

ANIMALS AS METAPHORS: AN ANALYSIS OF GENDER REPRESENTATION IN PASHTO PROVERBS

Mashhood Ahmad¹, Roslina Mamat^{1*}, Afida Mohamad Ali¹, Muslim Shah Abaseen Yousafzai²

¹*Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 UPM Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia.*

²*Department of Pashto, Islamia College University, Peshawar, Pakistan.*

E-mail: gs66607@student.upm.edu.my; linamm@upm.edu.my; afida@upm.edu.my; abaseen@icp.edu.pk

*Corresponding author

ABSTRACT

Pashto proverbs are a significant genre in the Pashto folklore and communication. The proverbs play an important role in framing the social cognition of the Pashtun community. Few past studies have been carried out on the various social aspects of Pashto proverbs. However, limited studies have been conducted on the social significance and linguistic richness of Pashto proverbs, and no studies have been directed at the gender representation of animal-based metaphors in Pashto proverbs. Therefore, this study identified the use of cultural animals as metaphors to represent gender in Pashto proverbs. Specifically, this study employed the conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) proposed and practised by Zoltan Kovecses (2010) to address the representation of genders in Pashto proverbs during interactional processes. After analysing 24 animal-based Pashto proverbs, this study concludes the existence of three categories: superior men, mediocre men, and inferior women, in the Pashtun community, represented through animals like horses, [he] donkeys and [she] donkeys. This study also confirms that Pashto proverbs can be further explored for other functions they perform in communication through modern critical approaches.

Keywords: animals; Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT); gender; metaphor; Pashto; Pashtun; proverbs

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 20 September 2024

Accepted: 21 September 2025

Published: 30 September 2025

Volume 12, Issue 2, September 2025

INTRODUCTION

Communicative ethnography in discourses has been identified and developed by Hymes (1996) and Philipsen & Carbaugh (1986) to comprehend social structure and establish discourses in communication. Ethnography of communication approves culturally and socially acceptable discourses which carry the ideological patterns of the community. Among others, the proverbial discourse of a community is rich with social and cultural wisdom (Dlali, 2023). As a folklore genre, proverbs are frequently quoted in communication to achieve the desired objectives pervasively. However, the core issue lies in the fact that there is a lack of a principled approach towards interpreting these ideological patterns that exist in the linguistic expressions of the proverbs (Khan, 2020). Therefore, the current study is a linguistically driven decoding of the animal-based metaphors in Pashto proverbs used during communication in the Pashto language.

Pashtun Community and Pashto Proverbs

According to a survey conducted by JICA (2022) in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, there are forty million Pashtuns living in this northwest province of Pakistan. These people have Pashto as their mother tongue, and one of the major languages in Pakistan. They are among the major ethnicities in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan (Bartlotti, 2021). Pakhtuns, Pathans, and Afghans are other names for Pashtuns. The British rulers and anthropologists used to refer to them as Pathan, and other ethnic groups in Pakistan, such as Punjabi, also call them by this name.

Although proverbs are the ‘smallest’ literary works (Maria, 2012), they are loaded with cultural and social cognition and thus are considered important in communicative happenings. Likewise, Pashto proverbs are the ‘molecules’ and ‘prized pearls of wisdom’ of the Pashtun community (Tair & Edwards, 2007), which play a significant role in developing various discourses favoured by the community (Khan et al., 2015). As a carrier of the discourses of society, Pashto proverbs are important to ‘affect a change of attitude or accomplish social or personal ends’ (Tair & Edwards, 2007: iii). As an important folklore genre, Pashto proverbs are seen to be culturally influenced. Therefore, Pashto proverbs are identified as a metaphorical guide to the cultural grounding of the Pashtun community (Sapir, 2004). Through metaphors, Pashto proverbs help the Pashtun mind frame a culturally bound discourse about a specific phenomenon (Sanauddin, 2015; Farid & Dinakhel, 2023). This opens plenty of unresearched paremiological domains for research. Accordingly, the current study analyses gender-based discourse represented through the animal-based metaphors in the Pashto proverbs.

The relationship between metaphors, cognition, and culture is understood when the cultural aspects of a specific social group conceptually pattern metaphors (Belkhir, 2012). Pashtun society has patterned metaphors in its proverbial folklore according to the ethnography of the Pashtun community. As a result, Pashto proverbs are rich in metaphors of various natures. Considering the limitations to identifying and discussing them, this study focused only on animal-based metaphors used in the Pashto proverbs. Other than non-pet animals like lions, monkeys, dogs, and camels, Pashto proverbs include cultural pet animals like buffalo, cow, horse, mare, donkey, and cat (Ali et al., 2023). This study selected only animal-based proverbs using horses, mares, and donkeys as source domains. As cultural animals, these animals have a significant impact on Pashto proverbs while developing gender-based discourse.

Although Pashto proverbs are a significant genre in Pashto folklore and communication, they have not received serious attention in the research domains (Farid & Dinakhel, 2023). For example, the use of metaphors, particularly animal-based metaphors, has not been

systematically investigated in existing research. Therefore, this study examined how culturally embedded animal references in Pashto proverbs contribute to the structuring and restructuring of a proposed discourse across generations since proverbs are resilient to synchronic and diachronic changes (Khan, 2020). This study answers how cultural animals are used as metaphors to represent genders during communication in Pashto proverbs. The objective of this study was to identify how cultural animals are used as metaphors in Pashto proverbs using the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) proposed and practised by Zoltan Kovecses (2010).

Finding effective and researchable gaps has usually been a challenging domain for researchers (Miles, 2017). However, the present study has empirically identified gaps in the past research and literature on Pashto proverbs. First, this study identified a knowledge gap of past literature as limited studies have explored the representation of genders through animal-based metaphors in Pashto proverbs. Second, as no study has adopted CMT to study animal-based metaphors in the Pashto proverbs in communication, this study complements a methodological gap.

LITERATURE REVIEWS ON THE PASHTO PROVERBS

Prior studies, mostly conducted by local researchers, on Pashto paremiology have investigated Pashto proverbs from various research perspectives, ranging from social and cultural philosophy to linguistic perspectives. For example, Farid and Dinakhel (2023) conducted a Pashto paremiological study to analyse gender stereotypes in Pashto proverbs through social discourse. Their study examined ten women-based Pashto proverbs for the impact of the social discourse based on gender discrimination. Considering Foucault's (1982) critical theory, the study by Farid and Dinakhel (2023) has concluded that the 'Pashto proverbs as a discourse derogate women and establish her secondary position, thereby stating her unfit for economic power and responsibilities' (Farid & Dinakhel, 2023:186). Despite making a substantial contribution to the field of Pashto paremiology particularly in its exploration of gender presentation, this study is limited in scope, relying on only ten proverbs to illustrate the cultural and social discourse surrounding women in Pashtun society.

In addition, Ali et al. (2023) conducted a comparative paremiology of the Pashto and English proverbs to examine the expressions instigating the elements of bravery and honour. Through a cross-cultural pragmatic study of Pashto and English proverbs, a total of 55 proverbs from both languages were investigated thematically. This study offered a significant systematic approach towards the Pashto proverbs; however, it recommends 'further [Pashto] proverbial studies to explore other themes for better cultural understanding' (Ali et al., 2023:33). Grounded on this recommendation, the current study employed an explorative approach towards gender representation in the animal-based metaphors used in Pashto proverbs.

Also, Aziz et al. (2022) conducted a study on the Pashto proverbs that are considered carriers of the wisdom of Pashtun elders' women. Pashto proverbs were collected from 39 female respondents who were identified and acknowledged as interpreters and disseminators of the Pashtun cultural practices, identities, viewpoints, and life experiences across the generations and then examined through a thematic analytical approach. As a result, Aziz et al. (2022) identified the importance of Pashto proverbs and their social function in communication. Nevertheless, the methodology in this study has certain flaws. It was inadequate and incomplete because it only included female participants without establishing clear selection criteria. Furthermore, there was no theoretical foundation for the study, and the conclusion was based

on the opinions of the women who cited proverbs rather than from a systematic analysis of the proverbs themselves. According to Aziz et al. (2022: 310), the study claimed that Pashto proverbs were not the cultural treasures of the Pashtun society, but rather "enshrined carriers of the wisdom of Pashtun [female] elders.". In response to these gaps, the present study investigates into the social representation of gender through the animal-based metaphors in Pashto proverbs.

Fahim (2022) based his critical review paper on the various definitions of proverbs offered by researchers and scholars of the Pashto language. While the study identified several source domains for their 'expected referent' domains, it decoded metaphorical expressions used in the Pashto proverbs without grounding the cognitive extraction on any theoretical framework. Although some metaphorical references were briefly explained, the paper recommends further investigation into the metaphoric references in Pashto proverbs. Ullah (2022) examined the social function of kinship ties in Pashto proverbs and claimed that such ties are absent when proverbs are employed during verbal rivalry. The study analysed six proverbs collected through interviews with elderly men and women, selected via purposive sampling, alongside the researcher's own observations. Drawing on various scholarly definitions of the proverbs by the paremiologists scholars as a theoretical framework for the analysis of the proverbs, the study concluded that 'proverbs are primarily spoken to indicate the opposing nature and level of kinship ties' (Ullah, 2022:424). The study recorded and analysed the contextual use of Pashto proverbs but did not analyse the data using any particular approach. In addition, just six proverbs were examined to generalise them for the study's goal. In the current study, a more systematic decoding of the contextualised messages of the Pashto proverbs is done.

Dinakhel and Islam (2019) studied the role of Pashto proverbs in shaping Pashtun national identity. Through the theory of ethics and identity, the study focused on ten proverbs to explain the function of three lines of Pashto proverbs in building the Pashtun nation. The study found that Pashto proverbs are significant sources of uniting and building the nation, but the use of three lines of the selected proverbs was not justifiable. In a related study, Ullah and Abid (2018) explored the portrayal of gender and power in 50 Pashto proverbs, which were gathered from interviews with Pashtun locals. The study concluded that Pashto's proverbial discourse promotes a cultural discourse that presents women as weak women and men as strong. As the study is an important addition to the research field, the current research expanded more into the subject matter using a more rational and systematic research design.

In conclusion, the metaphors based on animals that are employed to depict gender in Pashto proverbs have remained unexplored in scholarly research. Moreover, previous studies exhibit notable methodological limitations. To systematically address these gaps, the present study critically engages with these shortcomings and offers a more rigorous approach to Pashto paremiology.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

This study selected 24 animal-based Pashto proverbs that discussed gender representation based on Lauhakangas' (2013) subcategory (G4a) of positioning both genders in society through proverbs. This subcategory ranked men and women as 'boy>girl' in the proverbial genre of folklore. In the current study, this subcategory was modified to represent both genders in terms:

1. Superior versus Inferior
2. Good versus Bad

The context of proverbs is important for analysis. Therefore, the current study selected the proverbs from *Rohi Mataluna* (Pashto Proverbs) (2007), collected by Mohammad Nawaz Tair and Thomas C. Edwards. This source provides an authentic version of Pashto proverbs with literal translation and contextual happening. The collected data was triangulated, confirming their reliability and authenticity.

Theoretical Framework

Identifying linguistic metaphors and then systematically mapping their conceptual metaphors is a cognitively complex procedure. To do so, understanding a conceptual metaphor is important, which is a systematic set of correspondences between two different domains of experience. These two domains participating in the mapping process have been named as source and target domains, respectively (Kovecses, 2010). The source domain is typically concrete and tangible. The target domain in contrast, represents the abstract and intangible concept that is understood through the source domain. Therefore, this systematic mapping between two domains is to understand one abstract target domain through another concrete source domain. For example, in life is a journey conceptual metaphor, life functions as the target domain which becomes more accessible and comprehensible through the more concrete and familiar source domain of journey (Kovecses, 2010). Thus, interpreting a linguistic metaphoric involves establishing a conceptual mapping between domains – linking a concrete source domain to an abstract target domain. This cognitive process reflects a mental journey from the familiar and observable to the intangible, facilitating deeper understanding of language and thought.

CMT maps the cognitive process from the concrete domain towards the abstract domain. Generally, CMT suggests that the source domains are physical, concrete and sensibly tangible, whereas the target domains are abstract and intangible to the senses. Like in the above example, journey is more tangible and more concrete than life, which is sensed as abstract and intangible. This concludes that, in CMT, a less tangible and less easily accessible target domain/concept is conceptualised as and through the perspective of a more tangible and easily accessible source domain/concept (Kovecses, 2010; Lakoff, 2006). Thus, moving from a concrete domain to an abstract domain is a conceptual process. It is a cognitive shift from the concrete conceptualisation of an abstract concept or domain to the source domain by corresponding to the connection of the source and target domains or properties of the source domain. This default direction occurs most of the time in understanding and conceptualising cognitively the metaphorical linguistic expression that occurs in everyday language.

This study employed the conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) presented and practised by Zoltan Kovecses (2010) as an analytical framework. CMT is acknowledged to ensure the validity of the results when linguistic metaphors are contextualised (Forceville, 2009; Kövecses, 2011). Therefore, the current study considered the contextual happenings of Pashto proverbs using animal metaphors. Also, this study focused only on animal-based metaphors and no other linguistic metaphors were considered.

Ensuring Validity and Vitality

To ensure the validity of the discussion and vitality of the conclusion, this study modified Hiebert's (1984) critical contextualisation. Critical contextualisation was used in the previous paremiological study by Khan (2020). It was used to understand the cultural and social schema of the Pashtun community. In addition, the current study was conducted by a cultural insider of the Pashtun culture, which allowed an understanding of the contextual use of Pashto proverbs.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The selected Pashto proverbs were analysed under the four subcategories. Proverbs under each category were first given a contextual relevance and then analysed for the target domain conceptualised through the source domain used in the respective proverbs.

Superior Versus Inferior

In this section of the research, 13 nominal metaphor-based Pashto proverbs have been analysed to explain gender representation in the sub-category of *Superior Versus Inferior*.

- i. **Proverb:** *Khr aba kra kar pre teer kra.*
Translation: *To serve your own purpose, you may call even a [he] donkey as your father* (Tair & Edwards, 2007:239)
Context: When one needs the favour of another person but does not want to ask for a favour from the other person for some reason, the community members comment and provoke him for asking a favour from the other person by quoting this proverb.
- ii. **Proverb:** *Khr ta de Khudy khkr nah warkawe.*
Translation: *May God not give horns to a [he] donkey* (Tair & Edwards, 2007:239).
Context: This proverb is quoted by the Pashtun community member in a contextual situation when God gave some power to the unscrupulous or foolish person.
- iii. **Proverb:** *Ass Aasan dy khu sanj ye gran dy.*
Translation: *Buying a horse is easy, but feeding it is difficult* (Tair & Edwards, 2007:4).
Context: This proverb is quoted in a context when something grandeur, valuable and superior is meant to be acquired, however difficult to maintain. Both genders express the situation by saying, 'Buying a horse is easy, feeding it is difficult.'
- iv. **Proverb:** *Ass pa khpl kaboo thrapigi.*
Translation: *The horse gallops according to his strength* (Tair & Edwards, 2007).
Context: This proverb is used in a context when a person has some power/potential or superior position and behaves according to that.
- v. **Proverb:** *Ass da mogi pa zoor thrapigi.*
Translation: *The horse gains his courage from his master* (Tair & Edwards, 2007:6)
Context: When someone is superior in the community socially, politically, or economically, he behaves accordingly. The community members quote this proverb and say, 'The horse gains his courage from his master.'
- vi. **Proverb:** *Ass na rakozy pa khra sor.*
Translation: *Down off the horse and up on the [she] donkey* (Tair & Edwards, 2007:9).
Context: This proverb is quoted in a context when an inferior position is preferred to accept after having enjoyed a higher status.

- vii. **Proverb:** *Oorbashe kah da rupae sal mana she, da khre khu lapa wee.*
Translation: *Though a hundred muns [eight pounds] of barley cost only one rupee, the [she] donkey will still get but two handfuls* (Tair & Edwards, 2007:62)
Context: This proverb is used in a situation when there is everything for the superiors but not for the poor, inferior ones. The community use the proverb in such a context.
- viii. **Proverb:** *Pa Jannat ki khra taralay na she.*
Translation: *[She] donkeys are not tied in Paradise* (Tair & Edwards, 2007:104).
Context: When someone is inferior in the Pashtun community and is called upon to a gathering of elite or superior people, this proverb is quoted contextually.
- ix. **Proverb:** *Khra de shara ache khashnra ona kre.*
Translation: *You should drive away your [she] donkey so that she does not foul the place* (Tair & Edwards, 2007:245).
Context: This proverbial expression of contempt is contextually applied when one's behaviour and speech are unworthy (inferior) of his position in the Pashtun society.
- x. **Proverb:** *Khra hamesha pa bi tama zaey ki walara v.*
Translation: *[She] donkey is always found standing in unexpected places* (Tair & Edwards, 2007:246).
Context: It is used contextually when a fool person is expected to be found where (wise) others fear to tread.
- xi. **Proverb:** *Khr da khwed pa khwarak sa pohegi.*
Translation: *What does the [he] donkey know about the eating of green fodder (grass)* (Tair & Edwards, 2007:240).
Context: When some fool does not know and appreciate the value of a good thing, this proverb is quoted contextually.
- xii. **Proverb:** *Khr ma thara da sru rekhamo pa pare, asal ye kmasal dy pah khaoru ki bah rughre*
Translation: *Do not tie your [he] donkey with a silken red rope. It is of ill-bred stock and will roll in the dust* (Tair & Edwards, 2007:241).
Context: This proverb is used contextually when dignity is attributed to a lowborn person because sooner or later he will disgrace himself and abuse the privilege.
- xiii. **Proverb:** *Ass ye haghae ta warkru che da tang da taralu ye na woo.*
Translation: *The horse is given to those who do not know how to saddle it* (Tair & Edwards, 2007:10)
Context: When someone is given a superior position or place, and he is unable to handle it skilfully and tactfully, this proverb is quoted in this context by the community members.

Table 1. Metaphors Mapping

Proverb	Source Contextual Domain	Target Conceptual Domain
i	[He] Donkey	A Superior being, A person with abilities
ii	[He] Donkey	Foolish and unscrupulous being
iii	Horse	Something grandeur, valuable and superior Place
iv	Horse	Powerful and superior person
v	Horse	Superior being
vi	Horse	Superior Position
	[He] Donkey	Inferior Position
vii	[She] Donkey	Inferior position, poverty

viii	[She] Donkey	Inferior position, low status, weak
ix	[She] Donkey	Inferior position, unworthy, valueless
x	[She] Donkey	Unwise and fool being, inferior
xi	[He]Donkey	A fool and Inferior being
xii	[He]Donkey	The lowborn, inferior status
xiii	Horse	Superior Position, Power, High place

As illustrated in Table 1, animals like donkeys and horses are used as metaphors in the Pashto proverbs to conceptualise various target domains. According to Zafar Kaka Khel (2021), culturally, in Pashtoon society, “donkey” is ranked at the lower level in the hierarchical chain of animals as compared to “horse”, which is considered worthy among the pet animals (Ahmad & Boase, 2008). Therefore, in the above proverbs, “donkey” is used as a source domain metaphorically to concretise various “negative or inferior” target domains, while the metaphoricity of “horse” in the source domain conceptually frames the “positive or superior” target domains.

Table 2. Superior vs Inferior

Gender Representation	Horse (5)	[He]Donkey (5)	[She]Donkey (4)
Superior	5	1	-
Inferior	-	4	4

CMT helps to systematically map the two domains so that the source domain conceptualises the target domain in the given context. In the current study, CMT has helped to conceptualise the source metaphors used in the Pashto proverbs for the target referents in the target domains. Based on CMT, as shown in Table 2, 13 animal-based Pashto proverbs were analysed for their source and target domains. Among these 13 proverbs, the animal metaphor of ‘horse’ was used five times to explain its general superiority in the animal hierarchy and conceptually in Pashtun society. In the same animal hierarchic order, ‘[he]donkey’ was used once as a source domain for the ‘superior position’ as the target domain and four times for the ‘inferior position’. This presupposes that ‘horse’ is preferred to ‘[he]donkey’ in terms of the metaphorical conceptualisation of position. Also, it presupposes that Pashtun men with negative qualities are ranked through both genders of the ‘donkey.’ Among these 13 proverbs, ‘[she]donkey’ was used four times as a source domain to concretise the ‘inferior position’ of Pashtun individuals. The metaphoric use of ‘donkey’ in both genders presupposes that horses are more culturally important than donkeys in the animal hierarchy.

Good vs Bad

This section of the research has analysed 11 metaphor-based Pashto proverbs to explore gender representation in them.

- i. **Proverb:** *Khr che khr na km ve ghwag ye da prekolo dy.*
Translation: *If a [he] donkey does not behave as a [he] donkey should, his ear should be cut off* (Tair & Edwards, 2007:239).
Context: This proverb is quoted by the Pashtun community in a situation when a man does not choose an equal rival in any form. The Pashtun man needs to choose an equal as his rival.
- ii. **Proverb:** *Khr che de lat she khpla katha hum na ore.*

- Translation:** *When a [he] donkey grows stubborn, it will not even carry its own pannier* (Tair & Edwards, 2007:240).
Context: When a person refuses to do something as his responsibility, this proverb is quoted to upbraid and scold a stubborn person who refuses to budge when pressed.
- iii. **Proverb:** *Khr zan ta aryan dy, malik ye bar tah.*
Translation: *The poor [he] donkey is worried about himself, and the master is worried about the load* (Tair & Edwards, 2007:240)
Context: This proverb is said of a servant who, though too ill to work, is ordered by his master to do so.
- iv. **Proverb:** *Khr khkr ghware ao peshu wzar ghware.*
Translation: *The [he] donkey wants horns, the cat wants wings* (Tair & Edwards, 2007:241).
Context: This proverb is quoted contextually in a situation when an unscrupulous person wants to grasp power.
- v. **Proverb:** *Khr ghirat kary wo nu larae oowahu.*
Translation: *The [he] donkey stood his ground and was killed by the bus* (Tair & Edwards, 2007:241).
Context: This proverb is contextually quoted in a situation when a (foolish) person takes unnecessary risks.
- vi. **Proverb:** *Khr hagha dy day zal yae badal dy.*
Translation: *The [he] donkey is the same, but it carries a different pannier* (Tair & Edwards, 2007:242)
Context: This proverb is used to refer to someone who, having changed positions and his way of life, appears to be a different person, although he is the same unchanged (negative) person.
- vii. **Proverb:** *Ass na rakoz pa khra sor.*
Translation: *Down off the horse and up on the [she] donkey* (Tair & Edwards, 2007:9).
Context: This proverb is quoted in a context when the bad thing is preferred over the good thing.
- viii. **Proverb:** *Bodae Aspi ta trapaki ma khaya.*
Translation: *Don't teach an old mare to gallop* (Tair & Edwards, 2007:86).
Context: This proverb is quoted contextually in a situation when an experienced and skilful person is given advice or instructions.
- ix. **Proverb:** *Ass ba oboo la boze khu che oba na skee nu sa ba ye kre.*
Translation: *You can take a horse to the water (trough), but you cannot force him to drink* (Tair & Edwards, 2007:4).
Context: This proverb occurs in a conversational setting when someone has the strength/potential to do something but refuses or has no will do it even if the opportunity is there.
- x. **Proverb:** *Khru sara kena khr ba she.*
Translation: *Sit with the [he] donkeys, and you become a [he] donkey* (Tair & Edwards, 2007: 244).
Context: This proverb is used in a context when one is instructed about choosing a good company. A bad company would make him a bad individual, too.
- xi. **Proverb:** *Khru sara tersary khwand na kawe.*

Translation: *A headstall (bridle) does not look nice on [she]donkeys* (Tair & Edwards, 2007:245).

Context: An ugly face (of a person) cannot be made beautiful with ornaments.

Table 3. Metaphors Mapping

Proverb	Source Contextual Domain	Target Conceptual Domain
i	[He]Donkey	Rival
ii	[He]Donkey	Irresponsible Being
iii	[He]Donkey	Inexperienced or ill to do servant
iv	[He]Donkey	An unfit and unscrupulous person
v	[He]Donkey	Foolish individual
vi	[He]Donkey	Good Changed person
vii	Horse	Good thing
	[He]Donkey	Bad thing
viii	Old Mare	Experienced being, skilful individual
ix	Horse	Potential being
x	[He]Donkey	Individuals with bad nature
xi	[She]Donkeys	Ugly face

In the Pashtun culture, horses are preferred and appreciated more for being domesticated than donkeys (Khattak, 2010). The Pashtuns prefer horses to be in the stables because horses are considered powerful and superior biologically and culturally. They are considered a symbol of superiority. The ancestral legacy of the Pashtun culture reflects that bearing and riding horses are among the superior hobbies of the Pashtuns (Caroe, 1976). As Pashtuns are good horsemen, their cultural legacy domesticates horses more than donkeys in the same chain (Tainter & Macgregor, 2011). Therefore, metaphorically, horses are used as the source domain, as illustrated in Table 3, due to their biological and cultural significance; thus, their use in Pashtun proverbs refers to the superior and good target referents. On the other hand, donkeys are second to horses in their biological (Masko et al., 2022) and cultural importance (Ahmad & Boase, 2008). Due to its socially and culturally considered inferior position (Zafar Kaka Khel, 2021), it is used as a source domain in the Pashto proverbs to refer to the target referents with negative connotations, as shown in Table 3. Its metaphoric significance lies in the personification of the negatives through it.

Table 4. Good vs Bad

Gender Representation	Horse (1)	Mare (1)	[He]Donkey (8)	[She]Donkey (1)
Good	1	1	1	-
Bad	-	-	7	1

CMT helps to systematically map the two domains so that the source domain conceptualises the target domain in the given context. In the current study, CMT has helped to conceptualise the source metaphors used in the Pashto proverbs for the target referents in the target domains. Grounded on CMT, Table 4 shows the frequency of the animals used in different metaphorical domains. In the ‘good and bad’ category, 11 animal-based Pashto proverbs were analysed. According to Ahmad & Boase (2008), in Pashtun culture, ‘horse’ and ‘mare’ were commonly used as metaphors to represent superior qualities, each used once to symbolise the good domain. ‘[He]donkey’ was used seven times, and ‘[she]donkey’ was used

once to explain the bad domain, while '[he]donkey' was used once to conceptualise a 'good' target. Contextually, it is presupposed that both genders of horses and mares are represented as good in the animal hierarchy of the Pashtun culture as reflected in the Pashto proverbs, while both genders of donkeys represent bad or of low esteem.

Table 5. Overall Representation

Representation	Horse and Mare	Donkey [he/she]
Positive	7	2
Negative	-	16

Table 5 illustrates the representation of gender in animal-based Pashto proverbs. From the table, two major presuppositions were made. First, the animal hierarchy in Pashto proverbs can be categorised as (i) superior and good and (ii) inferior and bad. The linguistic metaphors to conceptualise the target domains of both genders in the first category (superior and good) were used positively. However, the feminine sex of the second category (inferior and bad) was used as a linguistic metaphor to refer to the negativity of the being in any form. In contrast, the masculine sex was sometimes given positive target referents. Second, socially discouraged qualities and beings are metaphorically represented by animals culturally considered 'inferior and bad'. Also, both genders were used as metaphors to address the abstract target domain of the socially unacceptable referents. In addition, both genders of the culturally considered 'superior and good' animals were used positively as linguistic metaphors to create a relationship between the source and target superior domains.

According to Ahmad & Boase (2008), in Pashtun culture, horses [and sometimes mares] are culturally considered superior to other animals of the same category and quoted metaphorically in literature for something superior and preferable to others in a hierarchical order. Culturally, horses have been used to pull a two-wheel passenger cart called a *tanga* in some areas, although this ride is rapidly becoming obsolete. Like in any other culture, bearing and rearing horses is considered a rich hobby in Pashtun culture. Therefore, horses are mentioned in the Pashtu proverbs as metaphorical referents to symbolise valuable and strong things (Khattak, 2010). Horses are metaphorically contextualised in proverbs as something superior and good. What do animals represent in the speech dealing with human characters and interaction? Domestic animals represent the human community, and big animals with hierarchical and biological domination, like horses, in this case, often represent authoritative figures and threats from the point of view of subordinates (Reynoso, 2008). Horses used as a metaphor in the above proverbs equate to those Pashtun men who are categorised as superior and good 'cultural prisoners' to the ones who do not fall in the same category.

According to Khattak (2010), in the same animal hierarchical order, donkeys, regardless of sex, are ranked just below horses, both biologically and in terms of domestic utility in Pashtun culture. In rural Pashtun society, donkeys are used extensively to pull cargo carts and haul freight independently. Pashtun people consider donkeys as not smart and usually quote them metaphorically in Pashtun proverbs for culturally and socially unliked beings in any form and negativity. They are used as an epithet for people deemed naïve or less intelligent than average and fall second to the socially and culturally superior. Calling someone a donkey is an insult in the Pashtun culture. When humanised, this metaphorical expression conceptualises those male and female Pashtuns who are not socially and culturally fit. To be more specific, the Pashtun men who are not 'strong prisoners' to the code of life of the Pashtuns and do not bear

equal cognitive or social status to the ones mentioned earlier are referred to by contextualising donkeys, an inferior animal (Zafar Kaka Khel, 2021) as a metaphorical expression.

The study found that the female sex of horses and donkeys was used once, positive and negative, respectively, in the selected Pashtu proverbs. This leads to the other presupposition that the female sex of these animals is rarely used as a source domain, unlike the male sex in the selected Pashtu proverbs.

CONCLUSION

In this research study, Pashto animal-based proverbs were analysed in terms of their representation of genders. The representation of animals in Pashto proverbs can be humanised to portray genders and reflect the positioning of genders in the Pashtun community. From Table 3, it is concluded that in the selected Pashto proverbs, the superior category of animals in the Pashtun culture is horses and mares, and both sexes have been positively used as metaphors. Nonetheless, mares are not frequently used as horses, while donkeys of both sexes are the inferior category in the animal hierarchy, as reflected in the selected proverbs. Based on the target domains, when concretised through the source metaphors, these categories of animals and their qualities share similarities with the positioning of humans in the Pashtun community. Proverbs have roots deeply embedded in the culture of the respective community. Therefore, the sexes of the animals in the selected Pashtu proverbs correspond with the positioning and status of the Pashtun men and women in the community. It is noted through the analysis that horses and mares are considered superior animals in the Pashto proverbs, and the superior beings are metaphorical through these animals. In contrast, donkeys are considered inferior and, therefore, used as source domains to concretise the negative connotations.

These animal-based metaphors, when humanised, develop an interesting discourse in the Pashtun community. Three categories have been developed as a result of analysing the metaphors used in the selected Pashto proverbs. First, the culturally, socially, and morally good and superior men are referred to as horses, a superior animal in the animal hierarchy according to the Pashtun culture. Second, [he]donkeys were used as a source to criticise Pashtun men who did not qualify for the required Pashtun codes of cultural values and social norms. Third, the female sex of both the mares and [she]donkeys was used once for positive and negative, respectively, which, when conceptualised for humans, reflects the place for the Pashtun women as second in the positioning order of both genders. Thus, this research proves that only culturally qualified men dominate Pashtun society in terms of value and existence. However, this does not mean that the Pashtun community is a male-dominated society. Rather, it pushes down the culturally and socially considered low men close to the Pashtun women who are at the bottom of the Pashtun social order. The strong ‘cultural prisoners’ are highly appreciated and acknowledged in the ranking of the Pashtun community.

From the perspective of the hierarchical structure of matter and life, this study concludes that Pashto proverbs, based on animal metaphors, have created and equated the relationship between animals and humans concerning their social order. The selected Pashto proverbs relate humans and animals in the hierarchical order of the great chain by conceptualising the metaphor that humans are animals. Deriving from the analysis, a more specific conceptual abstraction is likely to be concluded as positioning genders in an animal hierarchy.

This research concludes that the above-mentioned nominal metaphors help the Pashto proverbs to conceptualise their target domains easily and communicate the embedded message

convincingly to the participants involved in the communication process. These nominal metaphors characterise Pashto proverbs by inducing vivid concrete structures and shapes to personify the abstract concepts and ideas. These nominal metaphors, since they are cultural and context-bound elements, produce an impactful image in the mental process of the participant to retrieve the underlying message or ideology easily and perfectly.

In the field of Pashto paremiology, this study recommends a few new unexplored areas for future research. In this study, Pashto proverbs have been investigated for the nominal metaphors only; however, Pashto proverbs have adjectival and verbal metaphors used for different purposes. This is a potential area for future research. Secondly, this study has investigated the English translated version of the proverbs; the original version of the Pashto proverbs can be investigated for the syntax pattern compared to their English versions. Moreover, Pashto proverbs can be examined for other ideological aspects like patriarchy, matriarchy, nationalism, etc. These ideologies are present in the Pashto proverbs, which can be a significant research area in the future. Also, Pashto proverbs can be studied through concepts of Knowledge Construction (KC) in future research.

REFERENCES

- Ahmad, A., & Boase, R. (2008). *Pashtun Tales from the Pakistan-Afghan Frontier*. Saqi Books.
- Akhlaq Khan, L. (2020). *Conceptualization of Speech in Oral Cultures: A Linguo-Cultural Study of Yoruba and Punjabi Proverbs*. National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad.
- Ali, K., Saleem, A., & Ullah, I. (2023). Paremiological Analysis of Proverbs in Pashto and English: A Cross-cultural Pragmatic Study. *NUML Journal of Critical Inquiry*, 21(I), 33–57. <https://doi.org/10.52015/numlji.v21i1.245>
- Aziz, L., Khan, A. M., Abbas, Z., & Hussain, M. (2022). Pashto Mataluna (Proverbs) as Enshrined Carriers of Wisdom of Pashtun Elders: Narratives of Pashtun Women of Pakistan. *Competitive Social Sciences Research Journal (CSSRJ)*, 3(2), 310–317.
- Bartlotti, L. N. (2021). The Gospel in Afghan Pashto Poetry, Proverbs and Folklore. *Jesus and the Cross, January 2008*, 67–84. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1ddcm7b.11>
- Belkhir, S. (2012). Variation in source and target domain mappings in English and Kabyle dog proverbs. *Tàlentum*, 6, 213–227.
- Caroe, O. (1976). *The Pathans*. Oxford University Press.
- Dinakhel, M. A., & Islam, F.-. (2019). A Study of Pashto Folklore: Its Aspects and Nation-Building in Pakistan. *PAKISTAN-Annual Research Journal*, 55(1), 61–76.
- Dlali, M. (2023). Proverbs as an agent of cultural wisdom and identity among the Xhosa speaking people. *Lexicographica*, 39(1), 7–19. <https://doi.org/10.1515/lex-2023-0002/html>

- Fahim, S. (2022). Pashto Expressions and Phrases. *Journal of Critical Reviews*, 09(01), 205–208.
- Farid, N., & Dinakhel, M. A. (2023). Economic Impact of the Gender Related Proverbs of Pashto on the Life of Woman: An Analysis in the Light of Foucault's Concept of Power and Knowledge. *Palarch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt/Egyptology*, 20(1), 185–195.
- Forceville, C. (2009). Non-verbal and multimodal metaphor in a cognitivist framework: Agendas for research From the book Multimodal Metaphor. In *Multimodal Metaphor*. De Gruyter Mouton. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110215366.1.19/html>
- Foucault, M. (1982). The Subject and Power. *Critical Inquiry*, 8(4), 777–795.
- Hiebert, P. G. (1984). Critical Contextualization. *Missiology: An International Review*, 12(3), 287–296. <https://doi.org/10.1177/009182968401200303>
- Hymes, D. (1996). Ethnography, Linguistics, Narrative Inequality. In *Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan Guru Sekolah Dasar* (Vol. 6, Issue August). Taylor & Francis.
- JICA. (2022). *Data Collection Survey on Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in Pakistan* (Issue February). <https://openjicareport.jica.go.jp/pdf/1000043544.pdf>
- Khan, Q., Sultana, N., & Naz, A. (2015). Pakhto proverbs and gender identity. *NUML Journal of Critical Inquiry*, 13(December), 73–87.
- Khattak, R. W. S. (2010). *Introduction to Pashtun Culture*. University of Peshawar.
- Kovecses, Z. (2010). *Metaphor: A practical Introduction* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Kövecses, Z. (2011). The Contemporary Theory of Metaphor: Revisions and Recent Developments. *Review of Cognitive Linguistics*, 9(1), 11–25. <https://doi.org/10.1075/bct.56.02kov>
- Lakoff, G. (2006). Conceptual Metaphor. In *Cognitive Linguistics: Basic Readings* (pp. 185–238). De Gruyter Mouton. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110199901.185/html>
- Lauhakangas, O. (2013). The Matti Kuusi International Database of Proverbs. *Oral Tradition*, 28(2), 217–222. <https://doi.org/10.1353/ort.2013.0016>
- Maria, A. (2012). Paremiological Aspects in the Construction of National Identity. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 63, 276–282. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2012.10.039>
- Masko, M., Wierzbicka, M., Zdrojowski, L., Jasinski, T., Sikorska, U., Pawlinski, B., & Domino, M. (2022). Comparison of Donkey, Pony, and Horse Dorsal Profiles and Head Shapes Using Geometric Morphometrics 2. *Animals*, 12(931).

- Miles, D. A. (2017). A Taxonomy of Research Gaps: Identifying and Defining the Seven Research Gaps. In *Doctoral Student Workshop: Finding Research Gaps - Research Methods and Strategies* (Issue August, pp. 1–10). www.researchjournali.com
- Philipsen, G., & Carbaugh, D. (1986). A Bibliography of Fieldwork in the Ethnography of Communication. *Language in Society*, 15(3), 387–397. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047404500011829>
- Reynoso, L. V. (2008). “Like Dogs Bark at the Rear of an Elephant”: The Animal’s Place in Malay Proverbs. *Proverbium*, 25, 367–378.
- Sanauddin, N. (2015). *Proverbs and Patriarchy: Analysis of Linguistic Sexism and Gender Relations among the Pashtuns of Pakistan*. University of Glasgow, Scotland.
- Sapir, E. (2004). *Language: An Introduction to the Study of Speech* -. Dovers Books. [https://books.google.com.my/books?hl=en&lr=&id=GBIlo7SQr4wC&oi=fnd&pg=PR3&dq=Sapir,+E.+\(2004\).+Language:+An+introduction+to+the+Study+of+Speech.+NY:+Courier+Corporation.&ots=-ZVHX-l6E4&sig=9hUkVjtfN-f-yCamaUWgKWat7p0#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.com.my/books?hl=en&lr=&id=GBIlo7SQr4wC&oi=fnd&pg=PR3&dq=Sapir,+E.+(2004).+Language:+An+introduction+to+the+Study+of+Speech.+NY:+Courier+Corporation.&ots=-ZVHX-l6E4&sig=9hUkVjtfN-f-yCamaUWgKWat7p0#v=onepage&q&f=false)
- Tainter, J. A., & Macgregor, D. G. (2011). *Pashtun Social Structure: Cultural Perceptions and Segmentary Lineage Organization*. Utah State University.
- Tair, M. N., & Edwards, T. C. (2007). *Rohi Mataluna: Pashto Proverbs*. InterLit Foundation, Pashto Academy, Peshawar University.
- Ullah, A. (2022). Kinships Ties in Pashtu Proverbs. *Pakistan Journal of Society, Education and Language (PJSEL)*, 9(1), 424–435.
- Ullah, M., & Abid, S. (2018). Gender and Power Relationships in the Language of Pashto folk proverbs among Pashtun society. *Folkloristic Understandings of Nation-Building in Pakistan*, 113–128.
- Zafar Kaka Khel, M. B. S. (2021). *Pukhtana Da Tarikh Pa Ranra Ke" (Pashtuns in the Light of History)*. University Book Agency, Peshawar.

About the authors

Mashhood Ahmad is a PhD candidate at the Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Roslina Mamat and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Afida Mohamad Ali are lecturers at the same Faculty who specialise in Discourse Analysis. Muslim Shah Abaseen Yousafzai is a lecturer from the Department of Pashto, Islamia College University, Peshawar, Pakistan.