

PROVERBS AND IDIOMS AMONG TURKS IN NORTH MACEDONIA: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS WITH KOSOVO AND TURKISH VARIANTS

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Abstract: *The present study compiled the oral cultural products of Turks living in North Macedonia. This research was supported by the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TÜBİTAK), Scientist Support Programs Presidency. The study aimed to collect and record oral folkloric materials. For this purpose, interviews were conducted with Turks residing in various regions of North Macedonia. Approval for these interviews was obtained from the Research and Publication Ethics Committee of International Vizyon University, in accordance with the decision dated 24.10.2020. During the interviews, 54 informants were asked to perform manias and folk songs. In addition, idioms and proverbs that emerged during their speech were also recorded. In this way, proverbs and idioms were compiled from the Turks living in the city of Gostivar in the Republic of North Macedonia. Previous studies and compilation works on the subject were also examined. According to our findings, the 9 proverbs and 17 idioms compiled in this study had not been previously documented. Thus, a total of 26 oral cultural products are being published for the first time with this research. These proverbs and idioms were compared with their counterparts in Kosovo and Turkey. To identify the Kosovo variants, relevant literature was reviewed, and interviews were conducted with Turks living in Kosovo. Approval for these interviews was obtained from the Research and Publication Ethics Committee of Ukshin Hoti Prizren University, in line with the decision dated 30.12.2022. As a result of the comparative analysis, it was determined that only 1 of the 9 proverbs compiled from the Republic of North Macedonia was also used by Turks living in the Republic of Kosovo, whereas 8 of them were found to be in use among Turks in Turkey. Similarly, only 6 of the 17 idioms recorded in North Macedonia were found among Turks in Kosovo, while 5 were identified among Turks in Turkey. These findings challenge the prevailing assumption that Turks in North Macedonia predominantly adopt their proverbs and idioms from Turkey, mainly due to exposure to Turkish television channels and y, the results demonstrate that linguistic and cultural differences among the Turks in these regions continue to persist.*

Keywords: *proverb; idiom; Turkish culture; Kosovo Turks; Northern Macedonian Turks.*

Introduction

The Republic of North Macedonia and the Republic of Kosovo are Balkan regions that remained under the rule of the Ottoman Empire for many centuries. These two ancient geographical areas, which began to come under Ottoman control at the end of the 14th century, have been shaped by Turkish

cultural influence since the 15th century. Consequently, many ethnic groups—particularly Turks, Albanians, Macedonians, and Serbs—lived together peacefully for centuries within the geographical boundaries of these neighboring countries. Naturally, this coexistence facilitated cultural exchange, and as a result of this centuries-long process, linguistic and cultural structures emerged that gradually acquired a more homogeneous character. Each ethnic group has strived to preserve its unique cultural and linguistic identity. Following the nationalist movements that began in the 19th century, new states emerged. Additional states and demographic structures were established after the Balkan Wars (1911–1912) in the early 20th century and the First World War (1914–1918). These periods represented some of the most challenging times for various ethnic groups, as they endeavored to maintain their cultural, religious, and linguistic existence. Throughout these political struggles for state formation, the Turks living in North Macedonia and Kosovo sought to sustain their presence in the regions they inhabited and succeeded in preserving their cultural heritage. During this challenging process, language—with its inherently dynamic nature—and the oral cultural elements that constitute an integral part of it were inevitably affected by change (İğci, 2009, p. 1175). It can be argued that, alongside the structural differences in the Turkish spoken by Turks in these two neighboring countries, folkloric elements such as proverbs and idioms embedded within the language have also been influenced by these transformations.

The Republic of North Macedonia has a multi-ethnic structure. In this Macedonian-majority country, Albanians and Turks constitute the most densely populated minority groups. Within the scope of a post-doctoral research scholarship application to TÜBİTAK, a project was initiated to compile the oral culture of the Turks living in the region¹. Following the approval of this application, oral cultural materials were collected over six months, between September 15, 2020, and March 15, 2021. To conduct this research, approval was obtained from the Research and Publication Ethics Committee of International Vizyon University in line with the decision dated 24.10.2020. During the fieldwork, numerous individuals of Turkish origin were interviewed. In the course of these interviews, folk songs and *mânîs* (a form of folk poetry composed in a heptasyllabic meter, typically with rhyme in the first, second, and fourth lines) were primarily compiled. In addition, the proverbs and idioms used spontaneously in everyday speech by the Turks were also recorded. These data were subsequently compared with existing

¹ Scholarship title: "Compilation of Turkish Oral Culture Products in Macedonia and Transforming These Products into Cultural Coding Texts", Scholarship Supporting Organization: TÜBİTAK 2219- Abroad Post-Doctoral Research Scholarship Program, Application No: 1059B191900519, Date: 15.09.2020-15.03.2021.

studies.² As a result of these comparisons, it was determined that the 9 proverbs and 18 idioms published in our study had not been previously documented. Accordingly, further research was undertaken to determine whether these 9 proverbs and 18 idioms, compiled from the speech of Turks in the Republic of North Macedonia, had equivalents among Turks living in Kosovo and in Turkey. This evaluation was carried out thematically. The proverbs and idioms were also examined through web-based and written sources in order to identify whether Turks used the expressions analyzed comparatively in Turkey.

One of the reasons for conducting a thematic analysis of the proverbs and idioms compiled from Turks in North Macedonia with those used by Turks in Kosovo is the geographical proximity of the two regions. Another reason is the TÜBİTAK-supported project carried out to document oral culture in Kosovo. Through this study, the proverbs and idioms compiled in North Macedonia were presented to Turks living in the Republic of Kosovo.³ Approval for these interviews was obtained from the Research and Publication Ethics Committee of “Ukshin Hoti” Prizren University, in line with the decision dated 30.12.2022. In both countries, the interview method was employed as the principal research technique.⁴

In North Macedonia, compilations were carried out in the city of Gostivar, where approximately 12% of the population is of Turkish origin. Prior to the compilation process, a literature review was conducted. This review included theses on “proverbs” and “idioms” from the Council of Higher Education of Turkey (YÖK) thesis database, symposium proceedings on folklore research in the region, and the publication of Hamdi Hasan (1997), who had previously conducted compilation studies on the subject. In addition, the proverbs and idioms compiled in this study were searched via the Google search engine to determine whether they had already been documented in the literature. To determine the versions of these proverbs and idioms in Kosovo, which had not been previously recorded, another literature review was conducted. For this purpose, relevant theses in the YÖK database, symposium proceedings on regional folklore research, and especially the publication of Nimetullah Hafız (1985), who carried out compilation work on the subject, were examined. Proverbs and idioms not identified in written sources were presented to local informants to investigate whether they had equivalents in

² Uğurlu (2020a; 2020b; 2021a; 2021b; 2021c; 2022).

³ Scholarship title "Collection of Turkish Oral Culture Products in Kosovo and Structural and Thematic Analysis of These Compiled Products", Scholarship Supporting Organization: TÜBİTAK 2219- Abroad Post-Doctoral Research Scholarship Program, Application No: 1059B192201005, Date: 15.10.2022-15.04.2023.

⁴ The interviewees are listed in the *Works Cited*, which specifies which oral culture product was compiled from each source.

Kosovo. These informants were selected from among Turks living in Prizren, a city with a significant Turkish population. Thus, the scope of the study was defined with resource person limitations: Turks living in the city of Gostivar in the Republic of North Macedonia and Turks living in the city of Prizren in the Republic of Kosovo.

1. Some Considerations on Proverbs and Idioms

According to the dictionary of the Turkish Language Society (TDK), a proverb (*atasözü*) and an idiom (*deyim*)—which is sometimes used as a proverb (Aranyosi, 2010, p. 11)—are defined as “a saying, parable, or argument that has been established through long trials and observations and has become public property” (TDK Dictionary). Proverbs and idioms embody a complete set of conceptual compositions derived from past experiences, similes, metaphors, allusions, and contrasts. The strength of proverbs derives from their patterned sentence structures, rooted in literary artistry, and characterized by brevity and conciseness (Elçin, 2010, p. 626). Longer proverbs are rare; they generally consist of one or two sentences, convey rich meaning, and provide advice through the articulation of a definitive judgment (Hatipoğlu, 1964, p. 468).

Although proverbs and idioms are sometimes confused with each other, idioms possess a fundamentally different structure from proverbs (Yalçın, 2002, p. V). According to Bahadanlı (1971, p. 5), an idiom is “a unit of expression composed of two or more words, which usually conveys a new meaning other than its literal sense and enhances the beauty of writing or speech.” Similarly, the TDK dictionary defines an idiom as “a stereotyped phrase, generally consisting of more than one word, that conveys a figurative meaning somewhat different from its literal one” (TDK Dictionary). Both proverbs and idioms strictly adhere to the principle of concise expression and are valued for their artistic qualities (Koç, 2002, p. 375).

As products of folk literature, proverbs and idioms function as vehicles for transmitting intangible cultural heritage (Oğuz, 2013, p. 153). While they share common features, they also differ in significant respects. The study of Agile highlights these similarities and differences as follows:

Similar Aspects of Proverbs and Idioms

1. Both proverbs and idioms are concise linguistic constructions, characterized by brevity and clarity.

2. Some proverbs and idioms may include stereotypes; however, these can be adapted to different circumstances, provided that such adaptations remain within reasonable limits.
3. The majority of proverbs and idioms convey figurative rather than literal meanings, encapsulating the essence of their component ideas in a condensed form.
4. Many proverbs and idioms trace their origins to stories or elements of folk literature.
5. Proverbs and idioms are often anonymous, as they have been shaped collectively by people across different times and places.
6. Most proverbs and idioms possess rhythmic qualities, often resembling rhymed or patterned expressions (Agile, 2006, pp. 57–58).

Different Aspects of Proverbs and Idioms

1. Proverbs function as general rules that provide advice or moral guidance. Idioms, by contrast, do not possess the nature of general rules and are not intended to offer advice. Relatively, idioms are fixed expression patterns used to convey a concept in a vivid, attractive, and compelling manner.
2. Proverbs are generally structured as sentences that express a judgment, although there are some elliptical examples. Idioms, on the other hand, are most often not complete sentences but fixed word groups.
3. Proverbs are clear and easily recognizable expressions; thus, when a proverb is used in context, it is usually understood by nearly everyone. Idioms, however, are more frequently embedded within sentences and are often inflected or absorbed into the flow of speech. While they convey their intended meaning, they are not always perceived as independent, self-contained expressions.
4. Idioms tend to be used more frequently than proverbs. Even if one does not employ any proverbs in daily speech, idioms are often used unconsciously in everyday communication (Agile, 2006, pp. 57–58).

The proverbs and idioms compiled within the scope of our research were classified by taking into account the points outlined above. This approach was necessary because the informants used proverbs and idioms in sentences without distinguishing their specific types. Each proverb and idiom was recorded immediately as it was spoken. After compiling all the collected expressions, they were examined through both the existing literature and electronic sources. Those that had not been previously documented were published within the framework of this study.

2. Proverbs and Idioms Compiled from Turks Living in the Republic of North Macedonia and Their Equivalents among Turks in Kosovo and Turkey

Within the scope of this research, efforts were made to determine the versions of the proverbs and idioms used by Turks in North Macedonia and Kosovo that are also found in Turkey. Considering the geographical proximity of Kosovo and North Macedonia, it is natural that the Turks living in both countries have preserved linguistic and cultural elements that are closely related. Turks in these regions generally believe that younger, middle-aged, and older generations alike maintain their sense of Turkish national identity (Elmas, 2014, p. 146). Given the strong historical, cultural, and emotional ties of these communities with Turkey, which they regard as their homeland, it is to be expected that their oral cultural elements display similarities.

Additionally, Turks from Kosovo and North Macedonia frequently travel to Turkey for both commercial and familial reasons. Higher education is another significant factor motivating these visits. In the present day, with the widespread use of electronic communication networks, close bonds of cultural and linguistic interaction are sustained among Turks living in these three geographies. Furthermore, the global cultural influence of Turkey—particularly through its highly successful television series sector—contributes to the strengthening of linguistic and oral cultural similarities. For these reasons, it was anticipated that the oral cultural elements of Turks in these three different countries would be closely aligned.

The classification below presents the oral cultural elements of the same ethnic groups living in different countries. The first column presents the proverbs and idioms compiled from Turks living in the Republic of North Macedonia, which had not been previously documented. The second column indicates whether these proverbs and idioms have equivalents among Turks in the Republic of Kosovo. For this part, support was obtained from Turks residing in Prizren, and the data were confirmed through interviews. The third column demonstrates whether the proverbs and idioms compiled from North Macedonia and Kosovo exist in the language of Turks living in Turkey. Unlike the other two columns, this information was derived exclusively from written sources. In other words, the equivalence of these oral culture products in Turkey was established through a review of the literature. As a result, a comparative thematic analysis of proverbs and idioms, compiled as oral cultural products from Turks living in three different countries, was carried out as follows:

The proverbs and idioms compiled from the Republic of North Macedonia, listed in the first column of the table, represent original products of oral culture that have not previously appeared in any source and are presented for the first time within the scope of this study. The second column indicates whether these oral cultural products have equivalents among Turks living in Kosovo. In other words, it shows whether the proverbs and idioms compiled in North Macedonia are also in use among the Turkish population of Kosovo. The third column demonstrates whether these proverbs and idioms have equivalents among Turks living in Turkey, based on written sources. The final column provides thematic interpretations of the collected oral culture products.

As a result of this study, 9 proverbs and 17 idioms—a total of 26 oral cultural products previously unrecorded were compiled from Turks living in the city of Gostivar in the Republic of North Macedonia. These were then compared with their counterparts in Kosovo and Turkey. The comparative analysis revealed that only 2 of the 9 proverbs (nos. 3 and 4) collected in North Macedonia were also used by Turks living in the Republic of Kosovo, while 6 of them (nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, and 7) were in use in the Republic of Turkey. Similarly, only 7 of the 17 idioms (nos. 3, 4, 5, 12, 14, 15, and 16) compiled in North Macedonia were found among Turks in Kosovo, and 6 of them (nos. 3, 5, 7, 8, 14, and 15) were identified as being used in the Republic of Turkey.

Conclusion

In the Balkan Geography, various ethnic groups have lived in this region for centuries. Especially with the arrival of Turks from the Ottoman Empire in the 14th century, a multi-ethnic structure consisting of Albanians, Serbs, Macedonians, Bosnians, Roma, and Turks coexisted in the Balkans for nearly six centuries. As a result of this coexistence, the languages and cultures of each ethnic community influenced one another. Nevertheless, Turks living in different parts of this geography were shaped both by mutual interaction and by the cultural and linguistic distinctions that emerged from residing in separate regions. The Turks living in the city of Gostivar in the Republic of North Macedonia and those living in the city of Prizren in Kosovo exemplify this situation. Within the scope of our study, the similarities and differences in the current use of proverbs and idioms among Turks living in these regions, as well as among Turks in Turkey, were investigated.

Proverbs and idioms compiled from Turks living in Gostivar were compared with earlier research and compilation studies. As a result, 9 proverbs and 17 idioms that had not been previously documented were published for the first time within this study. A comparative thematic analysis

of the compiled proverbs revealed that some proverbs (nos. 3 and 4) used by Turks in North Macedonia are identical to those used in Turkey Turkish. Others (nos. 1 and 2) were found to exist in abbreviated forms, while additional examples (nos. 5, 6, 7, and 9) had been shortened or altered from their original versions.

When the idioms were evaluated, it was observed that certain idioms (nos. 3, 7, 8, 14, and 15) from North Macedonia were used in the same way in Turkey. In contrast, others (nos. 1 and 6) had changed abbreviations or differentiation from their original forms. These findings contradict the widespread assumption that Turks in North Macedonia derive their proverbs and idioms directly from Turkey, simply because they frequently watch Turkish TV channels and series.

Our research demonstrates that the oral cultural heritage of Turks in Macedonia, Kosovo, and Turkey is not identical. Although modern tools such as social media and electronic communication have facilitated cultural contact across geographic distances, they have not eliminated linguistic and cultural differences. Turks in Kosovo and North Macedonia continue to regard Turkey as their homeland, often traveling there, maintaining family ties, and following Turkish television programs. However, despite these ongoing connections, cultural and linguistic distinctions remain. The geographical and cultural environment in which communities live is the most decisive factor shaping and differentiating ethnic groups. Even though Gostivar and Prizren are geographically close, the linguistic and cultural differences among the Turks living in these cities continue to persist.

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