, a linguistic form of national culture. For instance, Maslova (2004, p. 40) explains the rationale for considering the concept as a cultural fact:

The concept has a complex structure, since, on the one hand, it includes everything that belongs to the structure of the concept, and on the other hand, the structure of the concept includes what makes it the fact of culture - the original form, or etymology, compressed to the main features of the historical content; contemporary associations; evaluations, connotations.

All culture consists of a set of concepts and conceptual relations. The core of culture should be the notion of "concept", guided by the principle that the language system is necessary to designate the most valuable part of cultural concepts (Maslova, 2007, p. 74).

The second direction is the semantic direction (Stepanov, 2004; Vorkachev, 2003). According to these scientists, the meaning of the concept is formed by the semantics of the linguistic symbol. Representatives of this trend also analyze the difference between words and concepts, notions and terms. For example, the analysis of the semantic structure of a word involves the interpretation of the denotative, signified, connotative and intra-semantic structure (archiseme, differential seme, potential seme) while conceptual analysis involves image- associative signs and cognitive aspects within one definite linguistic symbol.

Based on the definitions and clarifications given by the various directions mentioned above, the characteristics of the concept can be described as follows:

- concept - the main semantic unit that stores relevant information in the linguistic consciousness and processes it;
- concept - an ethno-cultural unit that reflects the national worldview of the particular ethnicity;
- concept reflects the national values of the world;
- concept is marked by language;
- concept reflects the background knowledge and mentality of the individual.

Karasik (2002, p. 127) claims that the concept consists of three parts: conceptual and material parts; descriptive-associative part; evaluation. After that, we structurally classify the concept. That is, the components of the conceptual structure include: conceptual meaning, figurative-associative meaning and evaluative meaning.

The concept "wolf" in the recognition and perception of the environment and the assertion of what is perceived in the linguistic consciousness contributed to the formation of many set expressions through metaphorical, metonymic approaches.

It should be noted that in the conceptual studies important part belongs to metaphors and metonymy. As Temirgazina et al. (2020) pointed out, "in conceptual metonymy A replaced B, while in conceptual metaphor A is understood as B". In view of that, vocabulary, mostly exposed to metaphorization and metonymizing are related to "human body, animals, plants, food, forces" (Kovecses, 2011, cited in Temirgazina et al., 2020).

"Wolf " in mythology

Myth is the oldest genre of folklore. The image of a wolf in mythological and folklore works is considered as an image of a Totem. Every nation attempts to identify their origin through mythological works, legends and fairy tales because this type of work reflects a primitive image of the universe (a naive picture of the world). Each ethnic group is aware of the surrounding world and creates its own linguistic image of the world. Thus, the previous research on the concept "wolf" highlights the importance of considering both positive and negative conceptualisations of the concept wolf (Burnakov & Tsydenova, 2015).

Legends, fairy tales, proverbs, set expressions, phraseological units formed in connection with the concept "wolf" may indicate the perception of the wolf as a cultural phenomenon for the Kazakh people.

In Kazakh language there are three key words denoting a wolf: a) *kaskyr* - a wolf, an ordinary predator; b) *buri* - synonym of wolf, an ordinary predator; c) *Kok Buri* (Blue Wolf) - she-wolf (always written in capital letters), progenitor of all Turks, totemic concept. As a rule, Kazakhs say: *Malga kaskyr shapty* (lit.: The wolf killed the cattle); *Koidy kaskyr zhepti* (lit.: The wolf ate the sheep). But they hardly ever say: *Malga buri shapty*. *Koidy buri zhepti*; (Dzhusupov, 2017). However, the lexeme "buri" can acquire strong stylistic colour when used as a symbol archetype in particular contexts, thus becoming the synonym of *Kok Buri*. It is generally known that blue wolves do not exist in nature, but the concept "Kok Buri" (Blue Wolf) was created to denote that wolf was perceived as a sacred animal in the historical memory of the Turkic peoples. Wolf as a totemic animal is primarily presented in Turkic folklore, along with Kazakh, for example, also in Bashkir mythology (Khusnullina, 2014), Khakas religious and mythological literature (Burnakov & Tsydenova, 2015). It is evident that the concept wolf is rather complicated as it includes both positive and negative characteristics of the animal. The archetype of wolf with positive connotations goes back to *Kok Buri* whereas the archetype with negative connotations reflects its predatory nature and is associated with evil and cruelty of people. Evidently, the archetypes in folklore are based on ethnocultural beliefs about the animal.

In Turkic folklore, including Kazakh, the image of a wolf is painted in three different colors. They are: blue wolf, white wolf, and black wolf. In general, the colors themselves have their own national symbolic meaning for each nation.

The white-black-blue image of a wolf clearly shows our people's unique understanding of the structure of the world. For the Kazakh people, white is always a symbol of goodness, blue means "powerful, holy, sacred", and black is considered a symbolic sign of evil and wickedness. However, the lexeme "black" for Kazakhs also retains the meaning of "sacred" in particular word combinations and set expressions such as "*kara nan*" (lit.: black bread), "*kara su*" (lit.: black water), "*kara shanyrak*" (lit.: black house), "*kara dombra*" (Kazakh national musical instrument).

There are many mythological legends about the origin of the ancient Turkic peoples, including the Kazakh people. According to one such legend, the Huns (ancient Turks) were brutally defeated and killed by a neighboring state in the east. The enemy army did not kill the baby, but left him in the field. According to legend, a wolf (*Kok Buri*) came to a lonely baby in the steppe and fed him. The boy was a descendant of the Huns and Turks. That is why the ancient Turkic peoples recognize the wolf as our ancestor, our totem ancestor (Klyashtornyy, 1992, cited in Dzhusupov, 2017; Smagulov, 2016). The image of a blue wolf also flutters on the battle banner of the Turks (Akatai, 2011, p. 74). Therefore, modern Kazakhs recognize themselves as descendants of that *Kok Buri*. Interestingly, in Tatar mythology, the same properties are prescribed to the white wolf. Wolf in Tatar mythology becomes the savior of nations, the ancestor of the tribe, and the white wolf – the deity (Urmachev, 1994, cited in Khaybullina et al., 2018).

It is noteworthy that in the Kazakh tales, the white wolf is also described as very smart, always leading the hero, sacred animal with the ability to speak. As it was mentioned, in the linguistic consciousness of the Kazakh people, white colour means good intentions, white mood; "blue wolf" indicates the concepts of "pure, holy, strong, powerful", whereas the gray wolf is often violent, constantly depicted as a hungry, stupid, gullible animal that

becomes a victim of deception. This is evidenced by many Kazakh fairy tales, such as "The Mouse and the Wolf", "The Fox and the Wolf".

Given a special place in the worldview memory of the Kazakh people, several lexemes were created on the basis of the concept "wolf": *kaskyr tanday* (wolf sky) (med.) - a defect that occurs during the development of the fetus in the womb due to a discrepancy between the upper jaw and palate. *Kaskyr zhidek* (wolf berry) is a fruit with long, ear-like leaves, resembling the wolf teeth. The name of the wolf berry is based on a metaphorical approach (similarity in appearance), which is based on the fact that the elongated leaves are arranged in a sequence, and the teeth of the wolf are crossed and look like a fishing rod. *Kaskyr zhem* (asparagus) is a plant which grows in the Kazakh steppes and the roots of this plant were eaten by wolves (KATTS, 2006). In oriental medicine, various medicines are made from the roots of this plant. From here we understand that the lexeme "wolf" in the Kazakh language, along with the typical features, also denotes entirely different objects.

In Kazakh mythology, our ancestors, who remained among the wolves, made a living by drinking wolf milk and by playing with his puppies. Perhaps that is why the wolf was so close to the Kazakh people. Although people knew how dangerous the wolves were, they were considered sacred animals. This is indicated by the phraseological unit "иттің иесі болса, бөрінің тәңірі бар" which means: "The dog has an owner, the wolf has a God." In the mythological consciousness, the following features of the image of the "Kok Buri" are determined:

- supports young children;
- comes to the rescue in difficult times;
- recognized as the progenitor of the Turkic peoples;
- becomes the protective clothing of the individual from evil (Kaskabasov, 2014, p. 81).

On the basis of the formed mythological legends, fairy tales, phraseological and paremiological fund of the Kazakh language, the following cognitive aspects of the "wolf" image are revealed:

- Images of wolves and sheep, wolves and hares, wolves and dogs are used to convey the opposite concepts of good and evil;
- the rural life;
- the image of a wolf is considered in society as an unpleasant, negative action;
- In most proverbs, the wolf is perceived as a symbol of pride and arrogance; determines the outlook of the people.

In a word, the wolf is a complex image that reflects the religious beliefs and worldview of the Kazakh people, presented in the form of a totem, an allegorical background or a predator. We see that in the linguistic consciousness of ancient Kazakhs there was a stereotype that wolf is "a predatory, strong, tenacious, blue animal living in freedom."

A stereotype is a system of linguistic units formed about a thing, phenomenon, quality, action adopted by this society, including the worldview of this society. Such a system of language units reflects the national identity of the stereotype. Stereotypes always have a national character; the phenomenon of stereotypes is formed within the concept and takes a strong place in the linguistic consciousness of the representatives of this society.

According to Kaliev & Bolganbaev (2010, p. 210), in the mythological consciousness of the ancient Kazakhs the lexeme "wolf" was considered as taboo, they believed that the wolf might come and kill their livestock, so out of fear to name it directly, indirect names appeared such as *serekkulak* (lit.: long eared), *ulyma* (lit. howler). Such phrases as

heavenly dogs, the dogs of God were also used as euphemisms for the lexeme “wolf” (Jetibai et al., 2018).

The connotative or pragmatic meaning is a set of semantic components that express the subjective attitude of the speaker or linguistic community to any object, phenomenon, thing (Kaliuly, 2019, p. 87). The connotative meaning is secondary to the denotative meaning. This value has an emotional, evaluative nature. In the minds of individuals or people, a single word or phrase may have a certain associative connection, for example, a cruel person is a dog, a cunning person is a fox, a clumsy person is a bear (Kaliev & Bolganbaev, 2010, p. 75).

The linguistic material for conceptual analysis below was found in the explanatory and phraseological dictionaries (KATTS, 2006) and literary works of various writers. The translation and interpretation of the poems from Kazakh was done by the authors of the current article.

Method

To determine the ethno-cultural features of the concept “wolf”, the method of semantic conceptual analysis proposed by Popova and Sternin (2007, pp. 16-19) was used.

The method of semantic-conceptual analysis enables to transform the lexical meaning of a word into a conceptual meaning. It is known that the semantic structure of a word consists of a set of semantics that are in a hierarchical relationship. The seme is a verbally labeled substance, a semantic micro-component representing the specific features of a phenomenon.

The notion, which has become a concept for a particular ethnicity, is determined by lexical-semantic, figurative-associative and connotative meaning (Karasik, 2001, pp. 3-16). We take this as the set of information on which the conceptual analysis is based. This set of information (concept) is presented both in separate words and in phrases, through a system of phraseology and paremiology, and forms a national-linguistic picture of the world.

Findings

Sacred, Totemic animal. Sigmund Freud, in his work Totem and Discovery, writes about the totem: “Many tribes use the image of animals as a coat of arms and decorate their weapons with it; men draw the image of the totem on their body or tattoo its image on the skin” (Freud, 1998, p. 122). Given that the Blue Wolf was the totem of the Turks, this is indicated by the following lines of Suyunbay Aronovich:

*My motto is the wolf,
The wolf is my flag.
If the wolf raises the flag
Where can I go?*

(The wolf is my flag).

Strong, courageous, tireless, disobedient. In the traditional linguistic consciousness of Kazakhs, the wolf is a symbol of agility and vigilance, strength and freedom. The law of the wolf is: to give one's life for love and freedom.

Such beliefs caused the creation of the following phrases, idioms and set expressions in Kazakh: *Kaskyr zhurek* (lit. with a wolf heart). A man with a wolf heart is not afraid of anything, persistent, tireless, noble. The Kazakh proverb “*kaskyr baylaganga konbes, shoshka aydaganga konbes*” (lit. the wolf will not obey to mating, the pig will not obey to driving) displays the independent nature of the wolves. The independence and love of

freedom was close to Kazakhs, accustomed to the Nomadic lifestyle. This is confirmed by the following verses:

*The color of the child is yellow, the eyes are black,
In the early times they said:
Wolf hearted, made of black stone
This is Bahadur himself*

(Iztileuov T. Rustem-Dastan).

Brave and fearless. The proverb "better to be the last among wolves than first among cowards" is not just a saying. The names Kaskyr, Buri have been used by Kazakhs to praise only brave men. For example,

Mature, wise. Kaskyr as an attribute – Kaskyr adam (lit. wolf man) used to describe a smart person, sophisticated and mature in some sphere of activity, well - skilled. (<https://sozdikqor.kz>)

Devoted to its family. The Kazakh people knew that the wolf chooses his mate only once in his life. That is why people believe that the wolf will never betray his family, that he is faithful to his family. Although the wolf is a predator, his instincts and inner world resembles humans. In addition, wolves living in packs form small groups. In this regard, the stable phrase that has developed in Kazakh language *uyalas buridey* (lit.: like a wolf family) refers to Kazakh families who live together with their dynasties, which means that they are united. For example: Twenty auls, the entire community of Kunanbay, were like a wolf's family (Auezov M. "Way of Abai").

Reliable friend. The Kazakh proverb "*kaskyr da kastyk kylmas zholdasyna*" means "even a wolf will not hurt his friend", thus displaying one of the positive traits of the animals' nature. This proverb is applied to people, who betray someone close to make him ashamed.

Noble animal. The nobleness of wolf is confirmed by the saying "*kaskyr apanynda kaiyrymdy*" (lit.: the wolf is kind in his lair). It means the wolf will not attack his prey in his lair. Also, it is believed that the wolf will never hunt for the cattle of surrounding villages.

Revengeful animal. The nature of the wolf is not only noble, but also vindictive and revengeful. In the story "Kokserek" (M. Ayezov), based on the Kazakh worldview, Kurmash, who adopted a wolf cub, dies from a wolf attack. Taking the three basic concepts of "wolf - environment - child" in a dialectical unity, the author shows the predominance of the influence of the environment on the growth and formation of a wolf among people. The violence and persecution that Kokserek saw from the side of big dogs and fellow villagers were so great that Kurmash's care and kindness alone could not melt the ice in his heart. The main idea of the book is that people can never resist the laws of nature. Therefore, in the worldview of Kazakh people, wolves will never replace dogs:

boltirik boriligin istemey koimaidy (lit.: wolves will behave like wolves);

buri balasyn asyraganmen it bolmas (lit.: wolves will never become dogs, even if they are adopted and treated like them);

kaskyrdy kansha asyrap baksan da ormanga karap ulidy (lit.: no matter how much you feed a wolf, it will howl and look at the forest).

The author proves that wolves are not suitable for adoption, not suitable for human domination.

Cunning and double-faced. The idiom *koi terisin zhamilygan* "wolf in sheep's clothing" is used to describe the hypocrisy of a person, to evaluate the actions of a person who wants to carry out some kind of malicious intent.

Cruel, bloodthirsty, greedy. The natural qualities of the animal contributed to its formation as a symbol of cruelty. When forming a concept, supporting metaphors attach the image of one part of the environment to another fragment. This is the basis for conceptualisation. Symbolic and stereotypical usage is often used to express concepts through metaphors. For example, the Kazakh people used to say “*өз бөлтірігін өзі жеген*” lit. “to eat their own cub” to describe the cruelty and bloodthirstiness of a wolf, associating it with the actions of a man who killed his cub.

The following expressions are formed in Kazakh language system to refer to people, which mark the cruelty of the wolf, its greed: *қасқыр талаған қойдай* (like a sheep torn by wolf); *қасқыр қамаған қойдай* (like a sheep shut by the wolf); *қасқырша қарау* (to look as a wolf); *қырып-жою, қасқырдай басып қалу* (to destroy like a wolf) *қасқырдай мейірімі жоқ* (no mercy like a wolf); to refer to its particular bloody-mindedness: *қасқыр тойғанына емес, қырғанына мәз* (the wolf is happy to destroy); *қасқырдың аузы жесе де қан, жемесе де қан* (the wolf’s mouth is always in blood).

Hungry. The Kazakh wolf is also described as a wolf that roams the country in search of food, ready to attack the village and attack both animals and people.

Based on this, Kazakhs apply such negative qualities to the humans to compare and create image of a hungry-eyed person: *аш бөрідей* (like a hungry wolf), *қасқырдай анталау* (to rush for food, to wolf out), *қасқырша бас салу, қасқырша талау, аш қасқырдай жалақтау* (to tear to pieces like a wolf).

A fool, a victim of deception. If one of the wolves falls into a trap, then the other may also fall into the same trap looking for his companion in the same area.

Thus, for the Kazakh people, the wolf is used not only as a predator, but also as a zoo metaphor to denote the positive and negative qualities of the human body.

Proud, arrogant. For example: *бөрі кеуде* (lit. wolf chest) is applied to a strong, broad-shouldered man. However, it has some additional connotation related to the pride and arrogance.

Overall, the conceptual analysis demonstrates that these phrases are associated with the external properties of a wolf (blue wolf, gray wolf, white, black); with internal qualities (heroism, courage, cruelty, perseverance, strength); abstract concepts (honesty, revenge, loneliness); ethnocultural features (Turks, worship, freedom); with mythological characters (blue wolf).

Limitations of the research

As with the major studies, this research has a limitation that could be addressed in future research. Specifically, a larger quantity of literary samples could be used for conceptual analysis.

Conclusion

Words with a connotative meaning are fragments of the linguistic image of the universe, linguistic manifestations of the traditional system of thinking of the people. The connotative meaning is based on metaphorical, metonymic approaches, and not on the denotative meaning. All these are the remnants of linguistic and mental representations that the speakers of a modern language inherit from father to son. The connotative meaning of individual words in one language may or may not correspond to the connotative meaning of another language, and sometimes it may be deeper in meaning.

The connotative meaning of the word reflects the internal psychological state of a person, positive and negative qualities. For set expressions, figurativeness is

characteristic, since here the change in meaning is carried out in metaphorical, metonymic ways. Connotative meaning consists of emotion and evaluation.

When expressing a certain concept, information is stored in memory in the form in which it is perceived in the mind of a person, and is expressed in the language of the people. Looking at any word, a person relies on his knowledge, culture and spiritual knowledge in order to convey the association or idea formed in his mind about this world through language. This is reflected in the lexical, phraseological, and paremiological structures of the language.

The conceptual analysis of the concept “wolf” conducted in this article enabled to identify the cultural and national image of the world, preserved in the ethno-lexicon and phraseology of Kazakh language and to discern figurative-associative and connotative meaning of the concept “wolf”.

The traditional conceptualisations of the lexeme “wolf” by native Kazakh people were revealed through the analysis of Kazakh idioms, set expressions, proverbs, sayings, and quotations with this component. By presenting the cognitive model of this concept in the linguistic consciousness of the Kazakhs, its conceptualisation is demonstrated, the associative nature of the concept “wolf” and its universal, ideological, and ethnocultural features are manifested. It was found that the concept “wolf” has various conceptualisations, reflecting the Kazakhs’ naive national-linguistic picture of the world and evokes interpretations with positive and negative connotations as well.

Therefore, the lexeme “wolf” in the linguistic consciousness of the Kazakh people can be recognized as a concept that has a national and cultural background. Due to the presence of both evaluative and national-cultural features, this concept is considered as belonging to linguocultural phenomena.

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