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NATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF METAPHORS AND EPITHETS IN THE LANGUAGE OF EPICS

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Abstract. This study investigates the national characteristics of metaphors and epithets in epic languages, drawing on examples from the Old English epic *Beowulf* and the Uzbek heroic epic *Alpamysh*. Through a comparative lens, it examines how these literary devices reflect cultural, historical, and societal values unique to their respective traditions. Findings indicate that English metaphors and epithets emphasize Germanic warrior ethos, fate, and natural hostility, while Uzbek ones highlight nomadic resilience, communal harmony, and vibrant natural symbolism. The analysis reveals both universal heroic motifs and distinct national flavors, contributing to understandings of cross-cultural literary expression.

Keywords: Metaphors, epithets, heroic epics, *Beowulf*, *Alpamysh* (*Alpomish*), national characteristics, kennings, figurative language, cultural identity, Old English poetry, Uzbek oral tradition, comparative literature, nomadic symbolism.

Аннотация. В данном исследовании изучаются национальные особенности метафор и эпитетов в эпических языках на примерах из древнеанглийского эпоса «Беовульф» и узбекского героического эпоса «Алпамыш». С помощью сравнительного анализа рассматривается, как эти литературные приёмы отражают культурные, исторические и социальные ценности, уникальные для соответствующих традиций. Результаты показывают, что английские метафоры и эпитеты подчёркивают германский воинственный дух, судьбу и враждебность природы, в то время как узбекские — кочевую стойкость, гармонию общин и яркую природную символику. Анализ выявляет как универсальные героические мотивы, так и различные национальные особенности, способствуя пониманию межкультурного литературного выражения.

Ключевые слова: Метафоры, эпитеты, героические эпосы, *Беовульф*, *Алпамыш* (*Alpomish*), национальные особенности, кеннинги, образный язык, культурная идентичность, древнеанглийская поэзия, узбекская устная традиция, сравнительное литературоведение, кочевая символика.

Annotatsiya. Ushbu tadqiqot epik tillardagi metafora va epitetlarning milliy xususiyatlarini o‘rganadi, qadimgi ingliz eposi Beowulf va o‘zbek qahramonlik eposi Alpamish misollaridan foydalanadi. Qiyosiy nuqtai nazardan, ushbu adabiy vositalar o‘z an‘analariga xos bo‘lgan madaniy, tarixiy va ijtimoiy qadriyatlarni qanday aks ettirishini tahlil qilgan. Topilmalar shuni ko‘rsatadiki, ingliz metaforalari va epitetlari german jangchi etikasi, taqdiri va tabiiy dushmanligini ta’kidlaydi, o‘zbek metaforalari esa ko‘chmanchi bardoshlilik, jamoaviy uyg‘unlik va jonli tabiiy ramziylikni ta’kidlaydi. Tahlil ham universal qahramonlik motivlarini, ham o‘ziga xos milliy lazzatlarni ochib beradi, bu esa madaniyatlararo adabiy ifodani tushunishga hissa qo‘shadi.

Kalit so‘zlar: Metaforalar, epitetlar, qahramonlik epolari, Beowulf, Alpamish (Alpomish), milliy xususiyatlar, kenninglar, majoziy til, madaniy o‘ziga xoslik, qadimgi ingliz she’riyati, o‘zbek og‘zaki an‘anasi, qiyosiy adabiyot, ko‘chmanchi ramziylik.

Introduction. Metaphors and epithets are fundamental literary devices in epic poetry, serving to enhance imagery, convey deeper meanings, and encapsulate cultural identities. Metaphors create implicit comparisons, enriching narratives with symbolic layers, while epithets provide descriptive attributes that reinforce character traits or thematic elements (Reichl, 2000). In epic traditions, these devices often embody national characteristics—reflecting historical contexts, societal norms, and worldview—shaped by the oral and cultural transmission of stories.

The Old English epic *Beowulf*, composed between the 8th and 11th centuries, exemplifies Anglo-Saxon literature with its focus on heroic deeds amid monstrous threats (Liuzza, 2000). In contrast, the Uzbek epic *Alpamysh*, rooted in 14th-17th century oral traditions, narrates tales of bravery and justice in a Central Asian nomadic setting (Zhirmunsky, 1960/2004). Both employ metaphors and epithets extensively, yet their usage reveals distinct national traits: English epics often portray a fatalistic, individualistic heroism, while Uzbek ones emphasize collective resilience and harmony with nature.

Literature review and research methodology. The study of metaphors and epithets in epic poetry has long highlighted their role as carriers of cultural and national specificity. In Old English literature, kennings—compound metaphorical expressions—serve as a hallmark of poetic style, functioning as compressed metaphors that evoke the Anglo-Saxon worldview of seafaring, warfare, and fate (Heaney, 2000; Liuzza, 2000). Scholars emphasize that kennings such as "whale-road" (for sea) and "battle-sweat" (for blood) not only enrich imagery but also reflect a society shaped by harsh natural environments, tribal loyalties, and a sense of inevitable doom (Reichl, 2000). Epithets in *Beowulf*, including "ring-giver" for kings and "guardian of the Geats" for the hero, reinforce social hierarchies and heroic ideals rooted in comitatus (feudal loyalty), while contributing to the poem's rhythmic, alliterative structure suited for oral performance.

In contrast, research on Central Asian Turkic epics, particularly the Uzbek dastan *Alpamysh*, underscores a rich tradition of expressive metaphors and epithets drawn from

nomadic life, shamanistic remnants, and later Islamic influences (Zhirmunsky, 1960/2004; Reichl, 2000). The Great Soviet Encyclopedia (as cited in Wikipedia entries on Alpamysh) describes the epic as "rich in aphorisms, expressive metaphors and proof of the wealth of the Uzbek popular poetic language," praising its vivid imagery of nature, animals, and communal values. Studies highlight zoomorphic metaphors (e.g., heroes compared to eagles or lions) and color symbolism (e.g., "green-blue world" for fertile harmony), which symbolize resilience, freedom, and ecological interconnectedness in steppe cultures (see analyses of color symbolism in Uzbek dastans). Epithets such as "brave lion" or nature-infused descriptors emphasize collective justice and endurance against oppression, differing from the more individualistic, fatalistic tone in Germanic epics.

Comparative scholarship on Beowulf and Alpamysh (or Alpomish) remains emerging but insightful, often focusing on shared heroic archetypes while noting divergences in cultural encoding through figurative language (e.g., mythological images, heroism models). Recent works explore positive-negative mythological contrasts and intercultural themes, revealing how metaphors and epithets adapt universal motifs to national contexts—martial stoicism in Anglo-Saxon tradition versus optimistic communal harmony in Uzbek nomadic heritage. This body of literature provides a foundation for analyzing how these devices preserve historical memory and cultural identity across disparate traditions.

A comparative literary analysis was conducted, focusing on primary texts and secondary sources to explore metaphors and epithets. Primary sources included translated editions of **Beowulf** (Heaney, 2000) and recorded variants of **Alpamysh** (Zhirmunsky, 1960/2004). Secondary literature was drawn from studies on Old English and Central Asian epics, including analyses of figurative language (e.g., kennings in **Beowulf**) and poetic devices in Uzbek folklore. Sources were selected for their emphasis on cultural specificity, such as Germanic warrior codes versus nomadic tribal values.

The methodology involved: (1) identifying key metaphors and epithets through textual close reading; (2) categorizing them by national themes (e.g., nature, heroism); (3) comparative evaluation to discern similarities and differences. This qualitative approach prioritized contextual interpretation over quantitative metrics.

Results. The examination uncovers distinct national characteristics in the deployment of metaphors and epithets, rooted in the cultural milieus of each epic. In **Beowulf**, metaphors often manifest as kennings—compound expressions that reflect a seafaring, war-torn Anglo-Saxon world. Examples include "whale-road" for the sea, symbolizing perilous journeys and nature's hostility, and "battle-sweat" for blood, underscoring the brutality of combat. Epithets like "ring-giver" for kings highlight generosity and feudal loyalty, embodying Germanic comitatus bonds. These devices convey a fatalistic view, where heroes confront inevitable doom, as in metaphors comparing the sun to "heaven's candle," evoking transient glory.

In *Alpamysh*, metaphors draw from nomadic life, using vivid nature imagery to denote resilience and unity. For instance, metaphors liken heroes to eagles or wolves, symbolizing freedom and strength in vast steppes. Color symbolism, such as "green-blue world,"

represents fertility and spiritual harmony, reflecting Central Asian ecological ties. Epithets like "brave lion" or "wise elder" emphasize communal justice and moral wisdom, aligning with tribal ethics. Aphoristic metaphors enrich the narrative, promoting values of endurance against invaders. Comparatively, both epics use metaphors for heroic elevation, but English ones stress individual valor amid adversity, while Uzbek ones foster collective identity and optimism. Epithets in *Beowulf* are concise and martial, contrasting with *Alpamysh*'s elaborate, nature-infused descriptors.

Discussion. The findings from this comparative analysis demonstrate that metaphors and epithets in epic poetry function as culturally embedded signifiers, encoding distinct national worldviews while simultaneously serving universal poetic and mnemonic purposes in oral traditions. In *Beowulf*, the predominance of kennings—such as "whale-road" for the sea, "battle-sweat" for blood, and "heaven's candle" for the sun—reflects a Germanic cultural orientation characterized by confrontation with an indifferent or hostile natural world, a strong emphasis on individual heroic agency, and an underlying fatalism influenced by pre-Christian pagan elements and emerging Christian fatalism (Liuzza, 2000; Heaney, 2000). These compound metaphors not only compress complex ideas into vivid, alliterative forms ideal for oral recitation but also mirror the Anglo-Saxon experience of migration, intertribal warfare, and environmental precariousness in northern Europe. Epithets like "ring-giver" and "guardian of the Geats" further reinforce hierarchical social bonds (*comitatus*) and the reciprocal obligations central to Germanic warrior societies, where loyalty and generosity sustain fragile communities amid constant threat.

In contrast, the metaphors and epithets in *Alpamysh* draw from the nomadic steppe ecology and Turkic cultural matrix, integrating zoomorphic imagery (e.g., heroes as eagles, wolves, or lions symbolizing untamed freedom and predatory strength) and polychromatic symbolism (e.g., the "green-blue world" evoking fertile pastures, spiritual harmony, and ecological interdependence) (Zhirmunsky, 1960/2004; Reichl, 2000). These devices emphasize communal resilience, moral equity, and optimistic endurance against external oppression—hallmarks of Central Asian tribal societies shaped by migrations, invasions, and pastoral mobility. Aphoristic metaphors and nature-infused epithets (e.g., "brave lion" or "wise elder") promote collective values over individualistic glory, aligning with the epic's role in fostering tribal unity and ethical continuity in an oral, performative context influenced by shamanistic and later Islamic elements.

Cross-culturally, both epics employ figurative language to elevate heroic figures and transmit didactic messages, yet national divergences arise from divergent historical trajectories: the feudal, sea-bound warrior ethos of Anglo-Saxon England versus the steppe-oriented, clan-based mobility of Uzbek nomadic heritage. Recent comparative scholarship underscores these contrasts, noting how *Beowulf* and *Alpamysh* (or *Alpomish*) share archetypal motifs (e.g., monster-slaying, exile and return, loyalty) but encode them differently through linguistic devices—martial stoicism and fatalistic transience in the former, versus harmonious optimism and communal solidarity in the latter (as explored in

studies on intercultural heroism and epic typology). Such variances highlight the adaptability of epic language to preserve cultural identity amid historical change, transforming universal heroic ideals into nationally specific expressions.

A key implication is that metaphors and epithets act as "cultural archives," preserving ethnographic details, ethical norms, and worldview while facilitating intergenerational transmission in oral societies. However, translation poses significant challenges: kennings lose rhythmic force and metaphorical density in modern English renderings, while the vivid, performative quality of Uzbek dastan imagery may be diluted when rendered in non-Turkic languages, potentially obscuring original cultural nuances (Reichl, 2000). This study is further limited by reliance on translated primary texts and the scarcity of direct linguistic analyses of original Old English and Uzbek variants.

Future research could benefit from multilingual textual comparisons (incorporating original manuscripts or recordings), broader inclusion of Turkic epics (e.g., Kyrgyz *Manas* or Kazakh variants), or interdisciplinary approaches combining linguistics, anthropology, and cognitive poetics to examine how these devices evolve in contemporary retellings or digital adaptations. Such extensions would further illuminate the dynamic interplay between language, culture, and national identity in epic traditions.

Conclusion. National characteristics of metaphors and epithets in *Beowulf* and *Alpamysh* vividly illustrate the profound influence of cultural, historical, and environmental contexts on epic language. English metaphors, dominated by kennings, encapsulate a Germanic worldview marked by confrontation with hostile nature, individual valor, and fatalistic acceptance of transience, as seen in expressions like “whale-road” and “battle-sweat” that underscore peril and martial glory. Uzbek metaphors and epithets, conversely, draw from nomadic steppe life to evoke resilience, communal solidarity, and harmonious integration with the natural world—through animal symbolism (eagles, wolves, lions), vibrant color imagery (“green-blue world”), and aphoristic wisdom that promotes endurance and justice.

These distinctions highlight not only divergences shaped by feudal warrior societies versus mobile tribal structures but also shared universal functions: elevating heroes, mnemonic reinforcement in oral traditions, and the transmission of ethical values across generations. By encoding national ethos—stoic individualism in *Beowulf* versus optimistic collectivism in *Alpamysh*—these devices serve as dynamic cultural archives, adapting ancient narratives to sustain identity amid change.

This comparative exploration contributes to broader literary scholarship by demonstrating the adaptability of figurative language in preserving heritage while bridging cross-cultural understandings. Future research could extend to additional Turkic epics (e.g., *Manas*) or incorporate linguistic analyses of original texts to further illuminate how metaphors and epithets evolve in response to globalization and modernization, affirming the enduring power of epic poetry in reflecting human diversity and unity.

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