

Publication Data:

M. Kirchner, 'On some stylistic features of Kazakh proverbs', *EJOS*, VI (2003), No. 17, 1–5.

ISSN 0928-6802

This article was originally published in M. Vandamme & H. Boeschoten, *Utrecht Papers on Central Asia. Proceedings of the First European Seminar on Central Asian Studies held at Utrecht, 16–18 December 1985* (=Utrecht Turkological Series, No. 2), Utrecht 1987, 223–228.

© Copyright 1987 Marc Vandamme; copyright 2003 *EJOS*.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, translated, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronical, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of EJOS.

On some stylistic features of Kazakh proverbs *Mark Kirchner (Mainz)*

The following study, which deals chiefly with the question of alliteration in Kazakh proverbs, is based on the analysis of 500 units taken from two manuscripts in the Kazakh language and Arab script. The two manuscripts proceed from Kazakh refugees and are very similar to the materials published by S. Çağatay.¹

Alliteration is the association of sounds of words with the same initial sound;² stave rhyme is the specific form of alliteration found in the Germanic languages. This form of alliteration is governed by a number of rules. Even in the earliest known periods of the Turkic languages, alliteration is evident. Mention must be made of I.V. Stebleva's attempt to identify elements of alliteration underlying other stylistic features in the Old-Turkic runic inscriptions,³ as well as of Peter Zieme's examination of the stave rhyme poetry of the Old Uighurs.⁴ On the question of whether Turkic alliteration is indigenous or a borrowing from Mongolian, I refer the reader to the arguments given by G. Doerfer in *Fundamenta II* in his article on the literature of the Turks of south Siberia.⁵

In the following I shall distinguish between two types of alliteration: What I call *horizontal alliteration* affects only the verse (line) and has no influence on other lines within a strophe. The German proverb "Wer rastet, der rostet" typifies our definition of horizontal alliteration. *Vertical alliteration*, on the other hand, is the connection of sounds of words with the same initial sound within a strophe, usually the beginning of a verse. That is the form of alliteration used in the Buddhist poetry of the Uighurs.⁶ When the initial sound is a consonant and the sound following it is identical, I call it *extended alliteration*. This form is described by Doerfer as genuine alliteration: "Um ein deutsches Beispiel zu wählen: Tat und Tod würden in der südsibirischen Dichtung (auch in der alttürkischen, mongolischen und mandschurischen) keinen Stabreim ergeben, wohl aber Tat und Tal."⁷ Only the change of *ö/ü* and *o/u* would be permissible and would produce an impure stave rhyme, all other major deviations would be "epigonale Korruption und volks-literarische Nachlässigkeit."

Whereas alliteration plays an important part in the poetry of the Yakuts⁸ and the Turks of south Siberia, it seems, that it is unsystematical and less important further to

¹ Çağatay, Saadet. *Kazakça Metinler*. Ankara, 1961.

² Behrmann, Alfred. *Einführung in die Analyse von Verstexten*. Stuttgart, 1970.

³ Stebleva, I.V. *Poezija Tjurkov (VI–VIII vekov)*. Moskva, 1965, 27 ff.

⁴ Zieme, Peter. "Zur buddhistischen Stabreimdichtung der alten Uiguren". *AOH* 29(2), 197–211 (1975).

⁵ Doerfer, Gerhard. *Die Literatur der Türken Südsibiriens*, p. 867–869.

⁶ Zieme, P. 1975, 198 ff.

⁷ *Fundamenta II*. Wiesbaden 1964, 866.

⁸ *Ibid.*

the west, in areas inhabited by Islamicised Turkic peoples, as Kowalski established it for the Ottoman, Tatar and New-Uighur languages.⁹ Since the Kazakh proverb material does not usually exceed two verses, it is impossible to decide in many cases whether an alliteration is accidental or intentional; this should be taken into consideration, especially in the case of common initial sounds like *ž-* (from *y-*). In his analysis of alliteration in the poems of the Kazakh national writer Abay Qunanbayev, Hřebíček applied a quantitative method; this led him to the conclusion, that the rate of alliteration in the writer's own poems exceeds that in the translation from the Russian done by the same author.¹⁰ From significant differences in the realization of alliteration in these two different categories, it is possible to conclude that this is not a chance-phenomenon. Proceeding from that premise, I chose to compare Ottoman proverbs with the Kazakh. Even if the data are insufficient for statistical purposes, it helps us, through showing differences in the distribution of the phenomenon, to recognize its structures and outlines.

Outside the language of poetry traces of alliteration are to be found, too, in the so-called "pairwords", for example: *kiyim-kešek* 'dress', *žaman-žuman* 'useless stuff', *köylek-konšek* 'light dress' and *zorlıq-zombılıq* 'suppression'. Such pairwords are found not only in other contemporary Turkic languages, such as Tatar,¹¹ but, for example, also in Old Uighur.¹² The Kazakh material I dealt with, in addition to the amount of alliteration which cannot be classified and is perhaps merely accidental, contains a considerable number of proverbs with extended alliteration, i.e. alliteration of the first two sounds of the words involved. As I did not count lexical parallelism and parallelism of the root, the number of proverbs obtained in this way cannot be explained by random alliteration. There are about as many proverbs with expanded alliteration as with end-rhyme. It would be possible to divide them into those with two participating elements and those with more than two. Similarly, there are proverbs in which alliterating words are placed side by side, and others in which they are separated from each other. There do not appear to be any rules determining the use of the different types of extended alliteration. Nevertheless the combination of different stylistic features results in many unique artistic creations, which cannot be assigned to a particular group. In the following example we find horizontal alliteration in the first and second lines. The two verses are connected through vertical alliteration and the parallelism of both predicates:

*Žaman Žasaqqa žaramaydı
želinsaw qoy qosaqqa žaramaydı*

⁹ Kowalski, Tadeusz. *Zo studjow nad formą, poezji ludow tureckich*. Krakau, 1921. 174, 176–177, 178.

¹⁰ Hřebíček, L. "Alliterations in Abay Kunanbaev's Poetry". *AO* 35, 67–72 (1965).

¹¹ Schönig, Claus. *Wortecho und Echowort im Tatarischen*. Manuscript, p.2.

¹² Çağatay, Saadet. *Uygurcada Hendiadyoinler. Türk Lehçeleri üzerine Denemeler*. Ankara, 1968, 34–35.

The bad one is not fit for military service;
the sheep with a sick udder is not fit for milking.

In the next example we see horizontal and vertical expanded alliteration in combination with lexical and morphological parallelism:

Žonğa salsaŋ žüyrik
žolğa salsaŋ zorğa

Take a quick horse for the steppe
and a pacer for the road.

In contrast to the first mentioned proverb, in the second the number of syllables is equal in both verses. In the following proverb horizontal expanded alliteration is combined with an assonance on *o*:

Qoydın süti qoğasın
qoydı soqqan oñbasın

One should protect the milk of a sheep;
someone who beats a sheep should fail.

Vertical alliteration in both its forms, the expanded and the normal, does not play an important role in the Kazakh proverb. This becomes clear when a comparison is made with Tuvan material. In a random sample taken from a Tuvan collection,¹³ half of the Tuvan proverbs were seen to have vertical alliteration, whereas this is comparatively rare in the Kazakh material and mostly occurs in combination with horizontal alliteration. For example:

Köbik qarğa tülki oynar
kök körpege žılqı oynar

The fox plays on the new fallen snow;
the horse plays on the green meadow.

A comparison with Ottoman material (I took a random sample of 200 proverbs)¹⁴ shows, that in this language both horizontal expanded alliteration and vertical alliteration are less frequent. The rate of horizontal expanded alliteration in the Ottoman material is less than 5%, whereas in the Kazakh proverbs, excluding all forms of parallelism it is more than 10%. In both Kazakh and Turkish, vertical alliteration does not play any considerable role. Although it is one of the stylistic features of the Tuvan proverb, it can be excluded for these other two languages.

¹³ Xadaxane, M. and Sagan-ool, O. *Tuvinskio poslovicy i pogovorki*. Kyzyl, 1966.

¹⁴ Aksoy, Ömer Asım. *Atasözleri ve Deyimler Sözlüğü*. Ankara, 1978.

In Kazakh we can establish a special sub-group of horizontal alliteration which only appears in the first two words of a line. There is a significant high frequency of examples of this type:

Toqtı toymas – šömiš keppes

The lamb is never sated; the ladle never dries.

Küysiz kölik žügirmes

Neglected horses do not run.

This sub-group of alliteration is usually found within short proverbs of one verse (line). The fact that, for Turkish proverbs too, there are many proverbs with such features leads to the conclusion that this phenomenon is related to the above-mentioned pairwords. On examination of those Kazakh proverbs which show only the basic (not the expanded) type of alliteration, it is possible to distinguish between those where alliteration might be accidental and some types in which alliteration is used for reasons of euphony. Special mention should be made of the group of proverbs in which every word (or nearly every word) has the same initial sound:

Eñbek etseñ emersiñ

If you work you will learn.

Ögizdi örge aydağannıñ ömiri öksiydi

The life of someone who drives an ox uphill will be hard.

Because the above-mentioned proverbs have vocalic anlaut, they fit into the definition of alliteration given by Doerfer. As regards those with consonant anlaut, which do not fit into that definition, nevertheless alliteration appears to be a stylistic feature.

Tulpar tübin tabar

The racing horse finds its own kind.

Last, but not least, the change of alliteration within one proverb must be mentioned. In the following example alliterations are interlocked:

Oynaqtayan bota ot basadı

The playing baby camel tramples down the grass.

More frequently the following type, with two groups of alliteration placed side by side, is to be found. Sometimes it is distributed between two verses or lines:

*Astındayı atıña
qoynındayı qatınıña senbe*

Do not believe in the horse under you;
do not believe in the wife in your arms.

In Turkic material examples with the same initial sound throughout the proverb, or with change of alliteration, are extremely rare. Regarding the relatively high frequency of these forms in Kazakh, we may assume that they belong to the euphonic repertoire of that language. The conclusion reached as a result of this investigation is that alliteration in Kazakh proverbs is as important as, for example, end-rhyme.

Alliteration, rhyme and the equality of the number of syllables in one verse are amongst the means used to achieve euphony in that language. Two types of alliteration can be distinguished: 1) expanded horizontal alliteration; 2) horizontal alliteration embracing the whole proverb. Quantitatively the first type is dominant. Its stylistic features are more distinct, and random alliteration can be excluded. The second type, on the contrary, seems to be the product of unsystematical play with language. Though none of the established forms have the universality of the vertical alliteration of the Tuvan proverb, these forms are nevertheless more common than in Ottoman proverbs. Further investigation, especially in other fields of folk literature, could help to produce a more complete picture of the frequency rate of alliteration in Kazakh and the other languages of that area.