

Conceptual metaphors in proverbs: Conduits of cultural values and beliefs

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Abstract - This study explores the similarities and differences in conceptual metaphors found in the proverbs of two indigenous languages, Balti and Burushaski, spoken in Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan. Focusing on metaphors related to animals, birds, fruits, and vegetables, the study analyzes 20 proverbs from each language. Data were collected from native speakers familiar with the proverbs and from two published books on the proverbs of Balti and Burushaski. The research employs the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) to analyze how these metaphors reflect the values and worldview of the respective speech communities. Through qualitative comparative analysis, the study reveals insights into the cultural and linguistic differences and similarities between the two communities. The findings highlight how metaphors encapsulate beliefs and attitudes towards various aspects of life, providing a deeper understanding of the cultural perspectives of both groups. This research contributes to the fields of cross-cultural linguistics and paremiology, offering valuable insights into the preservation and promotion of heritage languages and cultures. By exploring these indigenous proverbs, the study emphasizes the significance of understanding cultural diversity and the importance of safeguarding indigenous languages.

Keywords: folk literature; cross-cultural linguistics; paremiology; conceptual metaphors; worldview; Burushaski

1. Introduction

Proverbs are “figurative fixed sentences, which usually communicate morals, cultural beliefs, and communal wisdom” (Ferrari & Siqueira, 2023, p. 58). Since they are figurative in nature, they employ metaphors which can be divided into primary metaphors projecting universal meanings and complex metaphors which are culture-bound carrying distinct culture-specific meanings (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; 1999). While commenting on primary metaphors, Winter and Matlock (2017) state that such metaphors “are thought to arise from our most basic physical and perceptual experiences in the world” (p. 99). Unlike primary metaphors, complex or cultural metaphors “involve a form of conceptualisation across different domains known as the source domain and the target domain” (Sharifian, 2107, p. 18). If we take example of ‘sunrise’ as a primary



metaphor, it has a universal meaning in terms of hope as it marks a new beginning every day, while 'plum blossom' the national flower of China can be considered an example of a complex metaphor as it symbolizes resilience and perseverance in the Chinese culture. Conceptual metaphors also called 'cultural metaphors', being culturally bound, embody the core values and beliefs of a community.

According to Ali (2020):

Since the symbolic or idiomatic meaning embedded in proverbs through the use of specific imagery is culture-specific, understanding the meaning of proverbs used in any linguistic community, opaque as they are, requires a certain degree of cultural competence. The images and metaphors employed in proverbs of different languages may be the same but what they symbolize may vary from one language to the other which is indicative of the cultural traits specific to each language (p. 68).

There are quite a few examples of the use of similar metaphors with striking contrast in their meanings in different languages that can be provided here to support the claim made by Ali (2020). One example is that of the symbolic meaning of 'white flowers' which in the western culture stand for innocence and purity, while in Chinese culture they indicate death and mourning. Another example is that of 'donkey' which is used as a symbol of stupidity in Pakistani culture, but in Chinese culture the same animal metaphor stands for hard work. Yet another example that can be cited here is that of a 'rat' which is considered a sacred animal by the Hindus because of its association with one of their deities, Lord Ganesh. Like Hindus, Chinese also attach positive connotations to rats as a 'rat' represents wealth and wisdom in Chinese culture. However, in many other cultures of the world, rat symbolizes filth and disease.

If similar metaphors project contrastive meanings in different cultures, similar meaning may be conveyed through different conceptual or cultural metaphors found in the proverbs and idiomatic expressions used in different languages, which reflect the culture-specificity of such metaphors. In other words, apparently unrelated cross-cultural metaphors can be employed to project or manifest similar realities. Let us take example of a variety of conceptual metaphors used to refer to 'death' in different cultures. Tay (2019, p. 85) aptly states: "Languages X and Y might both describe death as a journey but specific details (e.g. the ways in which this journey is undertaken) might well originate from different cultural understandings."

In an attempt to explain conceptual metaphors, Garelo (2024) refers to three types of conceptual metaphors: structural, orientational, and physical. Structural metaphors, "organize a conceptual domain in terms of another"; orientational metaphors, "organize a conceptual domain in relation to orientation" while physical metaphors "organize a conceptual domain based on physical and bodily coordinates" (Garelo, 2024, p. 77).

However, while explaining metaphorical meaning under the extended conceptual metaphor theory (ECMT), Kövecses (2020a) discusses three types of meaning, which contribute in the construction of metaphorical meaning. These three types include, meaningfulness which occurs at image-schema level, decontextualized meaning, which occurs at the domain and frame levels, and deal with conventional meanings, and contextualized meaning, which occurs at individual level or mental-space level in the schematicity hierarchy.

While discussing metaphorical usage, Kövecses (2021) mentions the influence of contextual factors which he believes can be grouped into four categories: "situational context, discourse context, conceptual-cognitive context, and bodily context" (p. 199). Based on these four specific categories, two general types of context can be identified, local and global.

The local context involves the specific knowledge conceptualizers have about some aspect of the immediate communicative situation. Thus, the local context implies specific knowledge that attaches to the conceptualizers in a specific communicative situation. By contrast, the global context consists of the conceptualizers' general knowledge concerning their community's environment (physical, social, cultural). It involves knowledge shared by an entire community of conceptualizers (Kövecses, 2021, p. 200).



Proverbs of different languages, as part of folklore, have been studied from a multitude of perspectives in the last few decades because of a growing interest in cultural linguistics ---- a sub-field of linguistics. There is a wealth of research literature available on paremiology (the study of proverbs) reflecting the core values and beliefs of their speakers. One scholar whose name cannot be overlooked while reviewing the existing body of research on paremiology is Mieder (2005; 2008; 2012; 2014; 2018). A comprehensive picture of paremiology as a field of inquiry is provided in a state of the art article by Mieder (2008). Since the article carries details of the published journals, essays and collections of proverbs from different languages, it provides rigorous exposure to the research scholars working on paremiology.

One theme that has been extensively explored with reference to proverbs of different languages is the projection of gender identity, particularly feminine identity. While some studies exclusively focus on the proverbs of specific languages through an in-depth analysis of the use of conceptual metaphors found in the proverbial expressions to project gender identity (Ncube & Moyo, 2011; Nisrane & Tizazu, 2019; Rubab, et al., 2023), others primarily focus on a contrastive analysis of proverbs of two or more than two languages to identify differences and similarities in the worldview held by the speakers of different languages with regard to males and females (Hussein, 2005; Lomotey & Chachu, 2020; Pervaz, et al., 2021). Bletsas (2020), for instance, conducted a comparative study on the use of metaphors for the projection of female gender in French and Italian proverbs. The study based on the analysis of 168 French and 280 Italian proverbs on 'woman', utilizing CMT, reveals similarities as well as differences in the use of conceptual metaphors employed for the projection of feminine identity in French and Italian proverbs.

Besides examining the projection of gender identity through proverbs, some scholars have also studied proverbs from an ecological perspective (Adugna, 2014; Handoko, et. al. 2024; Pasaribu, et al., 2023; Tarigan, et.al., 2022), as the environment of a region not only influences the flora and fauna of that region but also its linguistic ecology which affects the choice of conceptual or cultural metaphors in the creation and use of proverbs of the languages spoken in that region. Considering the relevance of the connection between environment and language ecology, Kanu and Ndubisi (2022) explored the conceptual metaphors found in African proverbs as a source of African environmental ethics from ecological perspective. The data for the study were based on a selection of 39 African proverbs based on nature along with 20 proverbs related to environmental preservation. The data analysis of these African proverbs reveals the importance Africans attach to nature and their heightened sense of awareness to protect and preserve the environment. Since the Africans consider everything as part of nature, their proverbs project the worldview that gives preference to the preservation of the natural environment.

Since proverbial expressions are packed with metaphoric language using imagery from different fields, studies have been conducted with a focus on cultural metaphors based on specific fields (Aliakbari & Khosravian, 2013; Dabbagh & Noshadi, 2015; Mele, 2013; Tay, 2019). The use of animal metaphors, for instance, has been the focus of investigation in several studies based on proverbs of different languages (Estaji & Nakhavali, 2011; Imran, 2011; Liu, 2013; Olateju, 2005; Pan & He, 2023; Rodríguez, 2009; Sameer, 2016). Many African languages displaying a rich body of folk literature have attracted African scholars who have conducted research on the use of animal metaphors in the proverbs present in their indigenous languages. Kobia (2016), for instance, conducted a study on the use of animal metaphors with a specific focus on chicken metaphor found in 27 Swahili proverbs. The data comprising 27 proverbs, using purposive sampling technique, were selected from a corpus of 200 proverbs employing animal metaphors which were taken from a published book on Swahili proverbs. The 27 Swahili proverbs selected for the study were then translated into English and were analyzed qualitatively using the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). The findings of the study indicate that the metaphor of chicken used in Swahili proverbs projects multiple meanings with some carrying positive connotations like, care, peace, protection, while others connoting negative attributes like cowardice, laziness, stupidity, ignorance, etc. The results of the study reveal that the same



metaphor can have multiple interpretations within the same community which is indicative of the diversity in the worldview of the speakers living in that community.

By employing cognitive approach to study the use of animal metaphors in Yoruba, Adisa (2023) audio-recorded random discussion among Yoruba speakers including Yoruba language teachers and elder members and selected twenty animal metaphors found in the discourse of Yoruba speakers. The selected animal metaphors were categorized according to Lakoff and Johnson's Idealized Cultural or Cognitive Metaphor (ICM) framework for analysis. The results of the study revealed a strong conceptual link between animal traits and human attributes in Yoruba culture. The animal metaphors found in the discourse of Yoruba speakers are used for both positive and negative human attributes reflecting the beliefs and the worldview of the Yoruba people.

Since proverbs are loaded with cultural meaning, some research scholars have examined their effectiveness as pedagogical tools for increasing cross-cultural awareness in language classrooms (Babazade, 2024; Mammadova, 2024; Mpumuje, et al., 2024).

Although there is a significant body of research literature on paremiology within Pakistani context, there is not much diversity as most of the studies on proverbs focus on gender representation (Pervaz, et. al., 2021; Rasul, 2015; Sagheer & Zubair, 2020; Sanauddin, 2015; Khan, et al., 2015; Khan, et al., 2017; Khan et al., 2021). Utilizing conceptual metaphor theory, Rasul (2015) performed a sociolinguistic and critical discourse analysis of gender-based proverbs in English and Urdu. Her research aimed to reveal how linguistic choices in different societies shape gender power dynamics. She relied on Urdu and English dictionaries based on proverbs for her data. Rasul's work provides insights into the portrayal, symbolism, and perception of women in these two linguistic contexts and examines whether stereotypes about women are consistent across English and Urdu proverbs.

Noor (2015) in the study based on Pashto folk literature explores how gender relations are articulated and reflected through Pashto proverbs. The research utilizes a blend of folkloristics, feminist sociology, and sociolinguistics to demonstrate that proverbs convey and perpetuate patriarchal values. It is revealed through the study that Pashto proverbs embody and reinforce a patriarchal and sexist ideology. However, the study also shows that the meanings and implications of proverbs are context-dependent, allowing women to use them to discuss, challenge, and occasionally subvert gender norms. Specifically, the study posits that proverbs, as sources of 'wisdom,' often represent the perspectives of those with authority to define acceptable behavior, thus offering a partial and biased view that is sexist and misogynistic. It also indicates that while proverbs may appear as fixed representations of reality, their use in context can vary, with different speakers employing them strategically to negotiate ethnic and gender identities and power dynamics, influenced by factors such as gender, age, ethnicity, and class.

There are very few studies on proverbs in Pakistani context that do not exclusively focus on the projection of gender identities. Ali (2020), for instance, conducted a comparative study of Kalash and Khowar proverbs to explore similarities and differences in the worldview of the two indigenous communities by analyzing the conceptual metaphors employed in the proverbs of the two languages spoken in Kalash valley and Chitral, in KPK. In order to conduct this research, data were collected comprising a hundred proverbs from both the languages. Despite being a small-scale qualitative study, it analyzed the data from multiple perspectives. The study highlights both differences and similarities between Kalasha and Khowar proverbs, reflecting their geographical and social proximity. This finding further supports the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis which posits that speakers of different languages perceive and interpret realities in distinct ways.

Degener (2020) conducted a study analyzing proverbs from five orally transmitted indigenous languages in Northern Pakistan, focusing on family relationships projected through these proverbs. The research employed pairs of opposites, such as man/woman, father/mother, and brother/sister, to establish categories for analysis. Rather than reinforcing preconceived notions of women's status in a patriarchal society, the study aims to illuminate the structure and



dynamics within the family. It offers insight into how proverbs reflect the relationships of women with other close family members, revealing the intricacies of these familial connections.

This critical review compares two works that examine language as a vehicle of cultural and educational meaning. The study by Ali and Issa offers an insightful analysis of how conceptual metaphors embedded in Balti and Burushaski proverbs reflect cultural cognition, worldview, and sociolinguistic identity. Their work is grounded in cognitive linguistics and demonstrates how language, particularly in the form of proverbs, serves as a repository of cultural values and norms. The analysis is detailed and methodologically sound, revealing how metaphors are not merely rhetorical devices but cognitive tools shaped by cultural experiences.

In contrast, Wajdi's work focuses on language use within the formal context of classroom discourse, proposing a comprehensive model for researching interactional patterns in English language teaching. The strength of this study lies in its systematic approach to analysing teacher-student exchanges, questioning strategies, and participation structures, all of which significantly influence learning outcomes. Wajdi effectively connects theoretical frameworks with classroom practices, making the work practical for applied linguistics and pedagogy.

Despite their different foci—one cultural and metaphorical, the other pedagogical and interactional—both studies converge on the central role of language in shaping human experience. However, while Ali and Issa draw from metaphor theory to reveal how proverbs encode shared cultural knowledge, Wajdi leans more on discourse analysis and sociolinguistic theory to uncover the dynamics of instructional communication. A notable limitation in both works is their context-specific focus; the former may not generalize beyond the languages studied, and the latter may be constrained to specific classroom environments.

Nevertheless, together these works underscore the multifaceted nature of language as both a cognitive schema and a communicative practice, offering valuable contributions to our understanding of linguistic and cultural expression in both informal and formal domains (Ali & Issa, 2024; Wajdi, 2018).

Comparative studies examining Pakistani languages alongside other languages' worldwide provide valuable insights into the use of proverbs from different perspectives. These studies explore how proverbs function across various linguistic and cultural contexts, highlighting both universal themes and unique regional characteristics. These comparisons often reveal how different societies articulate similar ideas or resolve common issues through their proverbs, offering a broader understanding of cross-cultural communication and the role of language in reflecting and shaping worldviews.

It is evident from the review of the studies on the use of conceptual metaphors in proverbs that a variety of approaches have been applied to the study of metaphors ranging from cognitive metaphor approach to idealized cognitive metaphor (ICM) framework to conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) to the more recent extended version of CMT proposed by Kovecses (2020) with the name 'extended conceptual metaphor theory' (ECMT). Although the current study employs CMT, which is also used in some previous research studies reviewed in this section, it is unique because of the focus on the use of conceptual metaphors based on different categories in Balti and Burushaski proverbs. Since these two languages have been largely ignored with reference to paremiology, the study on the proverbs of these two languages rich in oral tradition can encourage the local scholars to not only explore the proverbs of these languages from other perspectives, but also study other genres in the folk literature of these two indigenous languages that are also included in UNESCO's list of endangered languages.

The current study has been undertaken with the aim to explore similarities and differences found in the two indigenous languages, Balti and Burushaski, through the lens of conceptual metaphors specifically employed in the proverbs of these two languages. Spoken in Gilgit-Baltistan, both these indigenous languages are also included in UNESCO's list of 27 endangered languages spoken in Pakistan. Besides being declared endangered, one of these languages, Burushaski is the only language isolate, spoken in Pakistan that is believed to have no genetic relation with any language family of the world. Since the United Nations General



Assembly has dedicated the period from 2022 to 2032 as the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (IDIL 2022-2023) with the aim to not only acknowledge, celebrate, and promote linguistic diversity but also to preserve and revitalize the indigenous languages and cultures, the study is undertaken with the same purpose to preserve and promote Balti and Burushaski language by exploring their oral literature, with a specific focus on the conceptual metaphors found in the proverbs of both the languages by addressing the following research questions: (1) What specific conceptual metaphors based on animals, birds, fruits, and vegetables are employed in Balti and Burushaski proverbs? (2) What similarities and/or differences are found in the projection of the worldview through the use of conceptual metaphors based on these categories in the proverbs of the two languages?

2. Method

2.1 Data Collection

This study falls under paremiology and is rooted in qualitative paradigm, as it aims to explore the use of conceptual metaphors employed in the proverbs of Balti and Burushaski. The study of conceptual metaphors is mostly done through Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), according to which concepts can be decoded effectively if examined with reference to other related concepts and metaphors, as linguistic tools help establish a connection between the two conceptual domains, the source domain and the target domain (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; 1999). Despite being related to cognitive linguistics, CMT is also utilized for undertaking research rooted in Cultural Linguistics, which being a multidisciplinary field within linguistics “engages with features of human languages that encode or instantiate culturally constructed conceptualisations encompassing the whole range of human experience.” (Sharifian, 2017, p. 2). While discussing the significance of cultural linguistics, Sharifian (2017) further states that the field “offers both a theoretical and an analytical framework for investigating the cultural conceptualisations that underlie the use of human languages.” (p.2).

Since the study of conceptual metaphors is mostly done through Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) that was earlier used by cognitive linguists and later became popular among scholars from other sub-fields within linguistics, the current study also utilizes this framework despite the availability of its extended version called ECMT proposed by Kövecses (2020). While drawing a distinction between the previous version proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980; 1999) and the extended version of CMT, Kövecses (2020a; 2020b; 2021) explains that since extended conceptual metaphor theory has a rich contextual component, the conceptual metaphors viewed through the extended version of CMT are simultaneously analyzed at four levels of schematicity that exist in a hierarchical manner. These four levels include, image schemas, domains, frames, and mental spaces. In the earlier version of CMT, according to Kövecses (2020a, p.115) “the mental-space level was not recognized as part of the hierarchy” while in the extended version it is an essential component.

Despite the ECMT having a rich contextual component, the current study does not utilize this extended framework, as it is applicable to only correlation metaphors not resemblance metaphors, which have been found in abundance in both Balti and Burushaski proverbs. It is important to clarify that unlike correlation metaphors which are based on metonymy, resemblance metaphors are not metonymy driven.

The data for this comparative qualitative study have been derived from the native Balti and Burushaski speakers having familiarity with the proverbs of their language as well as from two published books, one based on a collection of Balti proverbs, the other on a collection of Burushaski proverbs. There were two sampling techniques that were utilized for collecting the data: one was purposive sampling which is based on predetermined criteria, which in this case included the selection of only those proverbs that included conceptual metaphors related to four categories: fruits, vegetables, animals, and birds, while the other sampling technique employed was stratified sampling, which requires division of the sample into two equal groups, which in this case was based on 40 proverbs, 20 from Balti and 20 from Burushaski language.

2.2 Data Analysis



As stated in the section on methodology, the data based on Balti and Burushaski proverbs collected from the native speakers as well as from the books on the proverbs of these languages have been analyzed using the conceptual metaphor theory. Although 40 examples were collected and analyzed, the paper includes discussion based on 24 examples. Some examples carrying the same metaphors with similar conceptual meaning have not been included in the data analysis to avoid repetition. Since the focus is on the proverbs utilizing metaphors based on four categories that include, animals, birds, fruits, and vegetables, each category is analyzed separately in the sub-sections.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Use of animal metaphors in Balti and Burushaski proverbs

The region of Gilgit-Baltistan has a rich flora and fauna which adds to the biodiversity of this region. The diversity of its ecosystem is not only reflected in its landscape but also in the languages spoken in different areas along with the use of a diverse range of animal metaphors employed in the proverbs and idioms found in the indigenous languages spoken in this region. The animal metaphors employed in Balti and Burushaski proverbs not only manifest the presence of these animals in the region but also reflect these indigenous communities' familiarity with the specific traits of these animals and the symbolic value assigned to them in both the communities, which projects their worldview.

As mentioned earlier that proverbs not only embody the culture of a community but also reflect the fauna of a region where the speakers of a certain language live, the use of 'bear' as a conceptual metaphor employed in Balti proverbs, because of the presence of this animal particularly in Deosai plains in Baltistan, is one proof. In one of the Balti proverbs "**drenimve khana raal chi chhatnasi chhat**" the conceptual metaphor of a 'bear' is employed stating that "Even the hair of a bear is enough". This proverb which actually implies that "Anything from a miser and stingy person is sufficient" projects 'bear' as an animal that is not easily accessible. Bear being a hairy animal, the reference to hair is made implying that people who are stingy do not like to share even that which they have in abundance. This proverb is used in situations where the purpose is to criticize and make fun of those who are miser.

Unlike 'bear' which is found in Deosai national park in Baltistan, 'maaxxor' (a mountain goat with huge spiraled horns), which is the national animal of Pakistan is found in Khunjerab national park in Hunza in Gilgit region. A famous proverb in Burushaski "**haldin chhap sheyas sui yarne guimo chhap she**" which literally means "Before eating maaxxor's meat, one has to eat one's own flesh" employs the conceptual metaphor of 'maaxxor' carrying the implication that "In order to achieve grand success, one has to make huge sacrifices by putting one's life at stake". The 'maaxxor' metaphor is employed here for two reasons: firstly because its meat is highly delicious and nutritious, secondly because 'maaxxor' is one of the most difficult animals to hunt as it hides itself in the mountains and comes out rarely, thirdly when it senses human presence from a distance, it runs away. It is pertinent to mention here that the hunting of 'maaxxor' is illegal unless one takes the license from the government. The local government of Gilgit-Baltistan issues a license for its hunting every year. Those who are interested in its hunt have to pay a hefty amount in dollars to get the license. The amount generated through this hunting activity is spent on the conservation of wild life and other developmental projects in GB. The background information shared here reinforces the significance of the use of this conceptual metaphor in the Burushaski proverb.

Besides the use of 'maaxxor' as a conceptual metaphor, 'lamb' is also employed in metaphoric sense in one of the Burushaski proverbs "**thares hiles diwsa ke gapalete dinger, mamosha diwsa ke guyatise te farchin**". The literal meaning of this proverb is that "If you nurture an orphan, someday he/she may strike on your head, but if you nurture a lamb, it will provide you wool to make a cap." The proverb carries the implication that it is better to adopt a



useful animal than a bad person, which projects the Burusho community's preference for domestic animals and the way they utilize domestic animals like sheep, goats, and lambs to meet their daily needs.

One of the Burushaski proverbs "**huke tin shiyas asaan gurayas giraan**" which offers a profound commentary on human behavior and the tendency to seek quick, seemingly easy solutions to problems, only to face difficulties later is expressed through the metaphor of 'dog'. The literal meaning of the proverb suggests that "While a wandering dog may find it easy to eat leftover bones, it struggles with the far more challenging task of digesting and them", implying that actions which might appear simple or convenient at first can lead to greater complications in the long run.

In Burusho tradition, 'dog' is viewed quite differently from the symbolic meaning assigned to it in many cultures where it is considered a symbol of faith. Unlike perceiving 'dog' as a symbol of loyalty, the Burusho people perceive dog as a filthy, unwise creature, engaging in behaviors that are considered repulsive. This reflects the broader cultural context in which the proverb operates, where a dog represents lack of foresight, making impulsive decisions without regard for long-term consequences. Metaphorically, the proverb warns against the temptation to take shortcuts in life or to engage in actions that seem to offer immediate relief or escape. While the initial act might appear effortless or even gratifying – like the dog eating the bones – it is only after the act is completed that the full weight of the consequences becomes apparent.

This indigenous wisdom speaks of a deep understanding of human nature. It cautions against hasty decisions driven by impatience or the desire for quick results. The proverb suggests that wisdom lies in carefully considering the potential outcomes of one's actions, recognizing that what seems easy in the short term may lead to enduring hardship in the long run. Overall, the proverb encapsulates the Burusho community's cultural perspective on impulsivity, urging individuals to avoid actions that might offer immediate gratification or relief, but can lead to negative consequences that are harder to handle in the end. It serves as a reminder that wise decision-making involves considering both the immediate and long-term effects of one's actions.

One animal metaphor common in both Balti and Burushaski proverbs is that of a 'cat'. In one of the Burushaski proverbs, "**bushe mamo minume as o akhuljibi phongi maraaq etume akhuljibi**" employing the conceptual metaphor of 'cat', 'cat' is perceived as an animal with negative traits. The literal meaning of the proverb is that "It is not a cat's drinking of milk that annoys. What is actually annoying is the way it twists its moustaches", which implies that a wrong act does not annoy as much as the bad attitude of the doer of that act. There are two verbs associated with the metaphor of 'cat' in the given proverb, 'drinking' of milk and 'twisting' of moustaches. Both evoke the image schema of execution of an act that is disapproved of, as the cat is assumed to have drunk the milk stealthily. Despite drinking the milk without permission, the cat is not ashamed of the act. In fact, it teases in such a way that it annoys others.

Like the Burusho speakers, Balti speakers also have a negative attitude towards cats, which is evident from the Balti proverb "**sange dunu bili chi khiyu?**" (What is a cat's worth in front of a lion?). This proverb is used in situations where one wants to give more importance to the other person by minimizing one's worth. The use of two animal metaphors 'cat' and 'lion' in this proverb are used to show contrast, as lion being the king of animals is considered superior to a cat.

Besides the use of 'cat' as a conceptual metaphor, one also finds metaphorical use of 'goats' in Balti proverbs. For example, in one of the Balti proverbs "**oma metpi re qaqa chhoGho**" which literally means "The female goat that has less milk cries more" the metaphor of a 'she-goat' is used in a negative sense as it is compared with those having less skills. The proverb actually carries the implication that those who are not very capable and skilful are the ones who make tall claims or those who talk a lot rarely do any productive work. The use of a 'she-goat' as a conceptual metaphor is also found in another Balti proverb "**spyangkuikha dom hlungmana rala nene**" where it symbolizes a weak person in contrast to a 'wolf' a conceptual metaphor that implies power, hypocrisy, and cruelty. The literal meaning of this proverb is that "When a wolf is in distress or trouble, it makes a she-goat its aunt" implying that when powerful and cruel

people in trouble, they do not hesitate to seek help from the less powerful and even from those they had been cruel to. It is interesting to observe the use of 'she-goat' as a symbol of someone weak and less skillful in both the Balti proverbs, which could be seen as a reflection of gender bias against females in Balti society.

Yak being found in abundance in Gilgit-Baltistan is also used as a conceptual metaphor in the proverbs of the local languages spoken in the region. One example of the use of 'yak' metaphor is found, for instance, in one of the Balti proverbs "**Sosoe goekha hyaq gulba ma thong, eyungi goekha shik gulbo thong**". The literal meaning of this proverb is that "One does not feel a yak moving on one's own head, but instantly catches sight of a louse moving on the heads of others" implying that one is blind to one's faults no matter how huge their magnitude is, but one does not fail to notice even the minutest gaps or flaws in others. Here, the conceptual metaphor of 'yak' is used with reference to its size which is much larger than the size of lice.

There are quite a few examples of Balti and Burushaski proverbs in which cattle related metaphors abound reflecting agrarian societies where cattle play a pivotal role in agricultural production. Like in Balti and Burushaski proverbs, cattle related metaphors also abound in Chinese proverbs. However, unlike the positive use of cattle related metaphors in Balti and Burushaski, the cattle related metaphors in Chinese proverbs are used negatively as revealed in a study by Pan and He (2023).

3.2 Use of bird metaphors in Balti and Burushaski proverbs

Balti and Burushaski proverbs not only employ animal metaphors but also bird metaphors. A bird metaphor that is commonly found in Balti proverbs is that of a 'crow'. The conceptual metaphor of a 'crow' in one of the Balti proverbs "**phoroqla khab chi thobana sningla tsuga mikla tsuk**" which is literally translated as "A crow gets restless when it finds even a worthless thing like a needle and is unable to decide whether to prick its heart or eyes" implies that those who are not worthy of getting anything valuable, when they get it they do not know what to do with it, as a result of which they end up misusing it. The Baltis look down upon crow as a cunning bird that has low worth which is evident from another Balti proverb "**phoroq rgase kar phogoe men**" which means "A crow never turns white with age" implying that nature does not change. Since a crow is black in colour, which in some cultures carry negative connotations, its opposite 'white' is used in the proverb to show contrast between cunningness and innocence. All such Balti proverbs that employ the conceptual metaphor of this bird are used in such contexts where the aim is to make someone the target of insult and ridicule by either foregrounding their cunningness or worthlessness.

Like 'crow', 'magpie', which is found in abundance in Gilgit-Baltistan, is also employed as a metaphor in some proverbs of the local languages spoken in the region. For instance, in one of the Burushaski proverbs "**Ghan kahan tituna usseja Ghashap**" (No matter who hunts the prey, a magpie is the first to arrive on the spot), the metaphor of a magpie is used to refer to someone who does not waste time in availing himself/herself of any good opportunity. Magpie being a common bird in Gilgit-Baltistan is also used as a conceptual metaphor in Balti proverbs. In one of the Balti proverbs "**byaroq kapho xashep naqpo songse da**" (Can a crow be white and a magpie black?) the metaphor of a 'magpie' is used along with that of a crow to indicate contrast. The proverb can be considered a commentary on the ugliness of one (crow) and the beauty of another (magpie). Unlike crow, which is completely black, 'magpie' having black, white and blue stripes is aesthetically appealing. The juxtaposition of these two bird metaphors in this proverb also carries the implication that certain acts are impossible to occur or change in certain cases is impossible. It is interesting to note that 'magpie', despite being conceptualized in the proverbs of both the languages in a positive sense, is used as a symbol of agility in Burusho culture, while in Balti culture it is perceived as a symbol of beauty.

If 'magpie' carries positive connotations in Balti and Burushaski proverbs, 'crow' carries negative connotations in the proverbs of both the languages. In one of the Burushaski proverbs, "**gayou chumer she chiyou k thamo bachuk umemon**" (Literal meaning: "Kings are so naive that they would believe a crow can eat iron if they are told so"), the metaphor of a 'crow' is employed to target people who appear wise but are actually foolish, carrying the implication that



there is a difference between appearance and reality. Just as it is unimaginable for a crow to digest iron, it is equally foolish for people to believe in such absurdities without questioning them.

Besides the metaphor of 'crow', which is a common metaphor in Balti and Burushaski proverbs, in one of the Balti proverbs "**ukpaala ngimaala ma thongna ngimi chi qusur**" 'owl' is also used as a conceptual metaphor. The literal meaning of this proverb "If an owl is unable to see during the day, it is not the fault of the sun" implies that a person who does not have any vision cannot see the truth which is clear like sun and is visible to everyone except those who are blind.

Using birds as conceptual metaphors abound in both Burushaski and Balti proverbs, which indicate both the societies' strong association with nature. A Burushaski proverb "**ganaqish chin ni ganaqish chash te hurishi**" employs 'sparrow' as a conceptual metaphor to emphasize the importance of a person's associations and how they reflect and influence his/her character. The comparison to a sparrow—an animal often associated with lowliness in this context—symbolizes someone who chooses to align him/herself with unrefined or unworthy elements of society. On the contrary, a person of noble character or birth chooses to associate with those who are respected, like a bird of higher status that prefers beautiful trees with fruits over unkempt and undesirable spaces. This Burushaski proverb aligns with the universal understanding that "a person is known by the company he/she keeps," suggesting that the people we surround ourselves with, have a direct influence on our reputation and the way we are perceived. The sparrow's association with dirty or undesirable places, especially traditional open toilets and wild bushes, implies a lack of refinement and decency. In contrast, the noble individuals—like the birds sitting on trees with flowers and fruits—represent higher standards and are regarded with admiration.

The reflection of societal norms through such metaphors also serves to educate individuals on their social responsibilities and the importance of maintaining respectable associations. It is interesting to observe how nature plays a symbolic role in many local proverbs, specifically drawing on animal and bird behavior to offer life lessons.

3.3 Use of fruit metaphors in Balti and Burushaski proverbs

Like the fauna, the flora of a region also influences the language the natives of that community speak. The old people in local communities utilize fruit metaphors to share folk wisdom which is transmitted in the form of proverbs from one generation to the other. Gilgit-Baltistan offers a fertile ground where numerous plants with medicinal properties, fruits and vegetables grow in abundance and are famous both within and across the country for their health benefits, taste, and quality. There are quite a few Balti and Burushaski proverbs that employ fruit metaphors to project local wisdom. In one of the Burushaski proverbs "**beiTer khoTdila k chhamus besen duushi**" (The quality of juice can be predicted based on the quality of the dried apricot), the conceptual metaphor of 'dried apricots' is employed which implies that "the attributes of a progeny can be inferred from the attributes of its predecessors". GB is known for producing more than 100 varieties of apricots which are organically dried under sun on the roof tops of houses; these organically dried apricots are used for making a local drink called "chhamus" in Burushaski. The quality of the juice is directly dependent on the quality of the dried apricots used, as different types of apricots vary in juiciness and flavor. In the local context, this proverb extends to evaluating individuals and their descendants. Just as the quality of the apricot juice reflects the quality of the dried apricots, the attributes or characteristics of descendants can often be inferred from the traits of their predecessors, implying a kind of continuity or inheritance of qualities within a lineage.

Similarly, another Burusho proverb "**Syed akhon e chaga phat e naltar jangiir e chaga eti**" (Don't talk about the Syeds and Akhons (Mullahs), talk about jangiir) utilizes the metaphor of a special variety of apricot 'jangiir', emphasizing the importance of quality and the deeper value of things that are truly exceptional. In this proverb, people are advised to shift their focus from discussing clergymen and kings—who are traditionally held in high esteem in the society—to jangiir apricot, a fine and prized variety from the region.



Historically, clergymen and kings were regarded as the most important figures in society, and their presence in any gathering typically silenced the crowd, with everyone listening to them attentively. Even in their absence, discussions about them were conducted with the utmost respect and reverence. However, in this proverb, jangiir apricot is metaphorically elevated to such a height that it demands even more respect and attention than those traditionally revered figures. The fruit, as symbolized by the proverb, represents something of exceptional quality. It is considered so valuable that it surpasses even the importance of kings and clergymen in the context of the conversation.

Through this metaphor, the proverb highlights the idea that true excellence, whether in a person, object, or idea, deserves more recognition than conventional authority or power. It suggests that, in certain contexts, true value is found in what is exceptional and rare, not in what is traditionally revered.

As in Burushaski proverbs, one can also find the use of fruit and nut metaphors in Balti proverbs. For instance, in one of the Balti proverbs **"Starga pa rdoa ma loq"** which means "Let alone the walnut, even the stone thrown at the walnut tree does not return," the conceptual metaphor of 'walnut' is employed because of the abundance of walnut trees in the region. This proverb is used in situations when instead of yielding any fruitful result, the effort results in loss.

Since Gilgit-Baltistan is not only known for producing a variety of apricots, but also large quantity of walnuts, there are quite a few local proverbs that carry references to walnuts and walnut trees. There is a Balti proverb **"starga men staqji rga in"** (Walnut trees, not walnuts, are the enemies, if one wants to plough a field) in which the metaphor of a 'walnut tree' is used to project folk wisdom regarding the discreet choice of a place for ploughing a field and planting a tree. The proverb also embodies the belief held by the experts in the field of agriculture in Baltistan region with regard to the walnut trees. Since according to their belief, other trees do not grow or prosper under the shade of a walnut tree, it is wise to utilize that field for harvesting crops where walnut trees are not planted. The proverb, if extended in its scope, can also be used to advise people to use their discretion to recognize their friends and foes.

Like walnut and apricot trees, mulberry trees are also found in abundance in Baltistan region and therefore one can find their reference in some Balti proverbs. For example in one of the Balti proverbs **"ose shingna dose shing"** which means "Mulberry tree's wood is not durable", 'mulberry tree's wood' is used in a metaphorical sense to refer to someone who is not trustworthy and reliable. Basically, the unreliability of a person is compared to mulberry tree's wood in this Balti proverb because its wood is considered of low quality for burning, as it turns into ashes within a short span of time.

3.4 Use of vegetable metaphors in Balti and Burushaski proverbs

As far as vegetable metaphors are concerned, one example is that of 'garlic' which is used as a conceptual metaphor in one of the Burushaski proverbs **"mes phanum etem poqpa chik"** which can be translated as "An asthmatic person and garlic cannot go together" implying that it is wrong to create more adverse situations for a person who is already in a difficult situation. 'Garlic' is employed as a conceptual metaphor here because of its pungent smell which is believed to have an adverse effect on people suffering from asthma. Besides garlic, the metaphor of 'black peas' called 'bukuk' in Burushaski is also used in one of the Burushaski proverbs **"phish kish sis eir bukak bahaana"** which means "A person with gastric problems pretends to have eaten black peas" implying that people conceal their weaknesses or justify their wrong deeds either by blaming others or presenting excuses.

The metaphor of "black peas" is also used in a Balti proverb, which indicates the cultivation and consumption of black peas in Gilgit-Baltistan. However, the metaphor of 'black peas' is used in a very positive sense in the Balti proverb **"zanhrkon songna naqstran tob, xmulhrkon songna rgonma xsos"** which means "If there is scarcity of food, sow black peas. If there is shortage of money, rear a mare". Since the crop of "black peas" is considered very productive growing at a fast pace and its flour is also considered highly nutritious, as per the folk wisdom shared by the old Baltis, the cultivation of 'black peas' is highly recommended to deal with famine. In the second part of the proverb, an animal metaphor, specifically that of a 'mare'



is employed as it is believed by the old folks in Baltistan region that a mare is more productive than other animals when it comes to giving birth. Therefore, in case of shortage of money, the owner of a mare can earn by selling the ponies the mare gives birth to. A vegetable metaphor is juxtaposed with an animal metaphor encapsulating folk wisdom in a figurative way in this Balti proverb, which, in turn, manifests the coping strategies the Baltis are trained to employ to deal with challenges related to the shortage of food and money.

4. Conclusion

Because of the geographical proximity, the landscape of Gilgit-Baltistan is similar to a large extent, which results in the use of some common conceptual metaphors in the proverbs of both the languages. Some conceptual metaphors based on animals, birds, and fruits which are common in the proverbs of both the languages include: cat, dog, crow, magpie, apricots, apricot kernels, walnuts, and black peas.

Although there is a great deal of similarity in the use of conceptual metaphors in both Balti and Burushaski proverbs, significant differences have also been observed not only with regard to the metaphors specific to each language, but also how the metaphors are conceptualized in each language, projecting their worldview.

Since the study is an attempt to contribute in the existing literature on cultural linguistics in general and paremiology in particular, it has significant practical implications for language policy makers as well as indigenous communities. Recognizing and preserving the unique metaphorical expressions found in the oral literature of endangered indigenous languages can contribute to the revitalization and promotion of these languages. The study reinforces the role of oral traditions in the transmission and maintenance of cultural heritage to foster a sense of identity within communities.

Recommendations

- (1) Since the current study, being limited in its scope, only focused on conceptual metaphors related to animals, birds, fruits, and vegetables, a study of proverbs focusing on the use of conceptual metaphors based on other categories should also be undertaken with reference to both the languages in future.
- (2) Research on the proverbs of other indigenous languages also needs to be conducted to explore the use of conceptual metaphors in them for developing cross-cultural awareness.
- (3) Oral literature of different indigenous languages spoken in the country should be transformed into writing before it dies with the old generation, so that it can be explored to learn about the cultural beliefs and values held by the indigenous communities.
- (4) Some local organizations including Forum for Language Initiatives (FLI), working on the preservation and promotion of indigenous languages should include folk literature, especially proverbs of the indigenous languages in the materials they produce for providing mother tongue education to children, as they are least familiar with the folk wisdom embedded in their native language. By providing exposure to proverbs and idioms present in the indigenous languages in the home and education domains, parents, curriculum designers, and teachers can contribute in developing cultural competence of children.

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