

## Friends, enemies, and fools: A collection of Uyghur proverbs

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*Erning körki saqal, sözning körki maqal.*

A beard is the beauty of a man; proverbs are the beauty of speech.

**Abstract:** This article presents two groups of Uyghur proverbs on the topics of friendship and wisdom, to my knowledge only the second set of Uyghur proverbs published with English translation (after Mahmut & Smith-Finley 2016). It begins with a brief introduction of Uyghur language and culture, then a description of Uyghur proverb styles, then the two sets of proverbs, and finally a few concluding comments.

Key words: Proverb, Uyghur, folly, wisdom, friend, enemy

### 1. Introduction

Uyghur is spoken by about 10 million people, mostly in northwest China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. It is a Turkic language, most closely related to Uzbek and Salar, but also sharing similarity with its neighbors Kazakh and Kyrgyz. The lexicon is composed of about 50% old Turkic roots, 40% relatively old borrowings from Arabic and Persian, and 6% from Russian and 2% from Mandarin (Nadzhip 1971; since then, the Russian and Mandarin borrowings have presumably seen a slight increase due to increased language contact, especially with Mandarin).

The grammar is generally head-final, with default SOV clause structure, A-N noun phrases, and postpositions. Stress is typically word-final. Its phoneme inventory includes eight vowels and 24 consonants. The phonology includes vowel harmony in both roots and suffixes, which is sensitive to rounded/unrounded (labial harmony) and front/back (palatal harmony), consonant harmony across suffixes, which is sensitive to voiced/unvoiced and front/back distinctions; and frequent devoicing of high vowels (see Comrie 1997 and Hahn 1991 for details). In terms of grammar, nouns decline for six grammatical cases and have a single plural suffix, but are not inflected for gender; and verbs inflect for three persons and singular-plural, plus a variety of tense, aspect, and voice categories. The morphology is agglutinative, using various suffixes and clitics to make the above-mentioned grammatical forms. Little work has been done on higher-level linguistic structure, such as discourse structure or finer points of syntax.

Culturally the Uyghurs are similar to other nearby Central Asian people groups. They are almost entirely Muslim, with varying levels of devoutness. Clothing is typically modest, with long shirts and pants for men and long dresses with sleeves for women. Men traditionally wear hats and women headscarves. Uyghur cuisine includes beef and mutton, with bread or rice pilaf as a staple, and a variety of fruits such as melons, grapes, and figs, which grow in the arid climate of Xinjiang. Most of Xinjiang's cities are located around the outskirts of the vast Teklimakan Desert. Xinjiang was an important stop on the Silk Road and still represents the point of contact between China and Central Asia. Traditional occupations include agriculture, a variety of crafts, and trade, but urban areas are modernizing quickly. Uyghur culture fosters more individuality and independence than do some cultures farther east, but there is also a strong sense of family and moral duty.

The only other study of Uyghur proverbs published in English with English translations of the proverbs that I am aware of is Mahmut & Smith-Finley (2016). This work is a corpus study that surveyed a couple of Uyghur-language collections of proverbs and extracted all the proverbs dealing with male and female gender roles or stereotypes, and then classified them by content to give a picture of what Uyghur traditional wisdom has to say about the genders. Representative examples for each category were translated and discussed, but a comprehensive listing was not included.<sup>1</sup>

This collection focuses on the themes of friendship and wisdom, presenting a dozen proverbs on each theme. Each proverb is given first in Uyghur, accompanied by an English translation that attempts to render both the meaning and some sense of the feel or sound of the original. Uyghur is written in an Arabic script in China and a Cyrillic script in the former Soviet republics; here I use a Latin script, which, though not widely in use, will be more readable for an English-speaker. Below the proverb and translation is a more detailed breakdown with a morpheme-by-morpheme gloss, which should give a sense of the original word order and linguistic structure. After that I give some comments about the meaning, literary style, or linguistic features.

The proverbs in this collection come from two sources. Some were collected through discussions with Uyghur people I know. Others were drawn from *Uyghur Xelq Maqal-Temsiliri* (Uyghur Folk Sayings and Proverbs) by Abliz Emet (2013), a Uyghur-language collection of 1800 Uyghur proverbs. An earlier work by Emet (2008) contains even more proverbs, sometimes with longer explanations. The 2013 edition is designed for use in primary and middle-school curricula. It was chosen for its simple explanations and because it specifies the type of each proverb. A number of proverbs suggested by my friends also appear in this book. I owe much thanks to one friend in particular for his help in selecting proverbs, clarifying meanings, and answering questions as I wrote this article.

## 2. Proverbs in Uyghur

Uyghur proverbs can be divided into two types, *maqal* and *temsil*. Proverbs or sayings in general can be referred to by hyphenating the two terms together, *maqal-temsilliri*. A *maqal* is a saying that makes a point more or less directly. It may involve some simile or metaphor, but the target domain (such as a certain type of person) is usually stated directly. A *temsil* typically uses images, often animals or other things from nature, and does not make direct reference to certain kinds of people or directly describe abstract concepts like wisdom. It makes an oblique statement that requires a little more thought to understand. The word *temsil* also means ‘analogy’ or ‘parable.’ A few examples should clarify the difference between *maqal* and *temsil*. The first two are *maqal*.

- (1) Exlaq adem zinniti.  
Virtue is the jewel of a person.
- (2) Hurunning etisi tola.  
The lazy man has a lot of tomorrows.

These two proverbs are relatively straightforward and mean more or less what they say. Example (2) is mildly metaphorical, but it is not hard to link “a lot of tomorrows” with procrastination. The next two examples are *temsil*.

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<sup>1</sup> Karaman (2016) also examines the portrayal of women in Uyghur proverbs, but the article is in Turkish.

- (3) *Ëyitqan söz—atqan oq.*  
A spoken word—a bullet fired.
- (4) *Qagha balam ap’aq; kirpe balam yumshaq*  
The crow says, “My baby is white”; the hedgehog says, “My baby is soft.”

Example (3) does state the target domain (i.e., words that have been spoken), but the metaphor is left to the reader to interpret—namely, that once a word is spoken it cannot be retracted. Example (4) illustrates the maxim that everyone sees their own child as perfect, despite any of the child’s actual flaws or naughtiness. A crow’s baby is obviously black, but the crow itself sees it as white; the hedgehog’s young is just as spiny as the parent, but it seems soft.<sup>2</sup> The point is not stated directly, but it becomes clear with some reflection.

The *maqal-temsil* distinction is based on the content of the proverb, not the form. In terms of form, many Uyghur proverbs are short, simple sentences with one or perhaps two clauses, as in ((1)) and (2) above. Other proverbs are expressed in a special kind of rhymed couplet typically consisting of two contrasting topic-comment pairs. The topics are often opposite, like ‘friend’ and ‘enemy,’ or ‘fool’ and ‘wise,’ and the comments are opposite or at least contrasting. The two lines are parallel in structure and often nearly identical except for the words that create the contrast. The first words in the two lines, expressing the topics, can sound entirely different, or they may sound alike. The two words at the end of the two lines, forming the crux of the comment, must rhyme usually in at least two syllables; they often differ only in a single sound at the beginning of the word. Other words earlier in the line may also rhyme or be similar in sound. In some proverbs the two lines end with the same word; in this case, it can be dropped from the second line for increased pithiness. This form of proverb does not have a particular name in Uyghur; it would simply be noted as a proverb with rhyme (*qapiye*). Example (5) illustrates this type.

- (5) *Baliliq öy bazar;*  
*balisiz öy mazar.*  
A home full of children is a bazaar;  
a childless home, a tomb.

The parallelism and pithiness of this form can be observed here. The two lines are identical except for the suffixes on the first word and the first consonant of the last word. The first word is ‘child’ plus a suffix which derives an adjective from a noun—in the first line, a suffix meaning something like ‘-ful’ and in the second line a suffix like ‘-less’. These two words create the contrast of opposites—with and without children—and the last two words contrast the result. The last words *bazar* and *mazar* are two unrelated noun roots that coincidentally happen to sound almost alike; their selection for a rhymed proverb, of course, is not coincidence.

Example (5) is a *maqal*, but both *maqal* and *temsil* can be expressed using this parallel form. Uyghur literary aesthetic seems to appreciate rhyme and wordplay. Another brilliant example involving wordplay is the proverb just below the title of this article, repeated here:

<sup>2</sup> Thanks to Pete Unseth for noting that similar proverbs exist in other languages across Asia: Assyrian (Dinkha and Bitshamoon 2004: 220) “The hedgehog says, ‘No one is softer than my baby’”; Turkmen (Iraq) (Mustafa and Moosa 2008: 144) “The hedgehog says, ‘No one is smoother than my baby’”; Dari (Afghanistan); (Wilson 2004: 19) “A porcupine speaking to its baby says, “O, my child of velvet”; and Korean (Ha 1970:77) “The hedgehog thinks his young are soft and sleek.”

- (6) Erning körki saqal,  
sözning körki maqal.  
A beard is the beauty of a man; proverbs are the beauty of speech.

Not only is this proverb pithy, rhymed, and perfectly parallel, but there is a pun on the last word *maqal*. A *maqal* is a proverb, but the word has another unrelated sense—a small patch of beard just below a man’s lower lip (a “soul patch” in American lingo). More loosely translated, then, it runs something like: “As a man’s aesthetic is improved by a beard, so the aesthetic of speech is improved by a soul patch—I mean, by proverbs.”

I am told that Uyghur poetry also makes use of rhymed lines, either in couplets or interlocking ABAB structures. In a language with suffix-heavy agglutinative morphology it is not hard to find words ending with one or more identical syllables. In a further study it would be interesting to investigate whether a rhyming root word is also required for a “good” rhyme, or how often rhyme is created with suffixes versus bare roots.

### 3. Proverbs about Friends and Enemies

The first set of proverbs presented here deals with the topic of friends and enemies. Every proverb in this section includes the word *dost* ‘friend,’ which is an old word but still the same one used in everyday speech to refer to one’s friends. Most of the proverbs below also include the word *düşmen* ‘enemy’. The first four deal with the specific topic of what your friends and enemies say.

- (7) Dost keyningde maxtar,  
düşmen aldingda (maxtar).  
A friend praises you behind your back; an enemy only praises you in front of you.

dost keyn-ing-de maxtar, düşmen aldi-ng-da (maxtar).  
friend front-2SG-LOC praise enemy back-2SG-LOC (praise)

“This *maqal* tells us that a real friend never randomly praises you face-to-face; a false friend praises you before your face in order to get your secrets, giving you false praise and flattery” (Emet 2013: 168; translation mine, as for all subsequent quotations from Emet). The point of the proverb is not that friends never praise you to your face, but that enemies also do. The difference is that when you’re not there, friends can be trusted to continue saying good things about you, but enemies may be slandering you or plotting against you when you are absent. This is another nice example of the contrastive rhymed couplet. Friend and enemy are opposite topics, and praising you in front of you versus behind your back are opposite comments. The last word of the second line can be omitted, as it is the same as the last word in the first line.

- (8) Dost yighlitip ëytar,  
düşmen küldürüp (ëytar).  
A friend’s words make you cry; an enemy’s make you laugh.

dost yighl-it-ip ëytar, düşmen küld-ür-üp (ëytar)  
friend cry-CAUS-PART speak enemy laugh-CAUS-PART (speak)

“This *maqal* tells us that a well-intentioned man considerably gives advice, but a man of evil intentions is a yes-man, and will give you a lot of false praise” (Emet 2013: 166). The point here, similar to the previous proverb, is that you shouldn’t always trust pleasant words, as they may be intended to flatter you or win your trust for nefarious purposes. A true friend, on the other hand, may sometimes criticize you, but will be trustworthy. (Note: the version of this proverb listed in Emet (2013) has *aghritip* ‘cause you pain’ instead of *yighlitip* ‘make you cry’. The version cited above was given to me by a friend.)

- (9) Dostning atqan teshi bashni yarmas.  
A stone thrown by a friend won’t hurt your head.

dost-ning at-qan tesh-i bash-ni yar-mas.  
friend-GEN fire-PPART stone-3SG head-ACC hurt-NEG

“This *temsil* says that a sincere friend won’t spare your feelings; but his painful words will not do you harm” (Emet 2013: 168). This proverb goes nicely with the previous one about not ignoring a friend’s advice. It may be tempting to ignore criticism, but if it comes from a friend it may actually be helpful.

- (10) Dost sözini tashlima,  
tashlap beshingni qashlima.  
Don’t throw away your friend’s words; if you do, don’t be surprised at your misfortune.

dost söz-i-ni tashli-ma, tashla-p besh-ing-ni qashli-ma.  
friend word-3-ACC discard-NEG discard-PART head-2SG-ACC scratch-NEG

“This *maqal* says we should listen seriously to a true friend's well-intended advice, and tell us the importance of not thinking that we ourselves always know best” (Emet 2013: 167). If you ignore good advice, whatever happens to you is your own fault. This proverb rounds out the set of four on the words of friends and enemies. They exhibit tight parallelism, with a noun in accusative case as the second word and two rhyming negative imperative verbs as the last words in the two lines.

- (11) Düşmen siringni oghrilaydu,  
dost xatayingni toghrilaydu.  
An enemy steals your secrets; a friend corrects your mistakes.

düşmen sir-ing-ni oghril-ay-du, dost xatay-ing-ni toghril-ay-du.  
enemy secret-2SG-ACC steal-PRES-3 friend mistake-2SG-ACC correct-PRES-PRES.3

“This *maqal* tells us that evil-intentioned people always want to get hold of secret things or information, but pure-hearted, true friends want to help you amend your faults” (Emet 2013: 171). This proverb seems to be explaining why people are interested in getting to know you, or what their intention may be in learning information about you. Enemies have their own interests in mind, seeking ways to profit from what they learn about you, but friends have only your best interest in mind. Here again we see the typical parallel structure in the couplet. The verbs at the end of

the two lines rhyme in all four syllables, the difference being only a single word-initial letter.

- (12) Eqilsiz dosttin, eqilliq dushman jaxshi.  
A wise enemy is better than a foolish friend.

eqil-siz dost-tin, eqil-liq dushman jaxshi.  
wisdom-PRIV friend-ABL wisdom-ATT enemy good

This *maqal* tempers the advice of the previous proverbs with its warning that friends can sometimes be hazardous if they are fools. The words used for ‘wise’ and ‘foolish’ are derived from a single noun root using the same pair of adjective derivation suffixes seen in (5). This proverb was suggested by my students.

- (13) Dushmanimning dushmani mining dostum.  
The enemy of my enemy is my friend.

dushman-im-ning dushman-i mining dost-um.  
enemy-1SG-GEN enemy-3SG 1SG.GEN friend-1SG

This *maqal*, given by my students, expresses the oft-observed phenomenon that a common enemy can draw people together. The truth of this proverb can be observed in many situations at many levels, from simple experiences of shared adversity to large-scale geopolitical alliances. It features nice alliteration with the repetition of *d* and the nasal consonants *m*, *n*, and *ng*.

- (14) Dostunning könglini ayap boyumda qaldi.  
To avoid hurting my friend’s feelings, I got pregnant.

dost-um-ning köngl-i-ni ay-ap boy-um-da qal-di  
friend-1SG-GEN heart-3-ACC cherish-PART height-1SG-LOC stay-3

Friends can also be demanding and easily offended. This *maqal* describes a situation in which you go to absurd lengths to please a high-maintenance friend, who is still probably not satisfied even after all you did. Getting pregnant to preserve a friend’s easily injured feelings is a completely unreasonable accommodation—an effective use of hyperbole, or adynaton in cases when the proverb is invoked by men. The phrase *boyumda qaldi* is a polite circumlocution for having become pregnant. Literally it says “something remained on my stature,” referring to the increasing size of the expectant mother’s abdomen.

- (15) Piyazning posti tola,  
exmeqning dosti (tola).  
An onion has a lot of peel; a fool a lot of friends.

piyaz-ning post-i tola, exmeq-ning dost-i (tola).  
onion-GEN peel-3 many fool-GEN friend-3 (many)

“This *temsil* tells us the folly of naive people. A person who doesn't know the difference between good and bad people will just make friends indiscriminately with anyone he meets” (Emet 2013: 109). This proverb was suggested by several students, and it was given in several different versions, suggesting that it is still commonly quoted today.

- (16) Dostning köplüki eqil hem qudret.  
A multitude of friends is wisdom and strength.

dost-ning köplük-i eqil hem qudret.  
friend-GEN many-3 wisdom and strength

“This *temsil* tells us that there will be a time in life where every man is lacking something, but someone who has a lot of friends will always have enough money as well as other physical and moral wealth” (Emet 2013: 169). Comparing (9) and (16), we can see that having a lot of friends can be either a sign of folly or a sign of wisdom. It is not uncommon to find pairs of proverbs that give opposing advice for the same situation (for a Biblical example, see Proverbs 26:4-5). Doyle (2012) uses the term “counter proverbs” for opposing pairs like this.

- (17) Dost chillisa qalma,  
düşmen chillisa barma.  
If a friend invites you, don't miss it; if an enemy invites you, don't go.

dost chilli-sa qal-ma, düşhmen chilli-sa bar-ma  
friend invite-COND stay-NEG enemy invite-COND go-NEG

“This *maqal* tells us that for friends, affection is always the motivation, but for enemies, hatred and envy are the motive. A gathering of friends is intended to honor and respect you, so it would not do to miss it; a gathering of enemies can only be intended to mock or belittle you in a spirit of wicked jealousy, so there is no benefit in going” (Emet 2013: 167). The verb *chilla* ‘invite’ was originally used to describe the crowing of a rooster, which ‘invited’ the rising of the sun and the promise of a new day, and was later extended to mean invitation of friends with similarly positive connotation. The last two words in the lines exhibit near rhyme; in speech they may be identical, as /lm/ clusters often assimilate to /mm/ and syllable-final /r/ is often dropped.

- (18) Dostning poqi purimas.  
A friend's poop doesn't stink.

dost-ning poq-i puri-ma-s.  
friend-GEN poop-3 smell-NEG-ADJ

“This *temsil* tells us that experiencing the flaws, mistakes, or shortcomings of a close friend will not irritate us” (Emet 2013: 196). We close the set of proverbs on friends with a bit of scatological humor, featuring nice alliteration of *p* sounds. This proverb provides an interesting complement to the English idiom about arrogant people who

think their own poop doesn't stink. (Note: the version listed in Emet (2013) has *dostungning* 'your friend's' in place of *dostning* 'a friend's'; the version cited above came from a friend of mine.)

#### 4. Proverbs about Wisdom and Folly

The second set of proverbs deals with wisdom and folly. Uyghur has a variety of words about wisdom. Several of the proverbs presented in this section use the word *bilim* 'knowledge'. A similar term is *ilim*, and the compound *ilim-bilim* is a term for knowledge in general. *Eqil* 'wisdom' refers to a mental faculty that everyone possesses by nature—but it can be greater or lesser, improved or impoverished, depending on one's experience and learning. *Eqil* also appears in the derived adjectives *eqilliq* 'eqil-ful,' i.e. 'wise' and *eqilsiz* 'lacking eqil', i.e. 'foolish.' These words are also used as substantives to mean 'a wise person' and 'a foolish person.' A final term we will see in this set of proverbs is *hüner* 'skill, craft'. This word refers to practical skills for one's trade, which were traditionally passed down in families.

Folly is often expressed by litotes, negating one of the above words in derivations like *bilimsiz* 'ignorant, knowledge-less' and *eqilsiz* 'foolish, wisdom-less'. Two simple non-derived noun roots that describe fools are *exmeq* 'foolish' and *nadan* 'ignorant'. *Exmeq* describes a simpleton, who may be viewed with some condescending affection—a sort of 'cute' fool. *Nadan* is an incorrigibly ignorant idiot—the most pejorative term in the set. Some of the proverbs in this section offer general praise of wisdom or condemnation of folly, and others have specific things to say about certain aspects of wisdom.

- (19) Adem balisining bahasi ilim bilen.  
A person's value is measured by his knowledge.

adem bali-si-ning baha-si ilim bilen  
man child-3-GEN value-3 knowledge with

“This *maqal* tells us the greatness of knowledge, the limitless power, intelligence, and honor it bestows on a person, whatever difficulty a learned man is in he will be the victor, he will have reputation and honor; without knowledge, a foolish man will be subjugated, his descendants will be humiliated from generation to generation” (Emet 2013: 14). This is a good proverb with which to begin the set on wisdom, as it establishes the view of knowledge as an inherent part of being human in Uyghur culture. The phrase rendered 'person' is *adem balisi*, literally 'son of man' (or even 'son of Adam'). This term is often used in literature to refer to humans, sometimes appearing in contrast to *haywan balisi* 'son of a beast' i.e. 'an animal, animals.' This proverb also features both assonance (/a/ and /i/) and alliteration (/b/ and /l/). The words *balisi* and *bahasi* are nearly identical, creating rhythm and parallelism even though this is not a couplet.

- (20) Biliki küchlük birni yënger,  
bilimi küchlük mingni (yënger).  
A man of great strength defeats one; a man of great knowledge, a thousand.

bilik-i küchlük bir-ni yënger, bilim-i küchlük ming-ni (yënger).  
strength-3 powerful one-ACC defeat knowledge-3 powerful thousand-ACC (defeat)



“This *maqal* tells how the learned man with wisdom and ability, whatever difficulty, or opponent he faces, he will be victorious; the unlearned, ignorant, simple man, will only survive temporarily, relying on his physical strength alone” (Emet 2013: 92). The two lines in this couplet are nearly identical, differing only in the last consonant of the first noun (*bilik* versus *bilim*) and the number (*bir* versus *ming*). (Note: the version of this proverb listed in Emet (2013) has *chong* ‘great’ instead of *küchlük* ‘powerful’. The version cited above came from my students.)

- (21) Bilim yënip turghan chiragh,  
hüner ëqip turghan bulaq.  
Knowledge is a shining light, skills a flowing spring.

bilim yën-ip tur-ghan chiragh, hüner ëq-ip tur-ghan bulaq  
knowledge shine-PART stand-PPART light, skill flow-PART stand-PERF spring

“This *maqal* tells us that a man who has knowledge and skill will gain honor, respect, and both physical and moral wealth, and will live his life in prosperity and ease” (Emet 2013: 95). Knowledge and skills are infinite resources; once acquired, they can produce continual benefit, just as a spring, once found, provides a continual supply of water. This proverb might be considered a rhymed couplet; the end rhyme (*chiragh* and *bulaq*) is a near rhyme rather than a perfect rhyme as in other examples above.

- (22) Atangdin dunya qalghuche hüner qalsun.  
Inherit your father’s skills, not just his fortune.

ata-ng-din dunya qal-ghuche hüner qal-sun  
father-2SG-ABL fortune stay-INSTEAD.OF skill stay-IMP

“This *maqal* says that no matter how much of life’s money, livestock, and wealth you have it can be used up, but the possession of knowledge and wisdom bestows an endless wealth for humanity” (Emet 2013: 7). Similar to (21), this proverb expresses the value of skill as an infinite resource, in contrast with wealth, which will run out.

- (23) Bilim eqilining chirighi.  
Knowledge is the lamp of wisdom.

bilim eqili-ning chirigh-i  
knowledge wisdom-GEN lamp-3

“This *temsil* tells us how a wise person’s intellectual ability broadens his mind, and is the source of his reputation among others; knowledge is an unending moral wealth, which highlights one’s mental world” (Emet 2013: 94). Light here symbolizes added brilliance, rather than understanding or ‘enlightenment’ in the sense of the English word. Knowledge enhances one’s natural faculty of *eqil*, making it more sophisticated. Assonance based on the vowel /i/ is strong in this proverb.

- (24) Nadan qazangha qaraydu,  
tadan ochaqqa (qaraydu).  
The simple man looks at the serving dish, the cunning man at the oven.

nadan qazan-gha qara-y-du, tadan ochan-qa (qara-y-du)  
fool pan-DAT look-PRES-3 cunning oven-DAT (look-PRES-3)

“This *maqal* tells us that a foolish person just looks for what is already prepared, but a person who understands the process and wants to make a profit is busy making plans to make money” (Emet 2013: 265). It flips the perspective on the English adage about teaching a man to fish. Certain people are only interested in being given a fish (cleaned and cooked already if possible), whereas others see the potential profit in learning how to produce it themselves. The verbal artistry is striking here. The words for ‘fool’ and ‘cunning’ differ only by a single letter, and there is an impressive amount of assonance with the /a/ vowel through the whole two lines.

- (25) Bilmeslik eyib emes, sorimasliq eyib.  
A man can’t be blamed for not knowing, but for not asking.

bil-mes-lik eyib emes, sori-mas-liq eyib  
know-NEG-ATT guilty not ask-NEG-ATT guilty

“This *maqal* tells us that nobody can know everything, but if you ask what you don’t know you won’t be mistaken (however, after you’ve asked it’s not right to go around pretending you know everything); and that a person who doesn’t try or doesn’t study will end up in trouble” (Emet 2013: 93). Here the contrast is between two words with parallel morphological structure, *bilmeslik* and *sorimasliq*. One is a state of lacking information, which is not necessarily your fault; the other is a conscious decision not to seek the information. (Note: under the entry for *eyib*, [www.dict.yulghun.com](http://www.dict.yulghun.com) lists an alternate version of this proverb, which has *tirishmasliq* ‘not trying’ in place of *sorimasliq* ‘not asking’.)

- (26) Ėshiki keynide, texiyi aldidida  
After a donkey, before a colt.

ėshiki keyn-i-de, texiy-i ald-i-da  
donkey-3 back-3-LOC colt-3 front-3-LOC

“This *temsil* tells us that the children of a foolish idiot will also be bad people, learning their father’s bad habits and continuing to walk in his footsteps” (Emet 2013: 308). A more idiomatic translation might be “Son of a donkey, father of an ass.” It portrays the genealogy of a family of asses, looking at one that is just like the others before it (coming after a donkey) and bound to produce others just like it (before a colt). Until not long ago, donkeys were a ubiquitous beast of burden in Uyghur culture. They feature frequently in folktales, and the greatest hero of folklore, Nasreddin Ependi, is usually portrayed riding a donkey. They are less common nowadays as Uyghurs are moving to mechanical means of transportation and agriculture, but they still can be seen pulling carts through small-town areas now and again. At any rate, donkeys have not yet fallen out of common parlance as an emblem of stupidity. Children still call each

other ‘donkey’ as an insult.

- (27) Exmeq chong-kichiki yoq.  
There is no set size for a fool.

exmeq chong-kichik-i yoq  
fool big-small-3 not.have

“This *temsil* tells us that we can’t distinguish fools because they are big or small, they can just be seen because they go around doing and saying stupid things” (Emet 2013: 45). The last four in this set, proverbs (27) to (30), consider questions of who is wise and who is foolish. This proverb tells us we can’t judge by size. This one may fall just on the border between *maqal* and *temsil*. The meaning seems pretty straightforward, but Emet (2103) designates it a *temsil*, perhaps because the expression “does not have a size” seems a bit oblique. In any case the meaning is undeniably true: fools certainly do come in all shapes and sizes.

- (28) Bilim almighan yash,  
tam tüwidiki tash.  
A youth without knowledge is a stone at the bottom of a wall.

bilim al-mi-ghan yash, tam tuw-i-di-ki tash  
knowledge receive-NEG-PPART youth, wall base-3-LOC-REL stone

Young people can certainly be fools, and some are too stubborn or too naïve to be interested in learning. This rhymed *maqal*, given to me by a friend, expresses the uselessness of a foolish youth. One who does not receive knowledge is as useless as dumb rock. Here the rock must not be seen as a foundation or cornerstone, but rather as something which had no other useful purpose and was just tossed in a pile to be stacked up with a bunch of others.

- (29) Adem bolmisang eqling bilen,  
exmeq bolisen saqiling bilen.  
If you do not become a man with wisdom, you will just be a fool with a beard.

adem bol-mi-sa-ng eql-ing bilen, exmeq bol-sen saqiling bilen.  
man be-NEG-COND-2SG wisdom-2SG with fool be-2SG beard-2SG with

“This *maqal* tells us that whoever begins to be wise when they are young will be trained continuously in culture, and will think a lot about what they say and do, and do it wisely; a foolish old man, on the other hand, will be met with ridicule and mockery wherever he goes” (Emet 2013: 14). This proverb continues the discussion of (27) and (28), implying that fools come not only in all sizes but in all ages. One would expect some young people to be fools, as in (28), but age does not guarantee wisdom either. Traditionally, Uyghur men grow long beards when they are old, so the second half of this couplet implies an old man who did not become wise.

This couplet exhibits strong parallelism. Structurally, both lines consist of a noun, a

‘be’-verb in the second person, and a postpositional phrase using *bilen* ‘with’. The word pairs correspond with sound similarity: *bolmisang* and *bolisen* are from the same root *bol* and have /s/ plus a nasal consonant at the end, *eqil* and *saqal* share consonants /q/ and /l/, and then *bilen* is the same in both lines. The nouns (*adem* and *exmeq*, *eqil* and *saqal*) are the least similar; but they are the points of contrast in terms of meaning, so that is somewhat understandable.

- (30) *Eqil yashta emes, bashta.*  
Wisdom is not in your years but in your head.

*eqil*    *yash-ta*    *emes*,    *bash-ta*  
widsom    age-LOC    not    head-LOC

“This *maqal* tells us that wisdom is not dependent on age. A person may be wise at any age, and an old person may or may not be wise” (Emet 2013: 52). This gives a nice conclusion to the quartet of proverbs about who is wise and foolish, and a nice conclusion to this whole set. The cleverness in this proverb obviously turns on the rhyme of *yash* and *bash*, which is accentuated by the addition of the locative case suffix to each noun. It contrasts with some cultures in East Asia where age must be respected and deferred to no matter what. Uyghur culture certainly teaches respect and honor for elders as a principle, and expects wisdom to come with age as a norm, but it also acknowledges the possibility of exceptions to the norm—from time to time we do meet both old fools and young people wise beyond their years.

## 5. Final Comments

The two sets of proverbs presented here represent just a small sample of the vast array of Uyghur proverbs. They demonstrate the value Uyghur culture traditionally places on wisdom as a fundamental aspect of human life, expressing the lasting benefits of wisdom over the temporary benefits of material resources, and warning about the variety of fools we may encounter in our lives. The set of proverbs on friends and enemies advise us about criticism from friends and praise from enemies, and point out that a multitude of friends can either be a great resource or a sign of poor judgment. All of the proverbs together demonstrate the artistry and wit of the Uyghur literary aesthetic, with great wordplay and crafting of sounds, as well as demonstrating the two styles of proverb—the directly didactic *maqal* and the more whimsical metaphorical *temsil*.

I am told that proverbs are not quoted with great regularity in everyday Uyghur life nowadays, but they are used in a few specific domains or situations. Not surprisingly, older people often quote proverbs when advising young people, appealing to traditional wisdom to pass on values or make their point more convincing. Up until ten or fifteen years ago, proverbs were also taught in Uyghur schools as part of literature class, and students were required to produce or complete proverbs on exams. This may be changing now as Uyghur-language-only schools in Xinjiang are becoming fewer and fewer, while bilingual Uyghur-Mandarin schools (which in reality are majority Mandarin) and Mandarin-only schools are increasing. The current college-age generation, at least, is reasonably well-versed in proverbs and can recall them on appropriate occasions. My hope is that this small collection of Uyghur proverbs—to my knowledge the first such collection with English translation, linguistic analysis, and commentary—can introduce the wit and wisdom of Uyghur proverbs to an

English-language audience, and raise awareness and appreciation of the beauty of this relatively understudied language.

## Appendix

### Latin script Uyghur alphabet

In the Latin script used in this article for Uyghur words, most letters represent the sound of their English equivalents. The exceptions are explained below:

Latin script Uyghur	IPA
ü	[y]
ö	[ø]
ë	[e]
e	[æ] or [ɛ]
i	[i], [ɪ], [ɨ], or [ɯ]
gh	[ɣ]
x	[χ] or [x]
q	[q]

### Table of abbreviations used in glosses

	Abbreviation	Meaning	Notes
Personal suffixes	1SG	First person singular	There are two types of personal suffixes. One is called ‘predicative’ and applies to verb-type elements; the other is ‘possessive’ and applies to noun-type elements. The glossing in this article does not distinguish between the two types.
	2SG	Second person singular	
	3	Third person	
Noun case suffixes	GEN	Genitive case	Nominative case is unmarked. Any noun with no case gloss in this article can be assumed to be nominative.
	ACC	Accusative case	
	DAT	Dative case	
	ABL	Ablative case	
	LOC	Locative case	
Verb suffixes	CAUS	Causative	A verb-verb derivational suffix
	PART	Participle	
	PPART	Past participle	

	NEG	Negative	Several markers of negation, usually involving an ‘m,’ different variants distinguished here
	PRES	Present tense	/j/ is inserted as a tense marker at the end of the root but before personal suffixes in present tense verbs
	COND	Conditional	A verb suffix that usually expresses an “if” condition
	ADJ	Adjectivizer	A verb-adj suffix
	INSTEAD.OF		A verb suffix that expresses “instead of”
	IMP	Imperative	
	REL	Relativizer	A noun-adjective suffix, often used with locative case, expresses “which is in/at...”
Other	-PRIV	Privative	Describes <i>-siz</i> , a noun-adj derivational suffix that expresses a lack of said noun.
	-ATT	Attributive	Describes <i>-lik</i> , a noun-adj or noun-noun derivational suffix that expresses “having, characterized by” said noun.

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