



CONCEPTUALISATION OF LABOUR AND DILIGENCE IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK PROVERBS

Xasanova Zuxra Maxmud qizi

National University of Uzbekistan 2nd year master's student

zuhraXasanova16@gmail.com

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19844474>

ARTICLE INFO

Qabul qilindi: 24-aprel 2026 yil

Ma'qullandi: 26-aprel 2026 yil

Nashr qilindi: 28-aprel 2026 yil

KEYWORDS

Labour, diligence, linguoculturology, linguocultureme, paremiology, comparative analysis, English and Uzbek proverbs.

ABSTRACT

This article examines the conceptualisation of labour and diligence in English and Uzbek proverbs from the perspective of linguoculturology and comparative paremiology. Based on a selected mini-corpus of English and Uzbek proverbs, the paper investigates how the concepts of labour, diligence, perseverance, patience, and laziness are verbalised and axiologically structured in the two proverb traditions. The analysis shows that both languages share a stable universal core: labour is represented as necessary for sustenance, wealth, dignity, and moral legitimacy. At the same time, important differences emerge. Particular attention is paid to the symbolic load of recurrent images such as bread, land, hands, time, gold, and the path. The article argues that viewing proverbs as linguoculturemes enables a more precise account of national mentality and worldview than purely structural description allows. The findings are relevant for proverb studies, intercultural communication, translation, and the teaching of language through culture.

Introduction

Proverbs occupy a privileged place in philological inquiry because they condense collective experience into highly memorable verbal forms. In paremiology, they are commonly described as traditional, recognisable and socially circulating sayings that transmit “wisdom, truths, morals, and traditional views”; at the same time, they remain fundamentally recurrent verbal performances rather than inert museum pieces. Their significance, therefore, lies not only in their fixity, but also in their reproducibility, didactic force, and ability to organise shared evaluation within a speech community. In this sense, proverbs function as repositories of cultural memory and as compact instruments of social regulation. [1]

Within this horizon, the present article approaches labour-related proverbs through linguoculturology. The article draws on the formulations of V.N. Telia [2], V.V. Vorobyov [3], N.F. Alefirenko [4], and the linguistic-cultural tradition associated with E.M. Vereshchagin and

V.G. Kostomarov [5]. In this theoretical lineage, linguoculturology studies the interaction of language and culture at the point where verbal signs reveal value systems, national mentality, and the linguistic picture of the world. V.N. Telia explicitly places the paremiological foundation of language among the key domains of linguocultural analysis. V.V. Vorobyov, in turn, characterises linguoculturology as a philological discipline concerned with cultural values, communicative processes, national mentality, and the linguistic world picture. Building on this framework, the notion of the linguocultureme is especially productive: as formulated in later syntheses of Vorobyov's approach, a linguocultureme is a complex inter-level unit in which the form of a verbal sign, its semantic content, and its cultural sense are inseparably correlated; paroemia belongs among its canonical manifestations. Alefirenko's emphasis on the value-semantic space of language further clarifies that culturally salient linguistic units are always axiological: they encode scales of good and bad, useful and harmful, honourable and shameful. [6]

The topic remains relevant for at least three reasons. First, proverbs continue to circulate in pedagogy, everyday speech, journalistic discourse, and moral commentary, which means that they still shape cultural self-description. Secondly, labour is one of the most heavily value-loaded domains of social life, linked to survival, ethics, hierarchy, respectability, and identity. Thirdly, English and Uzbek proverb traditions present an especially fruitful comparative field because they combine a broad universal work ethic with differing historical, economic, and symbolic environments. [7]

The objectives are fourfold: to establish a theoretically grounded linguocultural framework for analysing labour-related proverbs; to interpret selected English and Uzbek proverbs as linguoculturemes; to compare the axiological organisation of labour, diligence, perseverance, patience, and laziness in the two traditions; and to formulate implications for proverb studies, intercultural interpretation, translation, and humanities-oriented language teaching. The novelty of the article lies in the fact that it combines comparative paremiology with linguocultureme theory and treats labour not as a neutral semantic topic, but as a value-saturated cultural concept distributed across recurrent proverbial imagery.

Methodology

The study is qualitative and comparative. Its empirical basis is a purposefully selected mini-corpus of 44 proverbs, evenly divided between English and Uzbek. The corpus was restricted to proverbs in which work, effort, diligence, patience, perseverance, laziness, reward, or sustenance constitute either the overt thematic centre or the main evaluative implication. Because the object of analysis is the conceptual and axiological representation of labour rather than the frequency of contemporary usage, the corpus was built from canonical paremiographic sources rather than from a large spoken corpus. [8]

The methodological design combines descriptive analysis, comparative analysis, semantic interpretation, and linguocultural analysis. The form "conceptualisation" is understood here in a philological and linguocultural sense: not as a psycholinguistic measurement of individual cognition, but as the culturally sedimented modelling of labour through stable proverbial discourse.

Results

The comparative reading of the corpus reveals a broad universal core and a narrower field of cultural divergence. In both proverb traditions, labour is evaluated positively and idleness

negatively; effort is associated with food, prosperity, dignity, and legitimacy; and enduring achievement is represented as requiring patience, repeated exertion, or self-restraint. Yet the two corpora distribute these values differently. English proverbs more frequently frame labour through individual agency, self-help, competence, and the economic management of time. Uzbek proverbs, by contrast, more often anchor labour in agrarian imagery, communal interdependence, honour, and the moral economy of bread, land, and collective wellbeing. In both cases, the proverb functions as a linguocultureme because its literal imagery and figurative lesson are inseparable from culturally shared axiological assumptions.

Labour as a source of prosperity. One of the strongest shared patterns is the link between labour and material or existential reward. In English, *"No pain, no gain"* presents effort and benefit as a causal pair, while *"He that would eat the fruit must climb the tree"* encodes an achievement through the image of ascent and exertion. The proverbised biblical maxim *"If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat"* sharpens this relation further by tying consumption directly to labour. Uzbek proverbs express the same logic, but often with more sensuous and ethically charged imagery: *"Mehnat, mehnatning tagi – rohat"* frames labour as the path to wellbeing or comfort; *"Mehnatli non – shakar, mehnatsiz non – zahar"* opposes earned bread, metaphorically *"sugar"*, to unearned bread, metaphorically *"poison"*; and *"Mehnat qilib topganing, qandu asal totganing"* intensifies the valuation of honest earnings by comparing them to sugar and honey. Here, labour is not merely instrumental. It sanctifies consumption and gives affective sweetness to the result.

The bread motif is particularly revealing. In English, food often appears as the reward for completed effort. In Uzbek, by contrast, *non* 'bread' functions as a powerful moral and cultural sign. Proverbs such as *"Nonni mehnat topgan, mehnatni non topgan"* and *"Tekin yeguncha, ekib ye"* represent bread not as a neutral commodity but as a culturally dignified outcome of rightful work. Earned bread is legitimised; unearned food is stigmatised. The proverb *"Qush qanoti bilan tirik, odam – mehnati bilan"* extends this logic to ontology itself: just as a bird lives by its wings, a human being lives by labour. Such formulations conceptualise labour as the condition of proper human existence rather than simply an economic necessity. [9]

A further distinction concerns the symbolic environment in which reward is imagined. English proverbs often use generic or portable images: fruit, gains, tools, money, race, and worms. Uzbek proverbs are more tied to agrarian and domestic materiality: land, sowing, bread, honey, water, field, tree, and household survival. Proverbs such as *"Mehnat qilmay rohat ko'rmay, Urug' sepmay, ekin o'rmay"* and *"Eksang – o'rasan"* clearly express the same causal principle as English *"As you sow, so shall you reap"*, but the Uzbek versions are more concretely embedded in cultivation. Labour is thus conceptualised through the tactile world of agriculture, which turns work into an interaction with land, season, and subsistence. This does not make the value less universal; it makes its verbal embodiment culturally thicker.

Diligence versus laziness in proverb semantics. The second major cluster is axiological opposition. In both languages, diligence is praised not only for efficiency but for moral steadiness, whereas laziness is condemned as an ethical, practical, and social failure. English proverbs treat idleness as vice, poverty, or evasion: *"Idle folks lack no excuses"*, *"Idleness is the key of beggary"*, and *"Idleness is the root (mother) of all evil"* place laziness in the semantic field of moral decay. *"A bad workman blames his tools"* adds another layer: what is criticised is not merely inactivity but the refusal of responsibility, the displacement of fault from self to

instrument. These proverbs conceptualise diligence as self-discipline allied to competence and accountability. [8]

Uzbek proverbs construct a comparably sharp but somewhat broader condemnation. *"Dangasaga har narsa bahona"* portrays the lazy person as permanently productive only in excuses. *"Yalqovning qo'li qo'ynidan chiqmas"* associates laziness with bodily inertia, while *"Yalqov – o'ziga yov"* and *"Yalqovlik – la'nat"* turn laziness into self-hostility and curse. Especially expressive is *"Nodon va yalqov – dushman uchun katta ov"*, where ignorance and laziness together become easy prey for the enemy. Laziness is therefore not merely economically unprofitable: it is socially dangerous, degrading, and even politically vulnerable. At the same time, diligence appears not as abstract industriousness but as *g'ayrat* – energy, zeal, inner drive. This semantic cluster is important because it shows that the Uzbek concept of diligence combines work with vitality, moral stamina, and active will. [9]

The two traditions also differ in the balance between ridicule and normativity. The result is a particularly strong education-oriented function: the proverb does not merely classify behaviour; it disciplines it.

Perseverance and patience as cultural values. The third cluster concerns duration. Labour is rarely represented as instantaneous. Instead, the proverb imagines meaningful achievement as cumulative, gradual, or dependent on endurance. In English, this is often rendered through procedural temporality: *"Little strokes fell great oaks"*, *"Slow and sure wins the race"*, *"Practice makes perfect"*, and *"Rome was not built in a day"* all foreground repetition, measured progress, or the long duration required for success. The conceptual structure here is incremental: large outcomes derive from disciplined small acts performed over time. Perseverance is thus linked to method, persistence, and rational temporal management.

Uzbek proverbs bind perseverance more closely to patience. The widely cited saying *"Sabr tagi sariq oltin"* conceptualises patience as "yellow gold", that is, as a rare and precious yield. Closely related proverbs such as *"Sabr bilan mehnat qilgan boy bo'lar"* and *"Sabr – yutuq kaliti"* explicitly join endurance to wealth and success. *"Qimirlagan qir oshar, tig'izlagan tog' oshar"* combines motion and perseverance: one who keeps moving crosses even difficult terrain. Unlike the English stress on processual efficiency, Uzbek patience is more overtly axiological and ethical. It is not only the technique of delayed success but also a virtue of self-command, inner ripeness, and moral composure. [10]

This difference is subtle but important. In English, perseverance may be conceptualised as a practical strategy: keep working, repeat the act, improve by exercise, wait because great constructions take time. In Uzbek, patience is often conceptualised as a morally tested path whose reward is both material and existential. The proverb, therefore, fuses labour and endurance more tightly. This fusion is visible in the recurring lexical constellation *mehnat + sabr + boylik* or *rohat*. The implication is that diligence without patience is incomplete. The work ethic encoded in these proverbs is thus not only energetic but also ethically tempered.

Comparative worldview differences. The clearest contrast between the two corpora concerns relative orientation towards the self and the collective. English proverbs certainly know cooperation: *"Many hands make light work"* is a case in point, but the general tendency of the selected labour corpus is to foreground the competent individual. *"God helps those who help themselves"*, *"Every man is the architect of his own fortune"*, *"He that will thrive must rise at five"*, and *"A bad workman blames his tools"* all centre labour on personal initiative, self-management,

and responsibility. [10] Even when the lesson is moral, the agent is conceived primarily as an individual organiser of his own success or failure. Time, moreover, is treated as a managed resource: *"Time is money"* condenses a strongly pragmatic model of labour disciplined by efficiency and opportunity.

Uzbek proverbs certainly preserve individual agency, but they more frequently frame labour as socially situated and communally validated. *"Ko'kka boqma, ko'pga boq"* redirects the gaze from abstract aspiration to the collective. *"Ayrilganni ayiq yer, bo'linganni bo'ri"* warns that separation from the community produces vulnerability. *"Eksang terak, elga kerak"* defines useful labour through benefit to others, while *"El hayoti yer bilan, yer hayoti suv bilan"* inscribes labour into a chain of collective survival mediated by land and water. Even honour is labour-based: the corpus records *"Obro'ning onasi – mehnat"*, implying that social reputation is born from work. Here, labour is more than self-realisation. It is an obligation, belonging, and ethical visibility within the community. [11]

Such differences should not be exaggerated into an absolute opposition between "individualistic English" and "collectivist Uzbek". English also contains cooperative work ethics, while Uzbek contains strong formulas of personal exertion and initiative. Nevertheless, the dominant symbolic centres do differ within this corpus. They are differences in the internal structure of the proverb as linguocultureme: what counts as reward, what threatens the idle, who validates effort, and which images make labour thinkable.

Universal ethics and national specificity. Both proverb traditions treat labour as the norm of legitimate life, diligence as a precondition of reward, and laziness as blameworthy. Both conceptualise delayed achievement through small repeated acts, perseverance, or self-control. Both also use concrete imagery rather than abstract theorising. Yet national specificity emerges in the selection and hierarchy of images. English proverbial discourse often imagines labour through portable, generalisable scenarios of competition, craftsmanship, and the economics of time; Uzbek proverbial discourse more frequently imagines labour through cultivation, bread, household subsistence, land, water, honour, and interdependence. In other words, both traditions moralise labour, but they do so through different cultural ecologies. [11]

At the level of theory, this confirms the value of treating proverbs as linguoculturemes. If one looked only at structure, one would see antithesis, parallelism, brevity, and formulaic balance. A linguocultural reading, however, discloses something deeper: bread in Uzbek labour proverbs is not equivalent to food in a purely lexical sense; time in English labour proverbs is not merely chronology; gold in patience proverbs is not simply wealth. Each image is a carrier of culturally weighted evaluation. This observation has practical consequences. In translation, literal equivalence may preserve surface wording while losing axiological force. In intercultural studies, work-related proverbs can illuminate different assumptions about merit, effort, honour, and social belonging. In humanities-oriented language teaching, such proverbs provide compact and memorable access to cultural value systems precisely because they unite semantics, imagery, and normativity in one reproducible form.

Conclusion

The comparative analysis has shown that labour and diligence are central proverb concepts in both English and Uzbek, but they are verbalised through partially different cultural logics. In both traditions, labour is axiologically positive and laziness negative; labour legitimises sustenance, while idleness threatens poverty, shame, or moral failure. Perseverance

and patience likewise form an essential part of the work ethic in both languages. In the English corpus, labour is conceptualised predominantly through self-help, personal competence, temporal discipline, and individual responsibility. In the Uzbek corpus, labour is conceptualised more strongly through agrarian imagery, bread and land symbolism, communal solidarity, and the moral prestige attached to socially useful work.

The article thus argues that labour-related proverbs should be analysed as linguoculturemes rather than merely as fixed folkloric formulas. For linguoculturology, the findings confirm that the paremiological fund of a language offers privileged access to cultural semantics. For comparative paremiology, they demonstrate the usefulness of linking thematic analysis to axiological and symbolic interpretation. For intercultural practice, translation, and education, the study suggests that labour proverbs should be taught and interpreted not by literal equivalence alone but by attention to their cultural scripts. Future work would benefit from expanding the corpus diachronically, incorporating regional Uzbek variants and contemporary English usage, and combining qualitative interpretation with quantitative corpus techniques in order to trace how older proverbial models continue, change, or weaken in present-day discourse

References:

1. Hrisztova-Gotthardt, H., & Varga, M. A. (Eds.). (2014). Introduction to paremiology: A comprehensive guide to proverb studies. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter.
2. Телия, В. Н. (1988). Роль человеческого фактора в языке: Язык и картина мира. Москва: Русский язык.
3. Воробьев, В. В. (1997). Лингвокультурология: теория и методы. Москва: РУДН.
4. Алефиренко, Н. Ф. (2010). Лингвокультурология: ценностно-смысловое пространство языка. Москва: Флинта.
5. Верещагин, Е. М., & Костомаров, В. Г. (2005). Язык и культура: Три лингвострановедческие концепции: лексического фона, рече-поведенческих тактик и сапиентемы. Москва: Индрик.
6. Алефиренко, Н. Ф. (2015). Language as a state of ethno-cultural consciousness. *XLinguae*, 8(3), 3–10.
7. Axmedov, I. (2024). A comparative analysis of Uzbek and English proverbs: Cultural insights and linguistic features. *Qo'qon University Herald*, 13, Article 67. <https://doi.org/10.54613/ku.v13i.1077>
8. Smith, W. G., & Wilson, F. P. (Ed.). (1970). *The Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs* (3rd ed.). Oxford: Clarendon Press.
9. Mirzayev, T., Musaqulov, A., & Sarimsoqov, B. (2005). *O'zbek xalq maqollari*. Toshkent: Sharq.
10. Uzbek Wiktionary. (n.d.). Sabr. Retrieved from <https://uz.wiktionary.org/wiki/sabr>
11. Ashurova, D. U. (2012). *Text linguistics*. Tashkent: Turan Ziyo.
12. Bahrombekova, M. M. (2025). Linguocultural features in English and Uzbek proverbs. In *Modern Science and Education: Achievements and Development Prospects* (Conference proceedings).
13. Дзядык, Ю. И., & Чайбок-Тверефу, И. (2023). Функционирование концептов труд и поведение в пословицах: сопоставительный подход. *Филологические науки в МГИМО*, 9(1), 53–69. <https://doi.org/10.24833/2410-2423-2023-1-34-53-69>