

Linguocultural Analysis of Uzbek Folk Proverbs Formed Around Titles and Official Positions

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Abstract. Proverbs encode socially shared evaluations in compact, culturally salient forms, yet the way Uzbek paremiology represents authority through historical titles has not been systematically described as a distinct linguocultural domain. This study examines how the title lexemes *sulton* ‘sultan,’ *podsho* ‘ruler, king,’ and *amir* ‘emir’ structure cultural meanings related to power, kinship, social inequality, self-interest, justice, and moral responsibility. A qualitative linguocultural design is applied to three focal Uzbek proverbs, supported by literary contexts and lexicographic evidence. Each unit is analyzed in four stages—lexical meaning, image structure, cultural model, and axiological interpretation—using a uniform five-category coding frame. The analysis identifies three recurrent models: power–inner circle–protection, ruler–socially vulnerable subject, and authority–greed–material deprivation. The first model is evaluatively ambivalent because kinship solidarity may shade into partiality; the second criticizes the unequal distribution of burden between the powerful and the poor; and the third condemns self-interested governance through hyperbolic household imagery. Across the three cases, authority is judged by the social consequences of its exercise rather than by rank alone, and the evaluative meaning of each title emerges relationally, through its interaction with co-occurring images and social roles. The study contributes to Uzbek paremiology by treating historical titles not merely as social-status labels but as axiological nodes within a folk model of governance. In practical terms, the proposed analytical frame can support paremiological description, explanatory lexicography, and university teaching of linguoculturology and Uzbek lexical semantics.

Keywords: Uzbek Proverbs, Paremiology, Linguacultural, Axiological Model, Cultural Evaluation.

1 Introduction

Proverbs constitute a highly condensed form of collective linguistic memory. Their stability, figurative structure, and evaluative force allow communities to transmit social norms, historical experience, and culturally preferred models of behavior across generations [1], [2]. In communication, proverbs function as ready-made evaluative judgments that speakers invoke to name recurring situations and to align listeners with a shared moral stance [3]. Cognitive research has further shown that proverb comprehension relies on metaphorical mapping from a specific image to a general schema [4]–[6], while cultural linguistics treats such units as carriers of culturally constructed conceptualizations [7]. Contemporary paremiological research therefore approaches proverbs not only as folklore formulae but also as linguistic and cognitive resources through which social values and cultural knowledge are organized.

Within Uzbek linguocultural studies, proverbs have been examined from comparative, semantic, cognitive, pragmatic, and culture-oriented perspectives. Recent studies have investigated English–Uzbek linguocultural codes, national values, conceptual metaphors, and the linguistic structure of paremiological units [8]–[10], as well as culturally salient components such as bread and household vocabulary [11]. Research on the concept of power in neighboring Turkic paremiological traditions also demonstrates that proverbs preserve historically formed attitudes toward governance, hierarchy, and social responsibility [12]. Together, these directions provide a solid basis for interpreting proverbs as cultural models rather than as isolated aphoristic statements.

However, the existing literature is dominated either by broad thematic comparisons or by analyses of culturally salient components such as food, household vocabulary, animals, plants, and general moral concepts [11], [13], [14]. The linguocultural functions of historical titles and official-position names in Uzbek proverbs

have not yet been systematized as a distinct semantic and axiological group. In particular, little attention has been paid to how such lexemes organize evaluations of authority, proximity to power, social vulnerability, material burden, and the moral responsibility of rulers. This is the research gap addressed in the present study.

The scientific novelty of the article lies in modeling the title lexemes *sulton*, *podsho*, and *amir* as culturally marked centers of three interconnected evaluative configurations: power–inner circle–protection, ruler–socially vulnerable subject, and authority–greed–material deprivation. Rather than treating the titles simply as historical designations, the study reconstructs the cultural judgments activated by their figurative environments in Uzbek paremias.

The aim of the study is to identify and interpret the linguocultural models of authority encoded in Uzbek folk proverbs containing names of titles and official positions. To this end, the study addresses three research questions:

RQ1. Which cultural concepts and evaluative meanings are activated by the lexemes *sulton*, *podsho*, and *amir* in the selected Uzbek proverbs?

RQ2. How do figurative components and semantic oppositions transform social-status designations into cultural evaluations of governance?

RQ3. What common axiological model of authority emerges from a comparison of the three paremias?

The remainder of the article is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews relevant paremiological and linguocultural research. Section 3 describes the material and the analytical procedure. Section 4 analyzes each proverb in turn, synthesizes the three cases, and states the limitations of the study. Section 5 summarizes the theoretical contribution, practical implications, and directions for future research.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Proverbs as Linguacultural and Cognitive Units

A major strand of contemporary research conceptualizes proverbs as repositories of cultural knowledge. Classic semantic accounts describe the proverb as a traditional, self-contained, didactic genre whose meaning arises from the interaction between a literal image and a figurative, generalizing interpretation [1], [2]. Cognitive approaches explain this interaction through the GENERIC IS SPECIFIC metaphor, whereby a concrete scenario is mapped onto a generic schema applicable to an open class of situations [6], and psycholinguistic evidence confirms that proverb understanding is grounded in such metaphorical thought [4], [5]. Studies of English and Uzbek paremiology likewise emphasize that proverbial meaning combines linguistic form with culturally specific values, traditions, mentality, and communicative expectations [8], [9], and linguocognitive work connects these patterns with the national worldview [10]. These studies converge on the view that a proverb cannot be adequately interpreted through dictionary semantics alone; its cultural and evaluative dimensions must also be reconstructed.

At the same time, much of this scholarship remains broad in scope. Comparative studies frequently organize material around general domains such as family, work, hospitality, education, speech behavior, or moral conduct [8], [9]. Such approaches are valuable for establishing cross-cultural tendencies, but they leave narrower semantic groups—particularly historical titles and official-position names—less systematically described.

2.2 Component-Based and Thematic Paremiological Analysis

A second research direction focuses on the cultural meanings generated by recurrent lexical components. Recent analyses of *non* ‘bread,’ household vocabulary, and animal and plant names show that a single lexical component can activate complex symbolic and axiological associations [11], [13], [14]. Component-based analysis is especially useful because it links the lexical semantics of an item to the wider cultural script in which it functions. In this respect, it parallels the key-word approach of cross-cultural semantics, which treats culturally salient words as points of entry into a community’s values [15].

Nevertheless, component-based studies have concentrated predominantly on material culture, natural imagery, or broadly recognized value concepts. Social-status vocabulary requires a somewhat different analytical perspective because a title simultaneously denotes an institutional position and evokes historically accumulated judgments about hierarchy, privilege, obligation, and justice. This dual status motivates a separate analysis of title-based paremias.

2.3 Power and Social Hierarchy in Paremiological Space

Research on the semantic field of power in Kazakh paremiology demonstrates that proverbial discourse can encode the organization of traditional authority, collective attitudes toward rulers, and the social consequences

of governance [12]. Axiological research on power in Russian linguistic culture similarly shows that power is accepted as necessary for social order, whereas its excessive pursuit and abuse are condemned, and that proverbs in particular advise keeping one's distance from authority [16]. These findings indicate that the paremiological representation of power is not neutral: it is structured by recurrent evaluations of legitimate and illegitimate authority.

The remaining question is how this general axiological domain is lexicalized in Uzbek through specific historical titles. The present study addresses this question by examining *sulton*, *podsho*, and *amir* not in isolation but in relation to the figurative elements that accompany them. This makes it possible to identify the cultural models produced by the interaction between title semantics and proverbial imagery.

3 Materials and Methods

3.1 Research Design and Material

The study adopts a qualitative, interpretive linguocultural design. The primary units of analysis are three Uzbek folk proverbs containing the historical title lexemes *sulton*, *podsho*, and *amir* (Table 1). The paremias were selected purposively according to three criteria: each (a) contains an explicit title or official-status designation, (b) evaluates a relationship between authority and other members of society, and (c) includes a figurative or oppositional component that enables linguocultural interpretation.

The three titles differ in origin but occupy a common position in the historical vocabulary of governance. *Sulton* and *amir* are Arabic borrowings (from *ṣulṭān* 'power, authority' and *amīr* 'commander, ruler'), whereas *podsho* goes back to Persian *pādšāh* 'king.' Lexicographic information on the title lexemes was checked against the etymological dictionary of the Uzbek language [17, p. 434]. In the Central Asian context, *amir* is also historically associated with the rulers of the Emirate of Bukhara, which lends the term additional regional resonance.

Literary contexts serve as supporting evidence where attested examples are available. The proverb *Sulton suyagin xo'rlatmas* is contextualized through Ahmad Said's selected works [18, p. 61] and the heroic epic *Alpomish* [19, p. 175]. Gulxaniy's *Zarbulmasal* [20, p. 42], the classical Uzbek allegorical collection of parables and proverbs, provides the cultural background for the bird imagery of the third proverb, and further literary attestations of title-based usage were consulted in [21, p. 290], [22, p. 283], and [23, p. 226]. The study does not claim statistical representativeness; its purpose is analytical depth and model construction within a deliberately limited qualitative sample.

Table 1. Focal Paremias, Glosses, and English Renderings

No.	Proverb	Word-by-word gloss	English rendering	Supporting context
1	<i>Sulton suyagin xo'rlatmas</i>	sultan his bone (= kin)-ACC does not let be humiliated	"A sultan does not let his own kin be humiliated."	Ahmad Said [18]; <i>Alpomish</i> [19]
2	<i>Podshoning holi tang bo'lsa, gadoni axtarur</i>	ruler-GEN his state narrow if becomes, beggar-ACC seeks	"When the ruler is in straits, he seeks out the beggar."	—
3	<i>Amir bo'lsa ta'magir, na tovuq qolur, na kulonkir</i>	emir if is greedy, neither chicken remains nor <i>kulonkir</i> (bird name)	"If the emir is greedy, neither the chicken nor the <i>kulonkir</i> will remain."	Bird imagery, cf. <i>Zarbulmasal</i> [20]

Note. ACC = accusative case; GEN = genitive case. English renderings are approximate and aim to preserve the image structure of the original.

3.2 Analytical Procedure

The analysis was conducted in four stages (Fig. 1). In the first stage, the literal and social-status meanings of the focal title lexeme and its co-occurring lexical components were identified. In the second, semantic oppositions, metaphorical extensions, hyperbole, and evaluative markers were examined within the internal structure of each proverb. In the third, the meanings were interpreted in relation to culturally salient domains such as kinship solidarity, social hierarchy, material well-being, justice, and moral responsibility. In the fourth, the resulting interpretations were compared across the three paremias and classified as positive, ambivalent, critical, or strongly negative evaluations of authority.

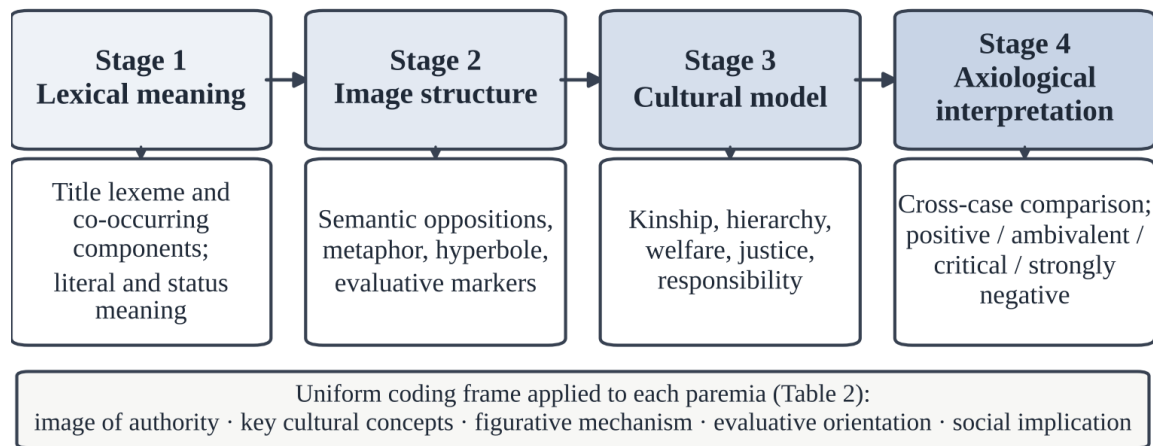


Fig. 1. Four-stage analytical procedure applied to each focal paremia.

To increase analytical transparency, the same five coding categories were applied to all three units (Table 2). This common frame underlies Tables 3 and 4 and allows the interpretations to be compared systematically. Because the study is qualitative, reliability is pursued through explicit analytical categories, contextual corroboration, and avoidance of claims that exceed the three focal paremias.

Table 2. Coding Frame Applied to the Focal Paremias

Category	Guiding question	Analytical indicators
Image of authority	How is the title-holder portrayed in the proverb?	Role assigned to the title lexeme; actions and qualities attributed to it
Key cultural concepts	Which cultural concepts does the proverb activate?	Kinship, hierarchy, material welfare, justice, morality
Figurative mechanism	Which device converts literal meaning into evaluation?	Metaphor, antithesis, hyperbole, correlative construction
Evaluative orientation	How is the exercise of authority assessed?	Positive, ambivalent, critical, or strongly negative
Social implication	What norm of governance does the proverb imply?	Expected or condemned conduct of power-holders

4 Results and Discussion

4.1 *Sulton*: Protection, Kinship, and the Boundary of Partiality

The proverb *Sulton suyagin xo'rlatmas* may be rendered as “A sultan does not let his own kin be humiliated.” The title *sulton* designates a holder of supreme authority, whereas *suyak* ‘bone’ is figuratively extended to one’s close circle, kin, or people connected through solidarity and shared interest. The causative verb form *xo'rlatmas* ‘does not let [someone] be humiliated’ presents the sultan not as a passive relative but as an agent who actively prevents the humiliation of his own. The resulting configuration is therefore not simply ruler + relative; it is a cultural model in which authority entails an obligation to protect those regarded as one’s own.

At the first evaluative level, this model is positive: the protection of relatives and close associates represents loyalty, responsibility, and kinship solidarity. At a second level, however, the same model becomes ambivalent, because proximity to power may create preferential treatment that conflicts with the expectation of impartial justice. The proverb thus exposes a culturally recognizable tension between solidarity and fairness. This interpretation supports broader paremiological findings that cultural values are often encoded not as isolated virtues but as context-dependent evaluative scripts [8], [10]. It also reflects the pragmatic nature of proverbs, whose evaluative force is realized in specific communicative situations rather than fixed in advance [3].

Literary evidence reinforces the protective reading. In Ahmad Said’s work, the variant *Sulton suyagini xo'rlamas* appears in a situation in which an office-holder is encouraged to support a close person [18, p. 61]. In *Alpomish*, the paremia is associated with preventing Barchin’s father from remaining humiliated, foregrounding kinship duty and social protection [19, p. 175]. The contextual evidence therefore confirms the protection

component, while the linguocultural reading reveals its potential critical extension toward privilege and partiality.

4.2 *Podsho* and *Gado*: Authority Versus Social Vulnerability

In *Podshoning holi tang bo 'lsa, gadoni axtarur* ("When the ruler is in straits, he seeks out the beggar"), the opposition *podsho* 'ruler, king' ↔ *gado* 'beggar' creates an explicit hierarchy. The first lexeme represents institutional power and access to resources; the second represents poverty, vulnerability, and limited social agency. The phrase *holi tang bo 'lmoq* 'to be in straits' (literally, 'one's state becomes narrow') adds a condition of constraint, producing a scenario in which the powerful respond to difficulty by turning toward the weakest social group.

The proverb therefore encodes more than social difference. Its evaluative force lies in the unequal distribution of burden: the powerful actor retains institutional superiority, while the vulnerable actor becomes the one from whom a solution is extracted. This reading is compatible with research showing that the concept of power in paremiological systems is frequently evaluated through its effects on those with less authority [12], [16]. The Uzbek proverb gives this general axiological pattern a particularly concise form through the *podsho–gado* antithesis.

A complementary reading is also available. The proverb may be understood as a statement of interdependence: even the most powerful person, when in difficulty, needs the help of the humblest, so that no rank guarantees self-sufficiency. This reading is less overtly critical, yet it still undermines the self-evident superiority of the ruler by exposing the dependence of power on those it ranks lowest. In both readings, the evaluation is generated by the relation between the two figures rather than by either title alone.

The theoretical significance of this finding is that social-status terms in paremias can function as relational signs. *Podsho* acquires its full evaluative meaning only through its opposition to *gado*. Consequently, the cultural meaning of authority is generated not solely by the title itself but by the social relation encoded around it, which supports a relational rather than a purely lexical approach to title-based paremiology.

4.3 *Amir*: Greed and the Material Consequences of Governance

The proverb *Amir bo 'lsa ta'magir, na tovuq qolur, na kulonkir* ("If the emir is greedy, neither the chicken nor the *kulonkir* will remain") represents a third configuration of authority. *Amir* denotes a ruler or high office-holder, while *ta'magir* assigns an explicitly negative moral quality: acquisitiveness or greed. The correlative construction *na ... na ...* 'neither ... nor ...' and the fowl images *tovuq* 'chicken' and *kulonkir*, a bird name, intensify the consequence through hyperbole: nothing in the household economy escapes the ruler's appetite. The cultural judgment is thus produced by linking the personal morality of the ruler to the material condition of ordinary households.

The bird imagery acquires additional depth against the background of the classical Uzbek allegorical tradition. In Gulxaniy's *Zarbulmasal*, birds act as rulers and courtiers, and *Kulonkir* appears among the officials through whom the work satirizes misgovernment [20]. Whether or not the proverb alludes to this text directly, it draws on the same culturally available association between bird imagery and the ethics of rule.

Unlike the ambivalent *sulton* model, the *amir* model is strongly negative. Authority becomes illegitimate when it is converted into a mechanism of private acquisition. The proverb constructs the semantic chain authority–greed–appropriation–loss of prosperity and thereby translates an abstract ethical judgment into tangible domestic imagery. This mechanism resembles component-based findings in which everyday objects carry broader cultural values and social meanings [11], [13]. Here, however, household imagery serves specifically to measure the social cost of corrupt or self-interested rule.

The practical implication concerns lexicographic and educational description: defining *amir* merely as a historical title does not capture the evaluative meanings activated in proverbial discourse. A linguoculturally informed account should distinguish the denotative meaning of a title from the axiological meaning generated in context.

4.4 Cross-Case Synthesis and Contribution

Tables 3 and 4 summarize the three models according to the coding categories introduced in Section 3.2. The comparison answers RQ1 by showing that the three title lexemes activate different but connected cultural concepts: *sulton* foregrounds proximity and protection, *podsho* foregrounds hierarchy and vulnerability, and *amir* foregrounds moral responsibility and material consequences.

Table 3. Linguocultural Models of Proverbs Containing Titles and Official Positions

Title / position	Proverb	Key cultural concepts	Evaluation	Linguocultural meaning
<i>Sulton</i> (sultan)	<i>Sulton suyagin xo'rlatmas</i>	Power, proximity, kinship, protection	Ambivalent	Protection and solidarity coexist with the risk of partiality and privilege.
<i>Podsho</i> (ruler, king)	<i>Podshoning holi tang bo'lsa, gadoni axtarur</i>	Power, stratification, economic burden	Critical	Unequal relations are represented through the transfer of burden to a vulnerable social group.
<i>Amir</i> (emir)	<i>Amir bo'lsa ta'magir, na tovuq qolur, na kulonkir</i>	Governance, greed, household livelihood, prosperity	Strongly negative	Hyperbolic household imagery condemns the material consequences of self-interested governance.

Table 4. Shared and Distinct Linguocultural Features of the Analyzed Proverbs

Criterion	<i>Sulton</i> paremia	<i>Podsho</i> paremia	<i>Amir</i> paremia
Image of authority	Protector of the in-group	Dominant actor in an unequal social relation	Office-holder whose morality affects collective welfare
Central issue	Solidarity versus impartial justice	Social inequality and burden distribution	Greed and abuse of authority
Figurative mechanism	<i>Suyak</i> 'bone' → kin (metaphor)	<i>Podsho</i> ↔ <i>gado</i> antithesis	Fowl imagery + <i>na ... na ...</i> hyperbole
Folk evaluation	Positive and critical layers coexist	Critical	Strongly negative
Cultural implication	Protection should not become unjust privilege	Authority is judged by its treatment of vulnerable groups	Private interest in governance threatens collective prosperity

With respect to RQ2, figurative components are decisive: *suyak* turns authority into an in-group relation, the *podsho*–*gado* opposition converts hierarchy into a judgment about unequal burden, and fowl imagery converts greed into a visible loss of livelihood. In each case, the figurative component performs the step from a specific scene to a generic evaluative schema that cognitive accounts identify as the core of proverbial meaning [4], [6].

RQ3 concerns the common axiological model (Fig. 2). Across all three cases, authority is evaluated through its social consequences rather than through status alone. Legitimate power is implicitly associated with protection, justice, and responsibility; problematic power appears as partiality, unequal burden transfer, or acquisitive governance. The three proverbs can therefore be placed along an evaluative continuum from ambivalent (*sulton*) through critical (*podsho*) to strongly negative (*amir*). This pattern is consistent with cross-cultural research in which proverbial representations of power encode expectations, restrictions, and criticism directed at authority [12], [16], while the Uzbek data specify the lexical and figurative mechanisms through which these evaluations are realized.

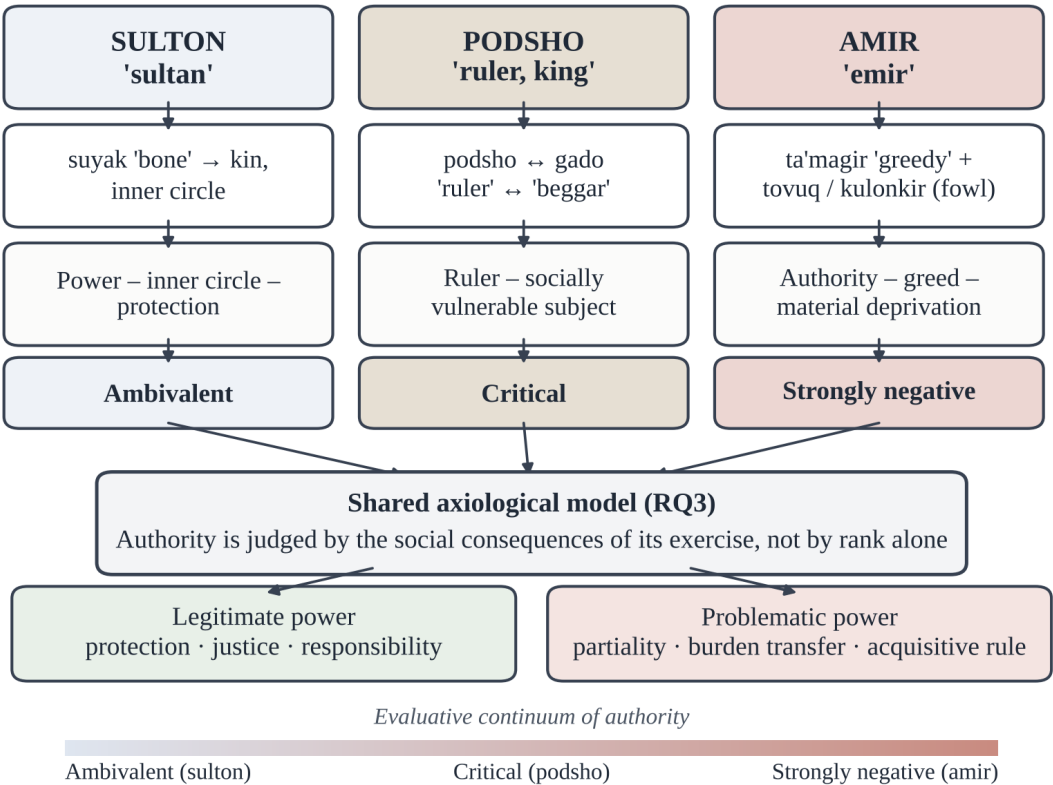


Fig. 2. Relational axiological model of authority in the analyzed Uzbek proverbs.

The theoretical contribution of the study is therefore twofold. First, it proposes a relational model for title-based paremiology: the cultural value of a title emerges through its interaction with other lexical images and social roles. Second, it demonstrates that historical titles can function as axiological nodes that organize judgments about governance. The practical contribution lies in an explicit analytical frame—title meaning, figurative mechanism, evaluation, and social implication—that can be used in paremiological dictionaries, linguocultural annotation, and university instruction.

4.5 Limitations

The findings should be interpreted within the limits of the study. The sample contains only three focal paremias and therefore does not represent the full inventory of Uzbek proverbs containing titles such as *xoqon*, *xon*, *shoh*, *bek*, *qozi*, or other administrative designations. In addition, the analysis is qualitative and does not measure frequency, regional distribution, or diachronic change; the interpretations, particularly those of polysemous proverbs such as the *podsho* paremia, would also benefit from validation with native-speaker informants. These limitations are partly mitigated by applying a uniform coding frame and by drawing on literary contexts where available, but broader corpus-based evidence is required before the model can be generalized to Uzbek title-based paremiology as a whole.

5 Conclusion

This study examined how the historical title lexemes *sulton*, *podsho*, and *amir* function in Uzbek folk proverbs as culturally marked representations of authority. The analysis identified three models—power–inner circle–protection, ruler–socially vulnerable subject, and authority–greed–material deprivation—which show that title lexemes do not merely name social positions; through their figurative environments, they encode evaluations of solidarity, justice, inequality, moral responsibility, and collective welfare. The findings also show that proverbial evaluation is relational. *Sulton* becomes culturally meaningful through *suyak* and the tension between protection and partiality; *podsho* is evaluated through its opposition to *gado* and the unequal distribution of burden; and *amir* is judged through the combination of *ta'magir* and the imagery of household loss. In all three cases, authority is assessed according to the social consequences of its exercise. This relational, consequence-oriented model of authority is the article’s principal contribution to the linguocultural study of Uzbek paremiology.

The proposed framework has practical relevance for explanatory and paremiological lexicography, where historical titles may require not only denotative definitions but also information about culturally recurrent evaluations. It can also be used in courses on Uzbek lexicology, linguoculturology, paremiology, and discourse analysis. Future research should expand the corpus to other titles and official-position names, compare regional and historical variants, and employ corpus-based frequency analysis to test the productivity of the three models identified here.

Disclosure Statements

Author Contributions

D. O. Bobojonova is the sole author of this article and was responsible for conceptualization, methodology, data collection, formal analysis, interpretation of the results, writing—original draft, and writing—review and editing. The author has read and approved the final version of the manuscript and agrees to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares no financial, professional, or personal conflicts of interest that could have influenced the research, the interpretation of the results, or the preparation of this manuscript.

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Artificial Intelligence (AI) Use Statement

During the preparation of this manuscript, the author used ChatGPT (OpenAI) and Claude (Anthropic) to improve the language, readability, and presentation of the text, tables, and figures. Mendeley (Elsevier) was used for reference management and is not a generative AI tool. No AI tool was used to generate data, select the analyzed proverbs, or produce the interpretations reported in the study. After using these tools, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed and takes full responsibility for the content of the published article.

Data Availability Statement

All data analyzed in this study—the three proverbs and their literary contexts—are included in the article. The sources from which they were drawn are published works listed in the References.

Ethics Statement

This study analyzed published folklore and literary texts and did not involve human participants, personal data, or animals. Ethical approval was therefore not required.

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