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GRADONYMIC PROPERTIES OF ADJECTIVES IN PROVERBS

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Abstract. This paper examines the gradonymic properties of adjectives used in Uzbek folk proverbs. Semantic gradation among linguistic units—that is, the strengthening or weakening of a quality on the basis of a shared semantic feature—gives rise to gradonymy. In proverbs, adjectives not only describe a person’s external or internal characteristics but also present these characteristics in relationships of varying degree. The study analyzes gradonymic relations between adjectives and adjectivalized units in the proverbs “Ahmoq bilan gap talashgandan, Moxov bilan uloq talashgan yaxshi” (“It is better to compete with a leper over a goat than argue with a fool”), “Yosh kelsa – ishga, qari kelsa – oshga” (“When the young come, put them to work; when the old come, serve them a meal”), “Och to‘yadi, Suq to‘ymaydi” (“The hungry become satisfied, but the greedy never do”), “Savlatlidan sabotli yaxshi” (“A steadfast person is better than one with an imposing appearance”), “Sodda siri – tilida, Pismiq saqlar dilida” (“The guileless reveal their secrets, while the sly keep theirs within”), and “Dangasaning mingtasidan bitta yalqov paydo bo‘libdi” (“A thousand lazy people have produced one idler”).

Keywords: adjective, gradonymy, gradation, gradational scale, seme, quality, antonymy, synonymy, proverb, gradonymic series.

Gradonymy has particular significance in the study of semantic relations among linguistic units. It is characterized by lexemes united by a common semantic feature yet expressing different degrees of that feature. The quality may change gradually from a lesser to a greater degree or in the opposite direction.

Adjectives are among the parts of speech with the greatest potential to express gradonymic relationships. This is because their semantic nature involves qualities, and such qualities may vary in quantity or degree. For example, a person’s intellectual, moral, physical, and character traits are not all manifested to the same extent.

In folk proverbs, such gradation is expressed more vividly and figuratively. Rather than explaining different degrees of a quality directly, a proverb reveals them through comparison, contrast, or the juxtaposition of synonymous units.

Identifying gradonymic relationships in proverbs requires more than an examination of the grammatical degrees of adjectives. As a lexical-semantic phenomenon, gradonymy involves identifying different stages of intensification or attenuation within a shared quality. For example, in the proverb “Ahmoq bilan gap talashgandan, Moxov bilan uloq talashgan yaxshi” (“It is better to compete with a leper over a goat than argue with a fool”) [5, p. 19], “ahmoq” (“fool”) and “moxov” (“person with leprosy”) serve to express negative characteristics attributed to a person. “Ahmoq” denotes an intellectual characteristic, whereas the primary lexical meaning of “moxov” relates to a medical condition.

Rather than automatically treating these units as members of a single gradonymic series, it is more important to recognize that in context they create contrasting situations linked by a shared seme of negative evaluation. The adjective “yaxshi” (“better”) indicates that one of the two situations is relatively preferable.

This proverb also demonstrates an important feature of gradonymy: the degree of a quality need not be communicated through different forms of the same adjective; it may also be inferred when distinct lexemes enter into a particular contextual relationship.

In “Yosh kelsa – ishga, qari kelsa – oshga” (“When the young come, put them to work; when the old come, serve them a meal”) [5, p. 118], “yosh” (“young”) and “qari” (“old”) belong to the same semantic field of age. Although they exhibit a straightforward antonymic relationship, they also allow us to consider a gradonymic series representing different stages of age.

For example:

old

middle-aged

young →

In this series, a person’s age is the shared semantic feature. Changes in its quantitative value produce different stages. The proverb selects the two extremes of the series—“young” and “old.” Although intermediate degrees are not explicitly expressed, they are semantically implied. The proverb therefore foregrounds the opposing endpoints of a gradonymic series.

In “Och to‘yadi, Suq to‘ymaydi” (“The hungry become satisfied, but the greedy never do”) [5, p. 299], particular attention should be paid to “och” (“hungry”) and “suq” (“greedy, insatiable”). “Och” denotes a state of needing food, while “suq” may express the more strongly negative character traits of greed and insatiability.

The following semantic gradation can be proposed provisionally:

insatiable / grasping

greedy

hungry →

The shared semantic component in this series is “need (the strength of desire).” In the case of “och,” the need is natural and temporary, whereas in “suq” it moves beyond a simple physiological state and becomes a character trait. In other words, a quantitative intensification of the feature creates a qualitatively new semantic stage. Therefore, the statement “the hungry become satisfied” points to the limits of a natural need, while “the greedy never do” expresses the boundlessness of insatiability.

The proverb “Savlatlidan sabotli yaxshi” (“A steadfast person is better than one with an imposing appearance”) [5, p. 328] is among the most revealing examples for gradonymic analysis. The adjectives “savlatli” and “sabotli” denote different positive qualities of a person. They are not, however, merely listed side by side. “Savlatli” refers to external appearance, dignity, and visible bearing, whereas “sabotli” denotes inner steadiness, determination, and resilience.

In the proverb, the following evaluative gradation emerges:

steadfastness

imposing outward bearing →

Here it is not the quantitative degree of a single quality that increases, but its social and moral value. The adjective “yaxshi” (“better”) explicitly evaluates this graded relationship.

Gradonymy, therefore, is not limited to quantitative scales such as "small – medium – large" or "low – medium – high." It may also represent differences in the evaluative status of a quality [8, pp. 75–87].

The proverb "Sodda siri – tilida, Pismiq saqlar dilida" ("The guileless reveal their secrets, while the sly keep theirs within") [5, p. 341] is noteworthy from the perspective of the varying degrees of a person's character traits represented by "sodda" ("simple, guileless") and "pismiq" ("secretive, sly").

A provisional semantic series can be represented as follows:

sly / secretive

one who keeps secrets

guileless →

In this example, the shared semantic field concerns "the extent to which a person discloses private information to others." A "sodda" person openly reveals personal secrets, whereas a "pismiq" person keeps inner thoughts concealed. Gradonymy is manifested through opposing poles. The relationship between gradonymy and antonymy is therefore evident: in certain cases, antonymous units represent two extremes of the same semantic field and imply intermediate degrees [8, pp. 102–111].

"Dangasaning mingtasidan bitta yalqov paydo bo'libdi" ("A thousand lazy people have produced one idler") [5, p. 403]. In this proverb, "dangasa" ("lazy") and "yalqov" ("idler, extremely lazy person") are closely related in meaning, both expressing the absence of industriousness.

Their relationship may provisionally be represented as:

idler / more markedly lazy

lazy →

and interpreted as a synonymic-gradonymic relationship. Nevertheless, limiting the gradonymic series to two units would be inappropriate. In context, the juxtaposition of the numerals "one thousand" and "one" figuratively intensifies the quality. The semantic impact of the proverb thus results not from the adjective alone but from the combination of adjective + quantity + context. This demonstrates that gradonymic relationships are also manifested at the level of speech and communication.

On the basis of the examples presented, gradonymic relationships involving adjectives in proverbs may be divided into several groups:

Type of gradation	**Proverb (original and translation)**	**Gradonymic series / interpretation**
Age-related gradation	"Yosh kelsa – ishga, qari kelsa – oshga" (The young to work, the old to a meal)	young → middle-aged → old
Gradation of need and insatiability	"Och to'yadi, Suq to'ymaydi" (The hungry are satisfied; the greedy never are)	hungry → greedy → insatiable
Gradation of character traits	"Sodda siri – tilida, Pismiq	guileless → secret-keeper →

	saqlar dilida" (The guileless reveal secrets; the sly conceal them)	sly
Negative pole of industriousness	"Dangasaning mingtasidan bitta yalqov paydo bo'libdi" (A thousand lazy people produced one idler)	Contextual gradation of near-synonyms: lazy → idler
Evaluation-based gradation	"Savlatlidan sabotli yaxshi" (Steadfastness is better than an imposing appearance)	imposing outward bearing → steadfastness; a shift toward inner moral worth

It should be emphasized that some of the series outlined above are not firmly established lexical gradonymic series. Rather, they are contextual-gradonymic relationships formed within particular proverbs. Recognizing this distinction is important for the precision of scholarly analysis.

Examining adjectives and adjectivalized units in proverbs from the perspective of gradonymy helps reveal their semantic potential in greater depth. In the proverbs analyzed, gradation is generally established not through the morphological form of an adjective but through the semantic relationships among lexemes, comparison, antonymic opposition, synonymic proximity, quantity, and context.

The defining characteristic of a gradonymic relationship is the presence of different degrees based on a shared semantic feature. From this perspective, pairs such as "yosh–qari" ("young–old"), "och–suq" ("hungry–insatiable"), "sodda–pismiq" ("guileless–secretive"), "dangasa–yalqov" ("lazy–idler"), and "savlatli–sabotli" ("imposing–steadfast") form particular semantic fields within proverbs. Yet not all of them can be classified equally as lexical gradonyms. Some establish antonymic relations, others synonymic relations, and still others contextual gradonymic relations.

Accordingly, Uzbek folk proverbs provide rich material for studying the gradation of adjectives. In them, gradonymy appears as quantitative, qualitative, evaluative, and pragmatic intensification or attenuation of a feature. The concise and figurative nature of proverbs makes these gradonymic relationships particularly expressive.

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