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ANTHROPOCENTRIC AND ECOCENTRIC WORLDVIEWS IN PASHTO IDIOMS (MATALONA): A QUALITATIVE ECO-CRITICAL STUDY

¹Kiran Zahir, ²Saqlain Hassan*, ³Muhammad Abdulwahab,
⁴Mansoor Ahmad

¹BS Scholar, Department of English Linguistics and Literature, Riphah International University, Pakistan.

²Assistant Professor, Department of English Linguistics and Literature, Riphah International University, Pakistan. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8861-6800>

³M.Phil. Scholar, Department of English Linguistics and Literature, Riphah International University, Pakistan.

⁴M.Phil. Scholar, Department of English Linguistics and Literature, Riphah International University, Pakistan.

¹kiranzahir172@gmail.com, ²saqlain.hassan@riphah.edu.pk

³muhammadabdulwahabi555@gmail.com, ⁴mansoor.ahmad@riphah.edu.pk

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Corresponding Author: *

Saqlain Hassan

ABSTRACT

This study explores the existence of anthropocentric and ecocentric worldviews in Pashto idioms. By analyzing various idiomatic expressions, the research highlights how this linguistic tool carries human perceptions and attitudes toward nature. After a thorough analysis of the data, it has been revealed that anthropocentric idioms emphasize human dominance and the utility of natural resources, portraying nature primarily as a means to human ends. In contrast, ecocentric idioms reflect a holistic understanding of the interconnectedness of all life forms, emphasizing respect for and harmony with the natural world. The findings suggest that, while anthropocentric views are prevalent, a unique wall hanging of ecocentric expressions underscores the importance of ecological balance. This duality offers insights into the cultural and philosophical values of Pashto speakers, revealing a complex relationship with their environment. Future studies could examine idioms across different contexts or compare them with other linguistic traditions to enhance understanding of ecological perspectives.

Keywords: Pashto Language, Idioms, Nature, Eco-Awareness, Environment.



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Introduction

An idiom is an expression that does not make literary sense but carries a figurative or non-literal meaning. It is categorized as formulaic language: a fixed form that expresses feelings or attitudes in a specific situation and does not mean precisely what the words say. It is commonly used in all languages (Davies, 1982). As in English, there are approximately twenty-five thousand idiomatic expressions.¹ It enriches communication with colour and imagery. Idioms are characterized by their imagery; some indicate society's relationships, cultural concepts, individual experiences, or eco discussions. Idioms allow speakers to express double meanings in fewer words. For clear communication, it is important to understand idioms in an interaction, as they reflect cultural traditions and the pragmatic meaning of language (Kennedy, 2023). Idioms are not limited to any one language; almost all languages around the world have their own idiomatic expressions (Yadav, 2024).

Pashto, with its rich tradition of idioms, proverbs, and riddles, reflects its linguistic heritage. Ancient Pashto poets masterfully wove these expressions into their verses, creating a lyrical landscape that resonated with the heart and soul of the Pashtun people. In today's fast-paced world, the

Pashtuns continue to cherish and recite these age-old idioms, using them as powerful tools to convey their thoughts and emotions. These expressions are versatile and used in a multitude of contexts, whether to convey deep-seated meanings in moments of joy or sorrow, to jest and mock in a light-hearted manner, to uplift and encourage, or to impart valuable life lessons to the younger generation. Each idiom serves a distinctive purpose, echoing the wisdom of the past while remaining relevant in contemporary discourse (Sarwar & Arslan, 2024). As Shinwari (2013) highlights, this linguistic genre of Pashto literature is not merely a remnant of culture but a vibrant element of daily communication that enriches Pashtun identity.

There is a difference between proverbs and idioms; in Pashto, both are called Matalona. However, in this study, the researchers focus mainly on idiomatic expressions. In Pashto, idioms are called Mataloona, a special collection of Pashtun sayings. Such sayings are part of the common language; later, they become an integral part of literature, and people use them on special occasions. In Pashto, idioms are mostly used for friendly satire (Aziz et al., 2022).

Most native languages are closely tied to nature and natural objects. Pashto is among those languages with the strongest relationship to nature. The native speakers

¹ <https://www.londonschool.com/blog/english-idioms-general-conversation/>



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of Pashto live in lush, mountainous areas teeming with wildlife and beautiful scenes. One of such examples is, سپرلي به بيا په گلو سږلي به بيا په گلو *Sparley ba byā pa gullo rāshe*, meaning that *spring will come again for flowers (who are dead)*. This raises the hope that, after the cold wind of autumn, there will be beauty in return, bringing happiness to the heart in spring (Farid, 2024). Moreover, nature also represents Strength and gentleness, such as mountains, which reflect many qualities in this language. Pashto is considered an environmentally friendly language because of its close relationship. The Pashto language encourages respect for nature by ascribing environmentally friendly qualities to even endangered species (Khalil & Ullah, 2023).

Research Question

1. What are the dominant thematic patterns of anthropocentric and ecocentric worldviews portrayed in the selected Pashto idioms (Matalona)?

Literature Review

The Pashto language is enriched with environmental concerns, as Farid (2024) concluded in his study that environmental degradation is growing, driven by human attitudes towards the environment. The researchers argue that humans are exploiting the natural resources. In this context, ecocriticism emerged in the mid-1980s and emphasizes nature over human dominance. This study applies to Pashto

folklore to reveal both positive and negative viewpoints. Some proverbs reveal human dominance, while others reflect eco-friendly wisdom, enriched by folklore traditions. Here, the scholar aimed to balance by raising awareness of anthropocentric views. Overall, his study suggests that Pashto proverbs play a significant role in understanding environmental ethics and in promoting sustainability in human attitudes, which are embedded in the indigenous language. Nature, social organization, and economy are connected. Ahmad (1980) conducted an important study on how native language systems and oral traditions function as mechanisms for environmental maintenance, and collective responsibility and honour are tied to environmental conditions within the Pashto society, which is the center of agriculture and livestock. In another study, Rahman (1999) examined the relationship among language, culture, and power in Pakistan and northern India, arguing that indigenous languages such as Pashto carry social values and knowledge worldwide. He further stated that losing ecological awareness will slowly decline natural sustainability. For better ecological awareness, it is important to pass on knowledge to future generations through language. The current study, in this regard, is of utmost importance, as it aims to examine how the Pashto language disseminates environmental awareness to



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future generations and the dominant views they encapsulate.

Research Methodology

Research Approach

This study uses a qualitative research methodology, which enables in-depth analysis of Pashto idioms. Through contextual and textual analysis of selected idioms, this research aims to understand environmental insights embedded in language. By examining metaphors, meanings, and imagery within idioms, this study highlights how the Pashtun-speaking community related to nature. This approach provides in-depth awareness of every language, rich in symbolic and environmental knowledge.

Data Collection

The data was collected from Akbar Ahmad's book, including Pashto Mataloona. Only those idioms were selected that explicitly reflect natural, environmental elements. Each idiom was carefully selected based on its environmental traces and was validated by the Department of Pashto and Oriental Languages, University of Malakand.

Data Analysis

This study uses close reading to analyze selected Pashto idioms and examine the

literal and intended meanings embedded in them.

Theoretical Framework

The analysis of the data in the current study is based on two important theories: the first one is the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), which holds that people's understanding of abstract ideas is grounded in concrete experiences. It is used to analyze idioms in Pashto, which demonstrates how elements of the environment are mentally represented, such as nature as a resource or tool, or animals as tools. While CMT elaborates on mindsets, ecolinguistics emphasizes the importance of nature and reveals how the Pashtuns interact with it (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). And the second one is Arran Stibbe's (2015) *Stories We Live By*, which helped the researcher to dig deep into the ideology and narratives built via the selected idioms.

Results and Discussion

In this section, the researchers have analyzed 10 idioms to examine how the environment and awareness are portrayed within an ecocentric worldview.



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Pashto Idioms Portraying an Eco-Centric Worldview

Table 1:

Idiom 1

Pashto Idiom	In Roman
چې څه کړي، هغه به رښې	Che sa kare, agha ba rebe

Literal Meaning: Whatever you sow, you shall reap.

Intended Meaning: The implied meaning of this proverb is that human actions are being counted and then shape the results. If you do something bad to someone, it will come back to you, no matter how much time passes. Moreover, if you are kind to someone, kindness will come back to you later. There is also a cognitive belief in Pashto culture associated with this idiom: if one daughter-in-law mistreats her mother-in-law, then, in the future, her own daughter-in-law will mistreat her. This

provides a core cognitive structure. It also suggests that a person's actions determine their future outcomes. If someone does good deeds, behaves kindly, and works honestly, they will eventually receive positive results. It reflects the idea of cause and effect in human life, emphasizing moral responsibility and accountability. Our present actions shape our future experiences. Your actions will yield results at the same speed you harvest. Nature is conceptualized as a moral accounting system.

Table 2:

Idiom 2

Pashto Idiom	In Romans
چې غر سورب وي، نو غرڅي يې هم سورب وي	Che ghar sorab we, no gharṣay ye hum sorāb we

Literal Meaning: If the mountain is fertile, then its grass will also be fertile.

Intended Meaning: This demonstrates that the sources shape results. When the base is nourishing, whether it is educational, environmental, social, or moral, the outcomes will be positive naturally. On the contrary, if the foundation is weak, no health outcomes can be expected. Here, the mountain functions as an ecological

source system, and the grass is represented as dependent on the mountain's fertility. But on the other hand, ancestors also believed that a child's behaviour reflects their family background. If a child behaves badly and uses slang and inappropriate language, it is assumed that such behaviour was learned from their family; it is believed that their forefathers possessed good moral values. This idiom can also be interpreted



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in the context of education. It reflects the belief that success at advanced stages depends upon the strength of one's foundational learning. The idiom

Table 3:

Idiom 3

Pashto Idiom

پياز دي وي خو به نياز دي وي

Literal Meaning: Let it be only an onion, but let it be sufficient

Intended Meaning: This demonstrates the simplicity of human beings, that it is efficient to have only resources for basic needs. Human happiness does not depend on luxury; it warns against greed. The onion here presents a natural food that reflects village life, which depends on agriculture. This shows that nature can meet human needs if humans become humble. It also promotes sustainability,

Table 4:

Idiom 4

Pashto Idiom

وني ته گوره او سيوري له يې ورځه

Literal Meaning: Look at the tree before sitting under its shade.

Intended Meaning: The implied meaning is that a person should examine a system or people before asking for something or depending on them. Here, trees and shades are shown as natural shelters. This idiom teaches us not to trust anyone before we fully know them, because not all support is safe. Support is shade. This idiom also emphasizes the importance of human

emphasizes that consistent effort and dedication at the initial levels of education contribute to future academic achievement and personal success.

In Romans

Pyaz de we kho pa niyaz de we

encouraging people to live within limits to avoid environmental degradation. It is like a warning from the environment. This idiom further reflects the idea that money alone cannot ensure happiness. Even when an individual has considerable wealth, luxury, and material comfort, these possessions lose their value if the person remains emotionally dissatisfied. It suggests that happiness and emotional well-being is primarily an inner satisfaction rather than material wealth.

In Romans

Wane ta gora ao soore la ye warza

personality before seeking help or sharing secrets. It suggests that not every individual is willing or able to assist others in difficult situations. While some people may refuse when approached for support, others, who are often perceived as empathetic, are more likely to respond positively. Therefore, it becomes essential to recognize a person's character and capacity before relying on them, as not everyone possesses the willingness.



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Table 5:

Idiom 5

Pashto Idiom	In Romans
ونه چې لويېږي، اصل ته کږېږي	Wana che loyegi, asal ta kagege
Literal Meaning: As a tree grows, it bends towards its roots.	human identity is never detached completely from its origins. It suggests that although they may grow intellectually, economically, and socially, their core values, beliefs, and behavioural patterns are deeply influenced by their background. The early influences play a significant role in shaping one's personality and perceptions.
Intended Meaning: It reflects a person's identity, values, and background. That if a person succeeds in life and grows, but this growth does not remove one's background or values. These idioms are used to explain the natural growth of a tree and elaborate on human identity. Here, roots represent support and the success of growth. Nature underscores the idea that success depends on a strong foundation. It also implies that	Moreover, if an individual attempts to adapt to a new environment, the underlying norms and habits resurface in different situations.

Table 6:

Idiom 6

Pashto Idiom	In Romans
چې باد نه وي، بوټی نه خوځېږي	Che bād na we, boṭay na khwazī
Literal Meaning: if there is no wind, the plant does not move.	event has an underlying reason or motivation. Similar expressions, such as 'There is no smoke without fire,' also emphasize that visible outcomes often result from hidden actions. In social contexts, when people criticize someone's behaviour, it is generally based on their experience. In the same sense, the idiom implies that individuals do not speak or judge without reason; rather, their discussions are usually rooted in specific actions that give rise to such intentions.
Intended Meaning: It suggested that nothing can happen without a cause. It needs motivation and the force for change. Wind is a natural force that moves plants, and pollination then occurs. The environment is a natural force that moves plants and compels them to act. Here, it promotes an understanding of causality through natural forces and logical thinking. With this wind, human plants are happy. It reflects the idea that every behaviour or	



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Table 7:

Idiom 7

Pashto Idiom	In Romans
چې غردېږي، هغه نه وريږي	Che gharṛēgī, agha na waregi
Literal Meaning: Lightning does not always result in rain	that individuals who may speak harshly or issue threats in moments of anger do not necessarily intend harm. Often, such expressions are temporary reactions that subside once the person becomes calm. In many cases, these individuals do not act upon their words and do not cause harm to others, indicating that their intentions are not evil. Rather, it suggests they may have a good-natured disposition and do not harbour long-term grudges.
Intended Meaning: It suggests that every scary-sounding thing does not always cause harm. For example, some people or settings threaten but do not act. Thunder without rain is a common natural phenomenon. This idiom teaches people to judge reality rather than being misled by appearances. For instance, empty threats are dry storms. This also reflects the idea	

Table 8:

Idiom 8

Pashto Idiom	In Romans
غر په غر نه ورځي، بنده په بنده ورځي	Ghar pa ghar na warzi banda pa banda warze
Literal Meaning: Mountains do not meet; humans do.	can change with emotions. When a person becomes angry or furious, they may act or say anything without consequences. However, such reactions are usually temporary, as emotions like anger do not last permanently. The idiom highlights the importance of patience, calmness, nature, and self-control in human interactions. It also implies that relationships and social interactions are dynamic and can be affected by emotional responses.
Intended Meaning: This shows the complex nature of human nature: human interaction and relationships are dynamic. On the contrary, nature is smooth and calm in its places. Mountains portray stability and permanence, in contrast to human nature, which continuously changes. This idiom also reflects that human behaviour is not always stable and	

Pashto Idioms Portraying an Anthropocentric Worldview

Table 9:

Idiom 9

Pashto Idiom	In Romans
دولس مياشتي کال، گنده يي پشکل	Dolas myashte kāl, ganda ye pashka



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Literal Meaning: Pashakal is the dirtiest among the twelve months of the year

Intended Meaning: This shows that, over time, the consequences of actions remain; waiting cannot undo the damage. These

Table 10:

Idiom 10

Pashto Idiom

In Romans

که غر هر څومره لوړ دي خو ده پاڅه پي لار شته

Ka ghar har sumra lwar de kho dapasa pe lar shta

Literal Meaning: Above every high mountain, there is always a walking track

Intended Meaning: This passage conveys the notion that humanity exercises significant control over the natural world. It vividly illustrates how humans have conquered even the mightiest of mountains, symbolizing their triumph over nature's challenges. This perspective embodies an Anthropocene approach,

Table 11:

Idiom 11

Pashto Idiom

In Romans

که اوبه هر سومره لوري څي خو ده پله ده لاندې څي

Ka oba har sumra lware zi kho da pla da lande zi

Literal Meaning: Water flowing at a high level always flows under the bridge

Intended Meaning: In this particular idiom, the theme of human creativity and dominance over nature is illustrated with striking clarity. It conveys the notion that, no matter how high the water level may rise in a river perhaps during a torrential downpour or a seasonal flood, it will

idioms reflect the natural time cycle. Moreover, the waste is so extensive in the summer. It reflects the season's aggressive nature and its consequences, which affect humans.

highlighting the evident environmental degradation as humans assert their dominance. In this view, humans are depicted as powerful beings able to manipulate their surroundings at will, seemingly unhindered by natural obstacles. The message implies that no force, not even the formidable power of nature itself, can stand in the way of human ambition and creativity.

inevitably flow beneath the bridge, a testament to human architectural prowess. This metaphor serves as a powerful reminder of our ability to manipulate and interact with the environment, showcasing the bridges we have built as significant achievements of civilization. This perspective embodies an anthropocentric attitude, placing human beings at the



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center while undermining the formidable power of the natural world. By championing human constructions as pillars of strength and resilience, this idiom suggests that our achievements can withstand even the most formidable forces of nature. Thus, the imagery of water

Table 12:

Idiom 12

Pashto Idiom

سپي تور دي او کا خر خو سپي دي

Literal Meaning: Black or brown dogs are still dogs

Intended Meaning: In this idiom, a significant aspect of animal degradation is highlighted. In Pashto culture, the term "spay," referring to a neutered dog, carries a negative connotation. For many, using the word "spay" is not just a simple descriptor; it can be interpreted as an insult or form of abuse. This negative perception often leads to heated confrontations and disputes among individuals when the term is invoked. The idiom emphasizes that, regardless of the dog's colour or breed, it is fundamentally still a dog. This assertion underscores that, in essence, all dogs share

flowing gracefully under our feet not only symbolizes the triumph of human engineering but also highlights our complex relationship with nature, portraying it as both a challenge to overcome and a force to be respected.

In Romans

Spay ka tor de ao ka Khar kho Spay day.

the same status as animals, independent of their external appearances. The message starkly contrasts with the inherent love and affection humans are supposed to have for animals. Here, anthropocentrism, the belief that human beings are the central focus and superior to other life forms, reaches an alarming peak. In this context, animals are not only marginalized but also demeaned, revealing a troubling perspective on the treatment and consideration of non-human beings. This idiom reflects societal attitudes toward animals, exposing the deeper issues of prejudice and disregard in human-animal relationships.

Table 13:

Idiom 13

Pashto Idiom

ده خر مينه لته وي

Literal Meaning: A Donkey kicks in love

Intended Meaning: This idiom serves as a pointed critique, often satirizing individuals who embody dishonesty and

In Romans

Da khar mena lata we

deceit. At its core, it reflects a broader commentary on human relationships, particularly how misplaced trust can lead to disappointment and suffering. The



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choice of a donkey as the focal point of this idiom is noteworthy, given that donkeys are non-sentient animals that have no understanding of complex social constructs such as dishonesty and loyalty. This anthropocentric perspective highlights a tendency to project human traits onto animals, treating them as vehicles for illustrating moral lessons. The idiom suggests that any affection or love we extend toward a donkey, and by extension, those who behave like them, will ultimately result in negative consequences. Specifically, it conveys the message that

Table 14:

Idiom 14

Pashto Idiom

تندر په تالاش راغی، اوڅره یې د راموري ووپړه

Literal Meaning: *Thunder struck Talash and drowned Donkey in Ramora*

Intended Meaning: In the Pashtun society, thunder is considered a fearful term, as we can see today's climate change and cloud bursts. Here, this natural phenomenon is considered to be a threat to humans, taking everything with it.

Conclusion

Idioms in Pashto extensively use natural and environmental elements to explain human mindsets. A thorough analysis shows that people understand abstract ideas through everyday experience. This study analyzed 14 idioms and, after a thorough analysis, identified themes such

donkeys are not creatures that can be genuinely loved or who love in return. Instead, they possess an inherent tendency to react defensively and aggressively. Therefore, metaphorically, those who attempt to form a bond with such an untrustworthy entity are likely to face an unexpected backlash, symbolized by the donkey's kick. This serves as a stark reminder of the risks of misplaced trust and the harsh realities of engaging with those who may not have our best interests at heart.

In Romans

Tandar pa talash raghay, kho khra yay da ramore wewra

as the environment as a resource, which portray nature as supportive and life-giving. Some idioms portray the environment as an enemy, natural forces as pressure, and the fear of nature as a reality reflecting a close relationship.

The Pashto idioms analyzed in the current study embody two distinct worldviews: anthropocentric and ecocentric. Anthropocentric idioms prioritize human interests and depict nature as a resource for human use, reflecting a perspective where nature's value is measured by its utility to people. For instance, expressions that emphasize human control over the environment and highlight the



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exploitation of natural resources showcase this dominant viewpoint. Such idioms resonate within a cultural narrative in which nature is often viewed through an economic lens, demonstrating how language can encapsulate and perpetuate the idea of human supremacy over the natural world.

In contrast, ecocentric idioms present a holistic understanding of the relationship between humans and nature, emphasizing interconnectedness and respect for all living forms. These expressions often draw on the beauty and resilience of nature, portraying it as something that requires harmony and balance rather than mastery. This perspective encourages a sense of responsibility and stewardship towards nature, highlighting the importance of ecological balance. Together, these contrasting idiomatic expressions reveal the complexity of Pashto speakers' relationship with their environment, illustrating a cultural dialogue between dominance and reverence that shapes their ecological consciousness. In addition, this study further manifests that nature is not only a background element but also a key source of awareness.

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