

Metin Ekici

Professor of Ege University at İzmir, Turkey  
(E-mail: mekici@yahoo.com)

## A cultural study on the themes of «hunger» and «poverty» in Turkish proverbs

**Abstract.** *The fact that Turkish culture is rich in creating and transmitting proverbs has led to the creation of Turkish proverbs in a very wide area in thematic terms. One of the areas where Turkish proverbs are concentrated is the themes of “hunger” and “poverty”, which are always on the agenda of mankind.*

*The methods used for humanity in eliminating hunger, as a result of subsequent, these measures done to ensure that people tomorrow won't be hungry; and society is left hungry to guarantee that “Rich” is called, the suppression of hunger and still take adequate precautions with regard to hunger at any moment with individuals and communities who are facing the danger of being “poor” has been named. For humanity “hunger” and “poverty” are two concepts that intertwined and used side by side and together. Since these concepts are one of the most basic thoughts that humanity has observed since time immemorial, it is also very natural to have many proverbs on this topic. This article first describes “proverb” as a genre and term. Following this, introductory information about the general characteristics of Turkish Proverbs has been given. After a brief assessment of the formation and use of Proverbs, the treatment and evaluation of the themes of hunger and poverty in Turkish proverbs were evaluated within the framework of the structure, content, use, contexts and functional characteristics of the proverbs selected as examples.*

**Key words:** *Proverbs, Hunger, Poverty, Creation, Turkish Culture.*

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**Introduction.** Turkish folk culture is very rich with its oral creations. There are number of genres in oral traditional culture and many creations in each genre. The richness of Turkish folklore can be seen by its epic, legend, joke, folktale and folk story creations which are the narration-based creations, and folk poetry creations. Each of these genres has its own unique tradition within Turkish folklore. One of the richness of Turkish folklore is that there are many proverbs on different subjects. One may easily find and use a proverb in Turkish folklore almost on any subject.

One of the subject matters of Turkish proverbs is “hunger” and “poverty”. In this article, I would, first, provide some information on the historical

background and written texts of Turkish proverbs which will be followed by the explanations on the word proverb, the word in Turkish and its meaning, the use of the word proverb as a literary term and its meaning. Then I will discuss the presentation of hunger and poverty in Turkish proverbs by providing examples. In my analyses, I will dwell only upon the subject matter of given examples

I would like to begin with providing some information on the background of Turkish proverb tradition. Although the proverbs in Turkish folklore have been created in oral tradition and passed to generations to generations, there are number written texts,

either prepared as the proverb collections, or for some reason included some proverbs. The first written text in which some proverbs were used is the Turkish monuments found near by Orhun River in Mongolia. The second source of Turkish proverbs is the first Turkish dictionary which is called "Divanü Lügati't Türk" (An Explanatory Dictionary of Turkish). In this monumental work there are number proverbs used to explain the meaning of given words. However, the tradition of proverb using and creating has not based on the written texts, but it has been based upon the oral tradition which is still alive in Turkey.

The term for proverb in Turkish is "Atasözü", the word or sentence left to us from our ancestors. As a term it means, the sentences created by our ancestors by way of using certain literary tools to tell an idea which based on certain observations. These sentences provide a definite idea or suggest what to do or not to do on a given subject. Those sentences are brief, structured as abstraction and literary since they have certain aspects of artful talk.

The oldest word for proverb in Turkish is "Sav." The meaning of this word is a sentence constructed with a thesis on a subject. During the Ottomans another word is used for proverb that is "Darb-ı Mesel." Meaning of this term is an abstract sentence used as an example to explain an idea or discussed subject.

Being rich in creating proverbs and passing to new generations in oral tradition have created situation that the topic of Turkish proverbs covers a wide range of subject. Just looking at a proverb collection shows us the numerous proverbs covering almost every subject.

One may easily find a proverb on almost any subject. One of the most dealt subjects of Turkish proverbs is hunger and poverty which are connected to each other and the oldest problem of humanity. As was the problem in the ancient times, the humanity has still fighting and struggling with these problems.

Since the begging, the fight and struggle of humanity in the world is to solve the problem of hunger and poverty. The hunger and poverty were very real for the ancient people, so they do for us. Feelings created by hunger and poverty

have not much changed since beginning of humanity. For hunger the distance between the ancient people and the most industrialized societies not so far. The humanity still struggles to satisfy its hunger and fights against to poverty. The cities, factories, skyscrapers, airplanes or any other creation of humanity have all created for satisfying hunger. The reason for daily struggle and fight is still same, the hunger and poverty.

The humanity has not only worked for satisfying its hunger when felt, but human being has thought about the food for tomorrow. Upon thinking about the to get hungry in a short time, the preparation has begun for the future, before being in the state of starvation, human being has started to prepare food for the future. Among the humanity, some societies applied special methods to satisfy this humanly demand not only for once, but they have developed systems that helped to solve their demand for food in the future. On the other hand, some societies have not been able to develop such systems to be guaranteed their food demands in the future. The threat of hunger continued for those societies and they have been called "poor."

As seen, the words "hunger" and "poverty" are used side by side and one within the other. Since the humanity felt this feeling at its early ages and observed that it is going to be timeless reality, they not produced food for their own demand, but they also created many sayings called proverb which state their observations and ideas. As one of the oldest societies in world, Turkish people have also observed different states of human and animals in hunger and poverty. They shared their observations with each other and also left their observations as proverbs to the new generations as a part of their cultural heritage.

As it was mentioned, proverbs are considered as an important part oral cultural creation, and they have conveyed the experiences gained in centuries. The proverbs are considered as one of the genres within the Turkish folk literature by Turkish scholars, those scholars mostly tried defining proverbs from the textual and creation process points of view. For example Ömer Asım Aksoy in the introduction part of his proverb collection; "Formulaic sentences that express

the judgment, wise knowledge, and suggestions which are based upon the observation and experiences of ancestors, the ideal those formulaic sentences have been adopted by the member of the society.” (Aksoy 1984, 30). Prof. Şükrü Elçin defined proverb as a genre in folk literature as follows: “Proverbs are the words filled with wisdom, passed down to generations to generations. They are the words which can be adopted as the principles of life, and created by unknown people, and formulated in social milieus and times.” (Elçin 1993, 623-624) Some other folklorists, such as Galit Hasan-Rokem instead of giving a definition of the genre chosen to describe it; “A verbal genre of folklore also widely employed in literary context. The proverb is seldom more than one sentence long, and it usually expresses one main idea” (Hasan-Rokem 1992, 128).

It is my opinion that while defining proverb a genre in folklore one should consider the creators, the context of creation, the formal and structural qualities, the context, the function and the context of function. With the help of above cited definition and with the addition of my own ideas as a genre proverb can be defined as; “The formulaic or fixed sentences which were created by the ancestors in oral tradition at least believed to be, and convey certain ideas or opinions on subject, provide a clear idea on an event, that are used to explain a situation as a statement of ancestors a discussion orally and written texts.

I would like to deal with the creation of proverbs a little. Although when, how and by whom the proverbs were created in the past, in a culture, the proverbs are adopted as part of a cultural heritage that they were the creation of our ancestors in the past. This is true, but when we pay a little more attention to jokes and anecdotes, we may find some hints and information on how, at least, some proverbs were created. I like to argue that the anecdotes may be accepted as one of the sources of proverbs. It is also my opinion is that when anecdote has been told for a long time in a society, almost everybody within that society learns the story part of the anecdote, but they still laugh at the punch line of it. Being told for along time puts the story parts of the

anecdote unnecessary to be told, but the punch line continues to live in the same oral tradition. Using only the punch line of an anecdote turns that sentence into a proverb in time.

This is true for Turkish folklore is that one of the well-known anecdote figures of Turkish culture is Nasreddin Hodja most of whose jokes and anecdotes have been told not only among Turkish people, but also in a wide area from Central Asia to the Central Europe. Some of the Hodja anecdotes with all the parts known by Turkish people, and they do not need to tell the whole story when needed. Upon a need for Hodja’s statement on a subject Turkish people use only the punch line. For example, one of the famous stories of Hodja ends with the punch line “One who pays can have the whistle.” The story part of this line is while Hodja was going to a market place a child gives some money to Hodja and tells him to buy a whistle. Upon seeing their friend ordered a whistle to Hodja, the rest of the children at the same place ask for whistles. Hodja goes to marketplace and buys only a whistle and when he returns to his village gives the whistle to the child who paid for it. When the other children ask for their whistles Hodja says; “One who pays can have the whistle.” Today, this anecdote is used as a proverb. There are some other examples as well. Such as Hodja’s saying “Eat my fur eat, the compliment is not for me, but for you.”

Having provided some information on the proverb tradition and the creation of proverbs among Turkish society, I would like to turn into my main subject, “hunger” and “poverty” in Turkish proverbs. My evaluation on this matter is based upon my search in Turkish proverb collections. Upon examining the most recent published collections of Turkish proverbs I have determined approximately 50 proverbs dealing with the subject of hunger and poverty. Before listing and giving brief explanations on some of those proverbs, it is better to provide some info about the collections. The first collection was prepared by Aydın Oy, and his collection titled “Turkish proverbs Through the History” (Tarih Boyunca Türk Atasözleri; 1972). The second collection was prepared by Ömer Asım Aksoy and his collection titled as “A Dictionary of

Proverbs and Idioms" (Atasözleri ve Deyimler Sözlüğü; 1984). The third and last collection was prepared by a commission consisting of the member of Turkish National Library in Ankara, and the collection titled "Turkish Proverbs and Idioms" (Türk Atasözleri ve Deyimleri; 2001).

In my analyses, I have tried to classify the proverbs about hunger and poverty that I have given the first place to the proverbs about hunger. The proverbs on hunger are also classified and short explanations provided about each example. My classification is as follows.

### A. The proverbs on hunger:

#### I. The proverbs describe the situation of a hungry person:

1. "A hungry will have his eyes on the bread tray."

A hungry person thinks only to satisfy his hunger, and he cannot think of anything else.

2. "A hungry person is unrelenting just as a child persists in unseasonable demands."

In this proverb, the state of a hungry person is explained with a comparison that a hungry person like a child who cannot think of right time or wrong time. The only thing important for a child is the demand. The proverb tells that a hungry person is worse than a child.

3. "A hungry may get full, but still cannot stay away from food."

When a person stays hungry for a long time, even after filling up his stomach, he still thinks hunger.

4. "A person who is desperate with hunger has no moral restrictions."

An important aspect of human being is to believe a creator. However, the hunger puts a person into a situation in which he gives away all the moral, ethical values and cannot think of his honor.

5. "Hungry cannot get a sleep."

For human sleeping is very important, but hunger is more important than sleeping. One of the most difficult things for human being is to stay awaken, however when a person is desperate with hunger, he can suppress the sleep, but not hunger.

6. "The hurt one falls into sleep, but the hungry one cannot."

As a result of the pain, for an injured person falling into sleep is difficult. However, even an injured one somehow gets some sleep, but the hungry one cannot sleep. Hunger is worse than being injured.

7. "They covered the hungry person with nine quilts; he still could not fall into sleep."

The hungry person needs only to full his stomach. In order to make him comfortable with other things is not possible. The only way him satisfy is to offer some food.

8. "A hungry horse will not travel, and an ill-fed hound will not fetch a game."

When the people working for us feel hungry, they do not perform their duties well enough. It is better to satisfy first their demand if want them to work properly.

9. "A hungry bear will not dance."

As the statement of the proverb above, in order to make people work for us properly, first we should satisfy their demands.

#### II. The proverbs describe how a hungry person may act to save himself:

1. "A hungry wolf will attack a lion."

A hungry person may put himself into any kinds of danger. Even knowing the danger is a life threatening cannot make the hungry to do something to satisfy his hunger.

2. "A hungry dog will break through the wall of a bakery."

It is stated in this proverb is that a hungry person may try inappropriate attitudes, and he may try to pass any kinds barrier to satisfy his demand.

3. "A hungry wolf will eat its own cub."

The feeling of hunger oppresses all the other humanely aspects and thinking, and hunger may turn a human being into a monster.

4. "A hungry person will reach into the coals."

A hungry person will risk anything for food. He has no moral values and feelings.

5. "Even if the hungry person is your mother or father avoid from them."

This proverb warns us the degree of threat created by hunger.

### III. The proverbs state how to deal with the hungry person:

1. "A person who strikes a conversation with a starving man risks his own life."

This proverb suggests that if you want to help a hungry person, you should tell him what to do and how to save himself from the situation he is in, but you should offer him some food. Not solving his problem with an immediate solution may create a real threat to you.

2. "Don't play with the bread bowl when a hungry person is present."

When there is a hungry person is with you, you should not talk about food and richness. If you do not want to be harmed by a hungry you should satisfy his hunger.

#### B. The proverbs about poverty:

Either as a side issue of hunger or as a different issue the poverty is stated in a number of Turkish proverbs. The classification of proverbs in this group is as follow:

#### I. The proverbs describe the state of poverty:

1. "A hungry person cannot carry bread under his shirt."

A poor person cannot save that he may have only money enough for today's needs.

2. "A poor person demands never ends."

Poor people do not have much to satisfy their daily needs. While they solve one of their problems, another problem may occur.

3. "Poverty puts a kingdom into danger."

Poverty is a problem of everybody. When a country gets poor, nobody wants to stay in such place that having nobody in a country does not a anybody an important person.

4. "A shepherd without debts is better off than a impoverished prince."

The same idea of being poor or rich determines our social position.

5. "A poor person's hen lays egg one in a day."

The poor people cannot easily become rich. The poor people should be optimist about their future, but they should also not in a hurry to be rich.

6. "A hungry hen imagines herself in grain bin."

The poor people always dream of richness.

7. "For a poor person piece of bread is like a full honey jar."

When the poor people get a little richness, they think they have everything.

8. "When a poor gets on a fine horse, he does not ride it to his neighborhood."

Upon getting some wealth or being a little rich some poor people look upon the people with whom they shared similar situation.

#### II. The proverbs describe poverty in comparing richness:

1. "The rich gets more, the poor cries for."

2. "The house of a rich filled with joy, the house of a poor filled with sorrow."

3. "When a person is rich there are many, when a person is poor there is nobody."

4. "The rich never knows the state of poverty."

#### III. The proverbs advice to poor:

1. "The distance between richness and poverty is a loaf of bread."

2. "Poverty is not a shame, but the laziness."

3. "No poor dies as a result of hunger."

**Conclusion.** One of the important subject matters of the humanity is "hunger" with which several Turkish proverbs dealt. The examined Turkish proverbs provide statements on the feelings, acts, and desperation of a hungry person. They also provide information how to deal with hungry people and what should hungry people do. Another important issue Turkish proverb talk about is that the "poverty". In Turkish proverbs poverty is described from a number of different angles.

The comparison between the richness and poverty is stated to get a better understanding of poverty. In my opinion the descriptions and ideas stated on the issues hunger and poverty are very real. The statements of the proverbs should not only be used in our daily speeches, but they also be taken as the warning of our ancestors. For a better world we should listen to the pointed ideas of our parents and help to poor and save the hungry people.

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## Екижи Метін

*Еге университеті, Измир, Түркия*

## Түрік мақал-мәтелдеріндегі аштық, кедейлік тақырыптарын мәдениеттанулық талдау

**Аңдатпа.** Түрік мәдениеті мақал-мәтелдердің пайда болуы және олардың аударылуы жағынан аса бай болып келеді. Түрік тілінде «аштық» пен «кедейлік» тақырыптарындағы мақал-мәтелдер көптеп кездеседі.

Адам баласының аштық сезімінің қанағаттандырылуында қолданылатын әдістермен алынған шаралардың нәтижесінде ертең аштыққа ұшырамайтындығына, тіпті өзінен кейін келген адамдардың да аш қалмауына кепілдік бере алатын адам және қоғам «бай» деп аталса, аштығын басу үшін тиісті шаралар қабылдай алмайтын және кез-келген уақытта аштық қаупі бар адам мен қоғам «кедей» деп аталды. Адамзат үшін «аштық» пен «кедейлік» бір - бірімен араласып жатқан, бірге қолданылатын ұғымдар. Бұл ұғымдар адамзаттың ежелден бері көңіл аударған ең негізгі ойларынан бірі болғандықтан аталған тақырып бойынша көптеген мақал-мәтелдер кездеседі. Бұл мақалада «мақал-мәтел» алғаш рет жанр және термин ретінде сипатталады. Сонымен қатар түрік мақал-мәтелдерінің жалпы ерекшеліктері туралы мәліметтер берілген және мақал-мәтелдердің қалыптасуы мен қолданылуы қысқаша қарастырылған. Аштық пен кедейлік тақырыптарындағы мысал ретінде таңдалған мақал-мәтелдер құрылымы, мазмұны мен қолданылуы, контекстері мен функционалдық сипаттамалары бойынша бағамдалады.

**Түйін сөздер:** мақал-мәтел, аштық, кедейлік, қалыптасуы, түрік мәдениеті

## Екижи Метин

*Эгейский Университет, Измир, Турция*

## Культурный обзор темы голода и бедности в турецких пословицах

**Аннотация.** Тот факт, что турецкая культура богата созданием пословиц и их передачей, привел к созданию турецких пословиц в очень широком пространстве с тематической точки зрения. Одной из областей, где сосредоточены турецкие пословицы, являются темы «голод» и «бедность», которые всегда были на повестке дня человечества.

В результате мер, принятых методами, используемыми для утоления голода в человечестве, люди и общества, которые смогли гарантировать, что завтра они не будут голодать, даже люди, которые пришли после него, не будут голодать, были названы «богатыми», в то время как люди и общества, которые не смогли принять адекватных мер по подавлению голода и все еще находятся под угрозой голода в любой момент, были названы «бедными». Для человечества «голод» и «бедность» - это два понятия, которые переплетаются и используются бок о бок и вместе. Поскольку эти понятия являются одними из самых фундаментальных мыслей, которые человечество наблюдало с незапамятных времен, также чрезвычайно естественно найти много пословиц по этой теме. В этой статье впервые описана «пословица»

как жанр и термин. После этого была дана вводная информация об общих характеристиках турецких пословиц. После краткой оценки формирования и использования пословиц, рассмотрение и оценка тем голода и бедности в турецких пословицах оценивались в рамках структуры, содержания и использования, а также контекстов и функциональных характеристик пословиц, выбранных в качестве примера.

**Ключевые слова:** пословица, голод, бедность, формирование, турецкая культура

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### Information about the author:

*Ekici Metin* – Professor, Doctor of the Ege University, İzmir, Turkey.

*Екижи Метин* – Профессор, доктор Эгейского университета, Измир, Турция.