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GRADONYMY IN PHRASEOLOGICAL EXPRESSIONS WITHIN PROVERBS: A LINGUOPRAGMATIC AND SEMANTIC ANALYSIS

Dilafruz Ashurovna To‘xtayeva
Lecturer at Bukhara State University,
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Philological Sciences
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Abstract: This article investigates the semantic and linguopragmatic properties of gradonymy in phraseological expressions found in Uzbek folk proverbs. Gradonymy is interpreted as a semantic phenomenon whereby linguistic units enter into hierarchical relationships according to the degree of a particular quality, state, action, or evaluation. The material comprises the proverbs “Onangni kaftingda tutsang, singlingni boshingda tut” (“If you hold your mother in the palm of your hand, hold your sister above your head”), “So‘raganning bir beti qora, bermaganning ikki beti qora” (“The one who asks bears shame on one cheek; the one who refuses to give bears it on both”), “Elga qo‘shilgan moy yutar, eldan ayrilgan qon yutar” (“One who joins the community enjoys abundance; one who separates from it suffers”), “Pora berganning bir beti qora, pora olganning ikki beti qora” (“The bribe-giver bears shame on one cheek; the bribe-taker on both”), “Aytishsang so‘z chiqadi, turtishsang ko‘z chiqadi” (“An exchange of words leads to an argument; shoving can lead to injury”), and “Arvoh urganning ishi o‘nglanmas, Pir urganning kosasi oqarmas” (“One cursed by ancestral spirits will not prosper; one cursed by a spiritual master will know no abundance”). Quantitative, intensive, figurative, cause-and-effect, and cultural-associative manifestations of gradation are identified. The findings show that gradonymic relationships in proverbs express the people’s moral and aesthetic views, evaluations of social relationships, and national-cultural worldview in a concise and figurative manner.

Keywords: gradonymy, gradation, proverb, idiomatic expression, phraseological unit, semantics, linguopragmatics, paremiology, figurativeness, intensity.

At the lexical and phraseological levels of language, semantic relationships between units take various forms. Alongside synonymy, antonymy, homonymy, and polysemy, gradonymy is an important phenomenon within the semantic system of language. It refers to differences in the degree of a quality or concept among units belonging to a shared semantic field.

In Uzbek linguistics, gradonymy has been studied primarily in relation to the gradation of meaning among lexical units. However, gradation is not confined to individual lexemes: it also occurs in the semantic structure of fixed expressions, phraseological units, and folk proverbs.

A proverb is a concise, semantically multilayered expression shaped by a people’s long historical experience, observations, and social relationships. Its expressive power depends considerably on devices such as imagery, parallelism, antonymy, metaphorization, and gradation.

Accordingly, investigating gradonymy in the idiomatic expressions embedded in proverbs is also important for identifying the Uzbek people’s national-cultural worldview and criteria of evaluation.

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In this article, idiomatic expressions occurring in proverbs were divided into their constituent elements, and the relationship between their lexical meanings and their contextual meanings within the proverbs was examined. An attempt was also made to determine the semantic foundations on which gradation arises.

The analysis considers gradonymy according to three principal criteria:

1. Semantic intensity — an increase or decrease in the strength of a quality;

2. Quantitative gradation — an intensification of evaluation through an increase in a number or quantity;

3. Figurative-cultural gradation — an intensification of meaning grounded in culturally specific conceptions and associations.

1. “Onangni kaftingda tutsang, singlingni boshingda tut” (“If you hold your mother in the palm of your hand, hold your sister above your head”) [8, p. 274]. The expressions “kaftingda tutmoq” (“to hold in the palm of one’s hand”) and “boshingda tutmoq” (“to hold above one’s head”) convey the semantic components of respect, esteem, and cherishing.

The gradation of meaning between them can be represented as follows:

hold above one’s head

hold in the palm of one’s hand →

This yields an ascending scale of respect.

“Kaftda tutmoq” denotes valuing and protecting someone, whereas “boshda tutmoq” conveys a particularly high degree of respect, affection, and veneration in Uzbek. Thus, gradonymy in this proverb is based on an increase in the intensity of esteem.

This gradation also serves the pragmatic purpose of the proverb: the need to appreciate one’s parents and other close relatives is conveyed to the listener not through a simple command, but through increasingly emphatic images.

2. “So‘raganning bir beti qora, bermaganning ikki beti qora” (“The one who asks bears shame on one cheek; the one who refuses to give bears it on both”) [8, p. 350]. The idiom “beti qora” (“having a blackened face,” figuratively “being disgraced”) conveys negative evaluations such as shame, guilt, and embarrassment:

both cheeks disgraced

one cheek disgraced →

The use of the numerals “one” and “two” does not merely signal a quantitative difference; rather, it indicates a heightened degree of evaluation.

The conditional semantic model is:

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strongly negative evaluation

negative evaluation →

This represents an ascending evaluative scale.

Thus, the numerical component functions as a gradonymic marker in the proverb.

3. “Elga qo‘shilgan moy yutar, eldan ayrilgan qon yutar” (“One who joins the community enjoys abundance; one who separates from it suffers”) [8, p. 400]. The expressions “moy yutmoq” (literally, “to swallow fat/oil”) and “qon yutmoq” (literally, “to swallow blood”) are employed as contrasting images. “Moy” carries comparatively positive semantic associations, while “qon” evokes hardship, suffering, and adverse consequences.

Consequently, the following relationship is observed:

swallow blood

swallow fat/oil →

An increase in negativity and hardship is observed along this scale.

Here, gradonymy arises not from lexical synonymy but from contextual and figurative semantics.

The pragmatic meaning of the proverb is intended to highlight the differing consequences of living in unity with the community and separating oneself from it.

4. “Pora berganning bir beti qora, pora olganning ikki beti qora” (“The bribe-giver bears shame on one cheek; the bribe-taker on both”) [8, p. 443]. The central component of this proverb is the phraseological expression “beti qora” (“disgraced”).

Its use in the following forms:

both cheeks disgraced

one cheek disgraced →

produces quantitative gradation.

Here, giving and accepting a bribe are assigned different degrees of negative evaluation. The numeral “two” expresses an intensification of this negative judgement.

Consequently, a numerical component that appears grammatically simple becomes a device that intensifies the evaluative and intensive semantic component of the phraseological unit.

5. “Aytishsang so‘z chiqadi, turtishsang ko‘z chiqadi” (“An exchange of words leads to an argument; shoving can lead to injury”) [8, p. 8]. In this proverb, gradation unfolds along two dimensions:

physical pushing

verbal argument →

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and:

eye

word →

“Aytish” refers to verbal interaction or dispute, whereas “turtish” denotes a physical action. Accordingly, their consequences also intensify:

eye injury

verbal altercation →

Gradonymy is therefore manifested not only in the units themselves but also in the relationship between action and consequence.

This model may be expressed as follows:

serious consequence

physical conflict →

verbal conflict →

Thus, the proverb communicates through concise imagery that a minor disagreement may escalate into a more serious conflict.

6. “Arvoh urganning ishi o‘nglanmas, Pir urganning kosasi oqarmas” (“One cursed by ancestral spirits will not prosper; one cursed by a spiritual master will know no abundance”) [8, p. 11]. National-cultural context is crucial to interpreting this proverb. The words “arvoh” (“ancestral spirit”) and “pir” (“spiritual master”) are associated with religious and mythological beliefs in folk culture.

In this proverb, the relationship between:

being cursed by a pir (spiritual master)

being cursed by ancestral spirits →

illustrates a figurative intensification of adverse consequences.

The first clause evokes “one’s affairs not improving,” while the second employs the image of “one’s bowl never turning white.” Here, the “bowl” may symbolize material prosperity and blessing. As a result, the second clause makes it possible to imagine a more severe negative outcome. This phenomenon may be described as cultural-associative gradonymy.

The proverbs analyzed demonstrate that gradonymy arises not through a single mechanism but through a variety of semantic devices.

Proverb	Gradonymic unit	Type of gradation	Semantic direction
“Onangni kaftingda tutsang, singlingni	hold in the palm →	Intensive	Increasing respect

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boshingda tut" (Hold your mother in your palm; your sister above your head)	hold above the head		
"So'raganning bir beti qora, bermaganning ikki beti qora" (One cheek shamed vs. both cheeks shamed)	one → two	Quantitative	Increasing negative evaluation
"Elga qo'shilgan moy yutar, eldan ayrilgan qon yutar" (Community brings abundance; separation brings suffering)	fat/oil → blood	Figurative	Increasing hardship
"Pora berganning bir beti qora, pora olganning ikki beti qora" (Bribe-giver vs. bribe-taker)	one → two	Quantitative	Increasing negative evaluation
"Aytishsang so'z chiqadi, turtishsang ko'z chiqadi" (Words vs. physical injury)	argue → push; word → eye	Action–consequence	Escalating conflict
"Arvoh urganning ishi o'nglanmas, Pir urganning kosasi oqarmas" (Curses by ancestral spirits vs. a spiritual master)	ancestral spirit → pir	Cultural-associative	Increasingly adverse consequences

As the table shows, gradonymy manifests itself at several levels within proverbs. In some instances, gradation is expressed directly through numbers, whereas in others it arises from the figurative meanings of phraseological units.

The "one → two" model is particularly noteworthy. In this model, the literal quantitative meaning of numbers is contextually transferred to the domain of qualitative degree. In other words, "two" does not simply refer to a larger quantity than "one"; it signifies a stronger degree of negative evaluation.

In phraseological units, gradation frequently emerges through the figurative meanings of their components. For example, although "kaftda tutmoq" ("to hold in one's palm") and "boshda tutmoq"

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("to hold above one's head") both refer literally to physical space, within the proverb they signify different degrees of appreciation for a person.

Gradonymy also strengthens the pragmatic properties of proverbs. One of the main functions of a proverb is to convey a particular life experience or moral conclusion to the listener. Gradation enables that conclusion to be communicated more forcefully than would be possible through a straightforward statement.

Thus, in proverbs, gradonymy:

• increases semantic intensity;

• reinforces imagery;

• conveys evaluative attitudes more precisely;

• makes cause-and-effect relationships apparent;

• reflects the people's moral and aesthetic outlook;

• enhances the communicative and pragmatic impact of the proverb.

Gradonymy within the phraseological expressions of Uzbek folk proverbs is an important device that demonstrates the semantic potential of language. The material examined shows that gradonymy appears in proverbs not only through synonymous or lexical units, but also through phraseological expressions, numerical components, relationships between actions and consequences, and national-cultural images.

In "Onangni kaftingda tutsang, singlingni boshingda tut", respect and esteem become more intense; in "So'raganning bir beti qora, bermaganning ikki beti qora" and "Pora berganning bir beti qora, pora olganning ikki beti qora", quantitative gradation occurs; in "Elga qo'shilgan moy yutar, eldan ayrilgan qon yutar", figurative-semantic gradation is observed; in "Aytishsang so'z chiqadi, turtishsang ko'z chiqadi", there is an escalation of action and consequence; and in "Arvoh urganning ishi o'nglanmas, Pir urganning kosasi oqarmas", gradation is cultural and associative.

Thus, gradonymic relations within proverbs constitute one of the ways in which a people evaluate reality, distinguish social phenomena, and express moral conclusions with added emphasis. Gradonymy functions as a semantic mechanism linking the conceptual structure of a proverb to its artistic and poetic form.

Future research could advance this field by examining a wider range of Uzbek proverbs and systematically classifying gradonymic relationships according to positive and negative evaluation, emotional intensity, quantitative gradation, phraseological gradation, and national-cultural gradation.

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