Uprooted and Replanted: Recontextualizing A Genre

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Özet Bağlam-dışı ekinsel öbekler yorumlamada başlı başına bir güçlük çıkarırlar. Bir atasözleri listesi ne insanların onları kullanmalarındaki toplumsal amaçlar dizisine ne de o atasözlerinin nasıl ortaya çıktıklarına ilişkin hiçbir gösterge taşımaz. Böyle atasözleri, arkeolojik bağlamlarına dikkat edilmeden topraktan çıkartılan kırık çömlek parçaları gibi kolaylıkla değersiz olarak görülebilirler; ancak, bu makale dilsel ve antropolojik yollar üzerinden yorumlamanın kapsam ve sınırlarını araştırmak için konuşma bağlamı olmayan bir atasözleri bütüncesinden yararlanmaktadır. Bağlam atasözlerinin iletişimsel türler arasında gidiş gelişleri gibi söylem öbekleri olarak keşfedilebilir. Ayrıca, bir dilin konuşurları baskın bir dili kullanmaya doğru kaydıklarında atasözleri, hatırlayanların önemli bir kaynağı olmaktadır. Bu destek kaynağı bu baskın dile olan dil kaymasının çıkağı da olabilir. Çözümleme bazı Türkçe Salar konuşucularının (ISO 639-3: slr)[1] bu esnek ortamı nasıl kullandıklarını araştırmak için dil teması ve anlatısal bellek üzerinden yapılmaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcük: Her yerde bulunup hiç görülmeyen atasözü

Abstract: Decontextualized cultural material presents an interpretive challenge. A list of proverbs gives no indication of the range of social purposes for which speakers deploy them, nor how the proverbs came about. Such proverbs could easily be deemed as worthless as potshards excavated without attention to their archaeological context; yet this essay uses a corpus of proverbs without conver-

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sational context to explore the extent and limits of interpretation via linguistic and anthropological means. Context can be discovered as discourse chunks such as proverbs move between communicative genres. When speakers of a language are, in addition, shifting to using a dominant language, proverbs are an important resource of rememberers, one that may also be the locus of language shift to that dominant language. The analysis draw on language contact and narrative memory to explore how some Turkic Salar speakers (ISO 639-3: slr)[2] deploy this flexible medium.

Keywords: The ubiquitous, elusive proverb

Proverbs are instantly recognizable yet difficult to define; easy to semantically characterize, yet often impossible to interpret connotationally. Even the eminent paremiologist Archer Taylor noted: "An incommunicable quality tells us this sentence is proverbial and that one is not. Hence no definition will enable us to identify positively a sentence as proverbial" (1962: 3). Since their form is prototypical and stylized, many proverbs also tend to preserve older linguistic features and cultural attributes.

Proverbs present a paradox: while speakers and academics alike know what belongs in the genre, only speakers are able to agree on how to identify and define one. (This definition usually involves the authority and wisdom of the ancestors; more on this in a moment.) As soon as one person has proposed a generalization for a proverb, another shows how it is not general enough. To claim that proverbs are always metaphorical, as in *L'ennui est mère de toutes les vices*, would exclude so-called medical proverbs (Taylor 1931: 121) as in *An apple a day keeps the doctor away*. To claim that a proverb always has a structure with two subdivided parts (as Milner 1969 does, as in *Qui tacet, consentire videture*), would exclude those that do not (*Rome was not built in a day*).

Prototypical proverbs nonetheless are largely metaphorical, and they set up logical relations between entities, even if one or more of these entities is implicit (*Money talks*). Implicit entities, which are often the con-

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crete counterpart to the metaphorical expression in the proverb, are provided by the context in which the proverb is uttered. Thus, proverbs do not function semantically without a discourse context. This essay uses a variety of approaches (ethnopoetic, semantic, formal, and interactional) to infer a context where one appears to be absent.

In the broadest sense, the logical relations in a proverb can be conceived of as a topic-comment construction, that is, a propositional statement consisting of at least one descriptive element (Dundes 1975: 971). Attempts to exhaustively classify these logical relations are best exemplified by Permjakov (1979 in Grzybek 2000), who defines twenty-eight different categories and three times as many subcategories of logical relations, in which one or more entities stands in relation to (an)other entity or entities.[3] While providing a precise and theoretically universal model of the argumentation of (at least Indo-European) proverbs, logical relations alone do not allow the creation of a coherent narrative about an individual proverb's use in context, nor about proverbs cross-linguistically.

Structural factors certainly play a large role in the recognition of a prototypical proverb. To the listener, proverbs distinguish themselves in the flow of conversation (and in other speech genres) as being as highly stylized. They tend to have a quadripartite structure (cf. Milner 1969 above) of two clauses or conjoined sentences, each subdivided into two parts. The stylistic markedness arises from parallelism between the two main clauses: vowel or consonant repetition (i.e. assonance or alliteration), morpheme or word repetition, or repetition of referents (anaphora). Morpheme and word parallelism, for example, can be seen in the Salar proverb below, which expresses 'doing the impossible.' The two clauses not only repeat the

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[3]   As an example of Permjakov's analysis, take his Construction type 2 (II.B.2): "When an Entity has a relationship to two other Entities, that stand in a particular relation to each other and are of different Qualities, then this Entity is preferable the other two, or not," expressed as the formula $[E3 \sim (E_1 \in Q_1 \sim E_2 \in Q_2) \wedge (Q_1 \wedge Q_2)] \rightarrow [E_3 \in (E_1 \wedge E_2)]$, where E=entity and Q=quality (Permjakov 2000: 86). As an example, we are given *Eine Kugel hat er überlebt, aber von einer Mücke ist er gestorben.* [Tamil] (id.: 88).

postposition *qama* 'like...,' but also showing parallelism of the entire clausal structure, with parallel conditional verb phrases embedded in the matrix clauses, which are similes:

(1) *Neme išsa*   *kurexla*   *čari gangnağan*   *qama,*   *iš etse*   *geme dimur qajiğan qama.*

    food eat-COND   wood.spade-INST dig shovel-NZR   like   work do-COND   mouse iron chew-NZR like

    [VP$_1$ -COND]   [VP$_2$ like]   [VP$_1$-COND]   [VP$_2$ like]

'Eating like shoveling snow with a wooden spade, working like a mouse nibbling iron.' [9.103][4]

While prototypical proverbs exhibit formal parallelism, a minority are characterized by ellipsis, where an element is omitted. In the following, it is the third-person subject that is omitted, as it is in its English-language equivalent, *Locking the barn door after the horses are gone*:

(2) *Uğrini kačata qoni dangnamiš.*
'Locked the door after the thief escaped.' [9.79]

Ellipsis serves an important social function of masking responsibility for an assertion. In a communicative context, this proverb is often used as an accusation of belated hindsight, either at the hearer or at a third party. Omitting the implicit contextualized subject (e.g. 'you') allows the speaker to dissociate him- or herself from the accusation and thus from culpability, while it is the listener that provides the context. This type also illustrates that temporal or logical paradoxes are often employed in proverbs, as well as logical devices like hyperbole and personification.

Such structural and social approaches, however, do not adequately emphasize the interaction between participants, current context, and prior

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[4]   Abbreviations used in this paper: ABIL abilitative, ACC accusative, AOR aorist, COND conditional, COP copula, DIR direct, DAT dative, EMPH emphatic, GEN genitive, INDIR indirect, LOC locative, NEG negative, NZR nominalizer, PERF perfective, POS possessive, PRED.ADJ predicate adjective, PST.EXP past experiential.

texts. An interactionalist approach sees proverbs as a dialogue between all of these elements. If a proverb cannot be interpreted without its context, then proverbs cannot be said to exist except in dialogue with their immediate discourse context and broader cultural matrices. We need to attend less to formal categorical boundaries and more to the systemic use of proverbs within communicative contexts.

Instrumentalizing proverbs

This essay therefore approaches the proverb as an authoritative micro-narrative, embedded in a particular co-text (discourse context) and part of a broader context (the use of proverbs in society). Speakers deploy proverbs to lend legitimacy to a particular assertion, and listeners in turn recognize the speaker as an authority, based on or at least reinforced by proverb use. Proverbs are used by social superiors to inferiors: parents to children, and elders to the younger generation. Aristotle noted, "The use of maxims is suitable for one who is advanced in years, and in regard to things in which one has experience; since the use of maxims before such an age is unseemly, as also is story-telling; and to speak about things of which one has no experience shows foolishness and lack of education. A sufficient proof of this is that rustics especially are fond of coining maxims and ready to make display of them." (Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1395a).

Proverbs establish, maintain, and reinforce the authority of their speaker because they are associated with an atemporal (and presumably ancient) collective wisdom of the group.

(3) *Gamagu neme qaynatsa qazanni uširer, xen kiš neme qaynatsa otni uširer.*

'While cooking, the fool looks at the pot, the wise one looks at the fire. [9.76]

Beyond their association with authority and collective, quasi-eternal wisdom, proverbs also derive their power from their enormous and flexible connotative potential. Non-proverbial assertions largely denote; proverbs also connote (Greimas 1970). A given proverb can thus be deployed

and reinterpreted in a multiplicity of discourse and semantic contexts. Its templatic shape withstands partial deformation (via e.g. ellipsis) within different co-texts, and paradigmatic elements can be swapped out for different nuances (also illustrated below in (22)).

As speakers manipulate the form of a proverb for different communicative purposes, a proverb may not stay a proverb, but may appear to shift into a different genre. Turned into a question, with one semantic element withheld, a proverb may become a riddle; a riddle turned into a declarative, non-enigmatic statement, may become a proverb (Pagis 1996: 98, 99). Speakers may also embed proverbs into the matrix of another discourse genre, as can be seen in examples (4), (5), and (11) below.

Thus proverbs are uninterpretable without understanding their communicative context, and yet they almost always come to us in isolation. Yet due to the redeployment of proverbs in other discourse situations, related and matrix communicative genres can provide context for the interpretation of proverbs. This essay suggests that when faced with a collection of decontextualized proverbs, interaction with such allied genres may provide the most useful clues for interpretation.

The linguistic archaeology of fossilized discourse

Collections of proverbs rarely come with a user's guide. The Salar corpus we examine here is typical in that respect, lacking almost all contextual information. Not only were the proverbs collected as rote lists, without any reference to discourse contexts, but proverbs appear to rarely be used. The Turkic Salars likely migrated with Chinggisid Mongol troops from Central Asian Transoxiana to northern Tibet in the 13th century (Dwyer 2007). Much of their experience can be viewed as constant recontextualization, through their years-long migration, sedentarization, intermarriage with Tibetans and sinophone Muslims (Hui), as well as their collectivization in the 1950s and incorporation into the codified hierarchy of official Chinese minorities under an overarching modern Chinese state. Taken together, these events, coupled with the absence of an official writing system or schools in the language, have contributed to the sharp reduction in

communicative domains where the Salar language and verbal arts are used.

Twenty years ago, I became interested in the Salars, initially not because Salar is a so-called endangered language, but rather out of a respect for how the Salars had finessed seven hundred years of constant uprooting, synthesis (e.g. of Turkic, Tibetic, and Sinitic cultural and linguistic elements), and reshaping of what it meant, and means, to be Salar. I ended up working with Salar communities and individuals in 1992, 1993, and 1999 and made recordings and transcriptions of various verbal art forms including narratives, conversations, speeches, love songs, laments, riddles, and proverbs.

Salar is ceding communicative territory to dominant languages Northwest Mandarin and Amdo Tibetan, especially to the economically dominant Mandarin Chinese language. When such rapid cultural assimilation occurs, no longer do all communicative genres occur in their original natural speech context. About half of the materials I recorded were "rememberer performances" rather than spontaneous naturalistic performances. Wedding speeches are no longer made. Young men and women no longer sing covert love songs across the fields. Nonetheless, mostly elderly remembers were willing to re-create these performances and reminisce about their contexts. For a speech community under such pressure from dominant languages, the breadth of the remembered texts, co-texts, and contexts was not only acceptable but rather ideal, considering the circumstances.

Such is how I came in 1993 and 1999 to interview Selime, the mother of my 1999 research partner Ma Wei. She ended up providing about a third of the proverb corpus used here, marked [D001-D026]. The other two-thirds of the corpus, ironically, was collected from the very same family on a different occasion during 1999 and 2000 by Professor Ma, from

his paternal grandfather Kerimu[5] (marked [9.1-9.110]), and published
without commentary in Ma, Ma, & Stuart 2001. (Their transcription and
glossing have been heavily regularized for this paper.) These data are
therefore far from ideal due to their potential lack of representativeness;
they were not systematically observed in discourse context. No one has
yet studied proverbs in other Salar villages and areas.

Proverbs occur very rarely in conversations and narratives, two genres
in which we would expect to hear them, based on a review of the larger
corpus. While the conversational use of the Salar language is still com-
mon, the proverb appears to be a fairly endangered verbal art. Since longi-
tudinal participatory research has not been attempted on that topic, I can-
not say how much proverbs are used in the everyday conversational con-
text of each and every Salar village.

Given Salar history, the encroachment of dominant practices, and the
limitations of academic research in the context of shrinking communica-
tive domains, the metaphors of uprooting and linguistic archaeology run
through this paper. It is not just the Salars who have uprooted themselves
through their migration, sedentarization, sinicization and tibeticization, but
also their proverbs have, through communicative domain restriction and
academic practice, also become uprooted.

Lists of proverbs could be compared with an artefact pile from a sloppy
archaeological dig, where potential treasures were removed from their
contexts and thus potentially uninterpretable. In their natural environment,
proverbs are often used in conversations; when a communicative genre
like the proverb is disappearing from the language (and/or has been sepa-
rated from its context), proverbs may remain in older chunks of language
or other discourse genres. Interpreting proverbs therefore requires a kind
of linguistic archaeology, carefully comparing the strata in which proverbs
are found for clues about earlier contexts and their transmission.

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[5]   Thus both Selime (b. 1949) and Kerimu (b. 1919) live in Dashinïx village of Jishi
        Township in the Xunhua Salar Autonomous County (Qinghai, China). Selime *aji*
        was originally from her natal Tiangai village in neighboring Qingshui Township.

Proverbs can both contain linguistic archaisms and also themselves be embedded and thus preserved within an archaic format—an earlier stratum. Such embedding is often called 'fossilization' or 'freezing' (e.g. *err* in *To err is human* and *ward* in *Rotbart nie gut ward*, cf. modern German *war*). Yet discourse chunks, even whole discourse genres can also be embedded within another layer of discourse, such that whole genres become fossils. As will be shown below, a number of the remaining Salar proverbs are embedded into a wedding speech.

The metaphors of fossilization and linguistic archaeology have their limits. Archaeological layers may not be immutable either, but discourse is much more malleable and responsive than the sedimentary strata that the archaeological metaphor allows. Furthermore, the term *linguistic archaeology* deprives speakers of agency, for it seems to imply that only a person outside of the language could possibly excavate the wealth of fossils therein. With these caveats in mind, we employ the terms only as a means to express the surprising longevity of proverbs, idioms, and other formalized chunks of discourse.

The wedding speech as a necklace of proverb

That verbal art forms could be repurposed as other genres was in the Salar context an accidental discovery. Some proverbs in the corpus sounded vaguely familiar to me, for example:

(4) *Dimur čixsa očax-kurliginden čixer, kiši čixsa arangden čixer*. [9.1]
'Iron comes from the furnace's mouth, a marriage (lit., people) come from the maternal uncle.'

The proverb is completely unparsable in the non-Salar context, literally denoting 'if iron emerges, it emerges from the furnace's mouth; if a person/people emerge, he/she/they emerge from the maternal uncle(s).' However, it turns out to be formally and semantically nearly identical with two linked clauses in the now-extinct wedding speech genre known as Words of the Ancestors (*Urux söz*, literally 'kin words'):

(5) *Kiš čixsa iški arangdan čixar diri; dimur čixsa očaxtin čixar diri.*
[SA001][6]
'When a marriage is made, the decision is taken from the two uncles;
when iron is made, it is taken out of a furnace.'

This proverb becomes interpretable if we examine its discourse con-
text: the wedding speech was always recited by the maternal uncle to the
bride and her groom, exhorting the newlyweds to make moral choices and
follow the words of the ancestors. The above statement explains that in the
past, it was the maternal uncle that was empowered to decide if a marriage
should occur. The wedding speech continues with a comment, giving us
an unambiguous key to interpretation:

(6) *Sünixnigi (j)isa(r) dir i.*
'[The maternal uncle] is our flesh and blood (lit., 'master of the
bones').' [SA001]

As 'master of the bones,' the maternal uncle is the ultimate clan arbiter.
An authoritative statement by the maternal uncle thus becomes an authori-
tative statement from collective kin in the form of the proverb in (4)
above. Soon, I noticed another parallel between a modern proverb and a
statement in the wedding speech:

(7) *Atni vaxsa küčini vax keler, kišni vaxsa yiregini vax keler.*
'To gauge a horse, examine its strength, to gauge a man, examine his
heart.' [9.75]

This maxim corresponds to a longer Words of the Ancestors passage,
which is still an elaborated proverb (or series of proverbs) both preceded

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[6]   The spontaneous (not recreated) wedding speeches SA001, and SA002 in (8)
        below, were recorded in January 1989 by Yusufu and Hassan, respectively, in Up-
        per Sikseng village. Both were transcribed and translated by the author.

and followed by commentary: "All of you must listen carefully... People are judged by their kin." Excerpting the relevant section, we find:

(8) *At kolasa engerni koler diri; ... kišini kolasa uruxni kola diri.*
'A horse is judged by its saddle; (...) people are judged by their kin.' [SA002]

In a list of proverbs without context, it is not immediately clear how one judges a horse from its saddle: the more worn the saddle, the more worn out the horse? Given that the wedding speech was, like a proverb, an authority figure expressing normative values, the horse's saddle constitutes one of several pieces of evidence (the peacock's tail, the knife's sharpness, the storehouse's guard dog) mustered by the ancestors as channeled by the speaker to show metonymically how the appearance of a part can affect the impression of the whole:

(9)

Kurğunčux volsa ongani vaxari.	Doves watch their nest.
Urux čixsa ozğina angašari.	Children heed their elders.
Seler čosong bir-birini angnaš at keler:	All of you must listen carefully:
Turna öt bersa uni qalbir diri.	When a wild goose passes, its sound remains.
Kiši öt berse atï qalbir diri.	When a person passes, his/her name remains.
Kungče kolasa modanni koler diri;	A peacock is judged by its peony [tail];
At kolasa engerni koler diri;	A horse is judged by its saddle;
Pičax kolasa kïnni koler diri;	A knife is judged by its sharpness;
Bazer kolasa itni kola diri;	A storehouse is judged by its guard dog;
Kišini kolasa uruxni kola diri.	People are judged by their kin. [SA002]

This metonymic evidence between an entity and its quality then refers metaphorically to human behavior in kinship relations: just as the *appearance* of a part can affect the impression of the whole, so can the *behavior* of one member affect the reputation of the entire kin group. Returning now to the proverb in (7) above, we can successfully interpret that a person's 'heart' —more abstractly, 'character'— is more important than external material attributes to evaluating a person. Across Central Asia, a person's reputation is critical; a very similar proverb exists in Mongolian:

(10) *Hu'un neree; togos o'doo.* 'To a man, his name; to a peacock, its feathers.' (Weigert 2006: 76.)

Upon further examination, we can find other proverbs which can be related structurally and semantically to the *urux söz* wedding speech, for example:

(11) *Asmande bulut atux volsa yağar, kiši[niği] ğem atux volsa yağlar.*

'If the sky is full of clouds it will rain, if a person is full of worry, s/he will cry.' [9.54]

The *urux söz* version is again more specifically focused on marriage:

(12) *Asmanda bulut joxmasa, rahamet joxtur diri; ziminda soǰi joxmasa, urux joxtur diri.*
'Without clouds in the sky, there would be no rain; without matchmakers on earth, there would be no families.' [SA_001, SA_002]

In the wedding speech in (12), the presence of rain-producing clouds is positively associated with natural irrigation of crops, which is critical for a good harvest in arid northern Tibet. In (11), however, the presence of clouds is negatively associated with worry. Nonetheless, the formal parallelism of the first clauses of (11) and (12) is too striking to be a coinci-

dence. That even our limited proverbs corpus has three examples, (4), (7), and (11), where proverbs are largely isomorphic with the paired clauses of wedding speeches suggests that the two verbal arts are closely related; but which is earlier, and which is derivative? Since the wedding speech has completely disappeared from the Salar repertoire and proverbs are still present, we might assume that proverbs are the last-remembered fragments of the extinct and 'archaic' wedding speech. While their structural and semantic salience may have contributed to the endurance of the proverb forms, the wedding speech must ultimately be derivative. The wedding speech, it appears, is one long conjoined string of proverbs. An authority figure passes on the collective wisdom of the Salar ancestors on the wedding day; the rhythm and memorable parallelism of the speech is derived from the formalized structure of the individual proverbs of which it is composed.

External evidence for the hypothesis that the wedding speech is a connected poetic discourse of proverbial statements comes the from lexical and semantic similarity of the Salar term for the wedding speech, *urux söz* 'words of the ancestors,' 'kin words' to the labels other Turkic languages assign to the genre 'proverb.' The similarity is especially striking between Salar and its most closely related Oghuz Turkic languages: the term for 'proverb' in Turkmen is *ata sözlari* (lit., 'grandfather words') and Turkish *atasözü* 'ancestor/progenitor/father words.' Also in the non-Oghuz Turkic language Tatar, one of the many terms for 'proverb' is *бабайлар ссзе*, 'grandfather/ancestor words.' Thus, Turkic or at least Oghuz Turkic proverbs are by definition 'words of the ancestors.' Unfortunately, there seems to be no consensus among Salar speakers about the Salar term for 'proverb,' but seems to be something like 'words of wisdom.'[7]

Further evidence for the link between proverbs as 'kin words' and marriage is seen in the term for 'matchmaker'; in many Turkic languages and

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[7]   My 1992 fieldnotes note the term *mešlik sözleri*, possibly from *bashla:g* 'beginning'; Ma, Ma, and Stuart 2001 have *bilun*, which is more likely derived from *bilim* 'knowledge.'

all historical periods, 'matchmaker' actually incorporates one lexeme meaning 'word' (and later 'news, proverb'), usually the form *sav* plus the agentive suffix *+či/ji*, e.g. Old [Orkhon] Turkic: sab, Middle [Old Uyghur] Turkic *sav* 'word,' *savči* 'matchmaker'; Middle [Xakani] Turkic has *sa:v* 'news, statement, proverb,' and the highly relevant derived forms *savči* 'prophet,' *savlaş-* 'to exchange proverbs' (Clauson 1972: 789.) Turkmen has *sāvčĭ* 'matchmaker' and Salar, *sōji* 'id.' *Sav* does not occur as an independent word in modern Salar.

We may further hypothesize that the more frequent Turkic lexeme *söz* 'word(s)' was semantically more appropriate for proverbs (as in *atasözü*, *ata sözlari*, and *бабайлар сезе* above) and the wedding speech (as in *urux söz*) as it implied not just words but 'talk,' i.e. *söz* refers to more than individual words. Repeated collocations of connotational discourse become idioms and adages. That these are fundamentally word chunks (albeit quite formalized and salient ones) allows us to understand why the term for 'proverbs' cross-linguistically is so often something resembling 'words': cf. Yiddish *vertl* (lit., 'little word'), also termed *shprikhvort~ glaykhvort~veltsvertl*.

We have seen above how context can be discovered for proverbs, and how fluid the relationship is between the genres of proverb and wedding speech. I have argued that the Salar wedding speech is more like a necklace, strung together with beads of proverbial wisdom. The highly stylized formal parallelism of proverbs lends itself to the rhythmic lyricism of the wedding speech. Later, I will argue that the proverb genre can be redeployed and re-encoded in other communicative contexts. First, we turn to formal, semantic, and co-textual aspects of the Salar proverbs corpus to provide us with more interpretive tools to analyze these authoritative sayings.

Formal aspects

Proverbs are known for their structural symmetry. The most common form Salar proverbs are composed of two bipartite utterances (as Milner 1969 predicts [not in references]) including two finite verb phrases; this

complex structure functions as one utterance. This is a marked form, as the Salar sentence in other genres generally permits only non-finite verb forms in the first clause and finite ones in the second. The most common form of these finite verbs is in the aorist tense (V-*Ar*, negative V-*mAs*), as exemplified in the proverb below meaning 'we are slow to recognize our own faults':

(13) *Kišniği qosinde katu ensa   görer,   iziniği qosinde   qar yağsa görmes.*
NP-LOC   [[VP-COND]   see-AOR]]   NP-LOC   [[VP-COND]
    see-AOR.NEG]
'Seeing frost before others' gates, being blind to snow before (one's) own gate [9.84]

Associated with imperfectivity, the aorist lends itself to expressing authoritative, universal truths, hence its frequency in Salar proverbs. Above, we also note the parallelism between the subject noun phrases in locative case (NP-LOC) and the embedded conditional in the verb phrase. Affirmative and negative aorist forms co-occur with a range of utterance-internal structures, but they are generally parallel. Thus in the next example, the subject nouns are both in the nominative case, the predicate are both transitive and their objects are both accusative:

(14) *Xağït išni otni arenmes, shaizi išni suni arenmes.*
'Paper can't trap fire, sieves can't trap water.' [9.17]

Next most common are two parallel predicate adjective clauses, which like the aorist tense describe a quasi-universal state. In (14) below, *ala* 'colorful' is used:

(15) *Yilanniği tiresi **ala**,   kišiniği yirex **ala**.* [D003= 9.25]
[NP PRED.ADJ   ]   [NP   PRED.ADJ]
'A snake's skin is colorful; a person's heart/mind is colorful.'

Snakes are seen in Central Asia as both powerful creatures, but also as having a deceptively and thus dangerously beautiful skin. The interpretation of (14) is aided by a very similar Mongol proverb, which cautions against judging on appearance alone, but rather by their character. True character can be masked by appearance (Weigert 2006: 77):

(16) *Hu'nii ereen dotroo; mogoin ereen gadnaa.*
'A person's interior is varicolored, a snake's exterior is varicolored (Weigert 2006: id.)

Other fairly common structures for Salar proverbs are parallel clauses with conditionals, exemplifying the topic-comment focalizing aspect of proverbs (Dundes 1975): if/when *x*, then *y*. Some of these may be truncated proverbs that were originally quadripartite as in (13). The following proverb, which comments on the intractable stubbornness of the goat, has two nonfinite clauses with the conditional suffix +*sA* and the locative +*DA*, resulting in a limitative sense ('no matter how..., however...'):

(17) *Döyi arux vol**sada** ǰazisi ǰadax dïr, ešgu arux vol**sada** qurǧuni tier.* [9.59]'
'However thin the camel is, (its) frame is large, however thin the goat is it still holds up (its) tail.'[8]

Given that words of wisdom are often tacit or actual commands, it is unsurprising that we also find a number of Salar proverbs in imperative form (do *x*, do *y*), here with the bare verb stems *iš*- 'drink/eat' and *ye(n)ša*- 'talk':

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[8]   Goats, while widely raised in Central Asia, are less beloved than sheep for their character, compare the Turkish proverb *Keçi geberse de kuyruğunu indermez* 'The goat doesn't let its tail down, even when it dies.' (Aksoy 1984.)

(18) *Ašni datde iš, išni sumurlade yenša..* 'Taste before eating, think before talking.' [9.67]

Besides using imperatives, the authoritative nature of proverbs allows the speaker to frequently use emphatic forms, shown here with the direct discourse particle *dïr* 'indeed, really, certainly,' which is in origin the direct form of the copula:

(19) *Bixi dağda otun yox dïr, ǰadax kiši aqïl yox dïr.*
'High mountains have no wood, tall men have no manners (lit., 'intellect').' [9.110]

(The disdain for height in the collective Salar memory is puzzling, and may indicate historical enemies who were vertically endowed. In contrast, for Mongols, bodily height is an asset, as can be seen in the Mongolian collocation *o'odgui hu'n* 'a person without height, a scoundrel', as in *Yostoi o'odgui'i hu'n baigaa yum* 'She's a real scoundrel,' as told by Cendsu'ren, in Oberfalzerová 2006: 54.)

Not all proverbs have a rigid parallelism, however. The following proverb, expressing 'everything in moderation,' has a predicate adjective construction (with an embedded conditional) in the first utterance, but a negative aorist verb (also with an embedded conditional) in the second utterance:

(20)   *Bal   köp   bolsa   ači dur;   jilim   köp   bolsa jaxïlmes.*
        honey much be-COND spicy be-COP-emph glue   much   be-CONDstick-
ABIL-AOR.NEG
'Too much honey tastes sharp, too much glue doesn't stick.' [D 015]

Also atypical but in evidence are proverbs whose expected structural elements (and thus connotations) are elided. In the following, which a speaker uses to exhorts an inferior to be realistic about his or her abilities, a nonfinite conditional phrase is embedded within an imperative, but un-

like the quadripartite structure we find in (18), only one utterance appears with the imperative *uzat* 'stretch out,' and the conditional itself is even elided (but added here in curly braces):

(21) *Yorğoning yeride {bilsa} ayağangni **uzat**.*
'Stretch out your legs {after discovering} a quilt's length.' [9.106]

Both in form and communicative function, this admonition closely resembles the Mongol proverb *Ho'nziliinhoo hereer; ho'loo z'ii.* 'Within the size of your blanket stretch your legs,' i.e. know oneself and evaluate how much danger is in a situation (Weigert 2006: 85). While (21) does not conform to the typical structure of a proverb, it is still recognizable as one by what is absent: non-proverbial conversational speech does not display such extensive elision.

By far, the highest frequency forms are the above types (13)-(16) expressing universal truths: aorist verbs and predicate adjectives. Of 122 proverbs which were structurally evaluated (four others were excluded for incoherence), about 40% (47/122) had an aorist verb form as the final verb, and about a third of the corpus (34/122) were formed with two aorist clauses (either affirmative or negative or combined). Two parallel predicate adjective utterances constituted ca. 15% of the corpus (19/122).

Beyond these two types, paired imperatives (as in (18)) and existentials (...*bar, ...bar* 'there is..., there is...' and ...*yox, ...yox* 'there is not..., there is not...') still stood out as occurring with some frequency. Though other parallel constructions occur, such as the necessitative (...*keler, ...keler* 'It is necessary to..., and to...'), the progressive, statives, and the perfective, these were highly infrequent. An example of the necessitative is the following:

(22) *Halina bilege desa atni minge **keler**; tatlux bilege desa ašni iške **keler**.*
'A person who claims to be strong should ride on horseback; a person who claims to know sweetness should eat [savory] food.' (= Strength is as

subtle as the rider's feel for his horse; the sense of taste is as subtle as the sweetness in savory foods.) [D 013]

A tabular format (see Table 1 below) reveals that the form of the predicate appears less important overall than the clausal parallelism: although the predicate form is overwhelmingly either an aorist verb or a predicate adjective, we notice that the form of the predicate in the first clause in almost all instances mirrors the form of the predicate in the second clause, even if that form is infrequent. This can be clearly seen in the grey-shaded cells above, which mark clausal parallelism. Without exception, the numbers in the grey-shaded cells are exponentially higher than those in other cells, which in contrast represent non-parallel clauses.

In the following figure, the predicate form of the first clause (or utterance) appears in the left-most column, while the predicate form of the second clause or sentence appears in the top row. Thus proverb (20) above, which has two negative aorist forms in *-mes*, would appear in the most common type, the second cell of the second column (headers such as AOR(.NEG) indicate that an aorist or negative aorist suffix was used):

Table 1: Frequency of clause type co-occurrence (N=122; shading=identical clause types)

V, clause 2 → / V, clause 1 ↓	AOR (NEG)	CON D	IMP (NEG)	EXIST (NEG)	PRED ADJ	PRED N	PRO G	STA TIVE	necc ess	PER F
AOR (NEG)	34									
COND	11	2		2						
IMP(NEG)	2		10	1						2
EXIST (NEG)				8						
PRED ADJ	2				19					
PRED N(zd)	1					7				
PROG			1				1			
STATIVE	2									
necessitative									3	
PERF (in)def										

Salar proverb types conform to the cross-linguistically common structural parallelism, as well as a prototypical quadripartite construction, which can also be considered topic-comment constructions. The use of imperfectives (here, the aorist and predicate adjectives and nominals) to express quasi-universal truths is also common worldwide.

In addition to strong stylistic parallelism, the heavy use of the aorist on non-copular verbs distinguishes proverbs from other Salar speech genres. A typical conversation, for example, has very few if any non-copular verbs in aorist tense, whereas in the present proverb corpus 98% of the aorist forms appear on non-copular verbs.

Such grammatical and stylistic features iconically express collective authoritative discourse, and make proverbs instantly recognizable as a genre. While its basic structural template is maintained over time, proverbs commonly undergo structural modifications (such as lexical substitution or phrasal elision). When these are redeployed in new discourse contexts and genres, they may lose their salience as members of the genre *proverb*. Being recognizable and deployable as proverbs depends not upon fulfilment of an absolute number of formal criteria, but rather conforming *enough* to the prototypical form and function of the genre in order to be considered a member. Drawing on prototype theory and its precedents

(Rosch 1973, Wittgenstein 1953, §3), in the above examples the formal criteria for proverbhood are gradient rather than absolute. Therefore, while the parallel, quadripartite structure as in (14) is prototypical, the barely bipartite structure of example (21) is still recognizable as a proverb, partly due to the absent, elided elements that an interlocutor would mentally supply. The proverb also derives its salience from both formal and experiential aspects of the discourse context. Formal discourse context entails the juxtaposition of the proverb's formulaic parallelism with the more variable morphology and syntax of ordinary conversation; see example (40). Experiential discourse context involves cognitive, social, and historical contributions to the salience of a particular genre, and it is to this context which we now turn.

„Metaphor, memory, and experience"

We have seen how the denotative elements in proverbs can be re-deployed in different contexts for a different connotative meaning; thematically general proverbs about character, reputation and kinship take on more specific didactic meaning when embedded in a wedding speech. If denotative elements are less flexible and therefore less likely to change than connotations, then these metaphoric building blocks invite the cautious interpretation of the collective memory of past experience. I am referring neither to the memory of one individual actor nor to the memory of all Salars, but rather to the distributed and instrumental aspects of remembering as embedded in one 'textual resource' (Wertsch 2008:11), here, the proverb. Proverbs lend themselves to creating a series of abstract memory-narratives about some characteristics of both pre-modern and contemporary life. While these do not indicate specific events, such memory-narratives can illuminate both universal cognitive processes of remembering as well as culturally-specific historical and social processes. The latter is particularly important when proverbs are little used, language domains are shrinking, and the proverbs are largely decontextualized, as in the Salar case.

Certain experiential themes emerge from the Salar corpus. Two of the most frequent, and therefore most salient, denotative themes concern rela-

tive wealth and gendered relationships within a previously pastoral socie-
ty. For the last six hundred years, most Salars have lived on the banks of
the Yellow River as sedentary farmers; for the last sixty, they have lived
as part of the People's Republic of China's socialist nation. Its laws and
educational practices aimed at closing gender gaps in society and in the
workplace; it discourse was of a society free from class and gender issues.
Yet class consciousness remains etched into Salar collective memory;
wealth is the thematically most prevalent type of proverb, comprising ca.
15% of the corpus (18 out of 122 proverbs). Typical proverbs contrast
features of wealth and poverty: Such proverbs are literal and claim to ex-
press general social truths, so their form and deployment are less flexible
than metaphorical proverbs.

(22) *Bar kišiniği helli atux, yox kišiniği bala atux.*
'The rich have lots of money, the poor have lots of children.' [D005][9]

(23) *Bar kišiniği søzi dadax, jox kišiniği iji dadax.* [D001, D016]
'The rich have big words, the poor have big hands.' (i.e. 'The rich
boast, the poor beg.')

(24) *Volğan kiši her kuni et ye, yoqqan kiši her keše ğem ye.*
'Every day, the rich consume meat; every evening, the poor are con-
sumed by worry.' [D 007]

(25) *Bar kišniği ati rangnaji, yox kišniği balasi rangnaji.*
'The horses of the rich are spoiled, the children of the poor are spoiled.'
[9.64]

Discussing wealth is neither a taboo nor a particularly common topic
among Salars today. The elders I interviewed for oral histories said that a

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[9]   Another variant of this proverb [D006] has köp 'many,' instead of atux 'excess,
        many,' illustrating the paradigmatic flexibility of proverbs.

hundred years ago, even sixty years ago, malnutrition was a major prob-
lem, and goiters were so common that they became a sort of fashion
statement: a woman without a goiter was said not to be marriageable.
Mention of property shows the continued usefulness of the memory of the
arrogance of the wealthy:

(26) *Iyiniǧi saǧatni bao göriner, kišniǧi saǧatni čöp göriner.*
'Regarding one's own property as treasure, regarding the property of
others as weeds.' [9.80]

In the last fifty years, Communist Party discourses (in which Salar
males over age 50 are fluent) highlight such disparities as features of the
"pre-Liberation" (pre-1949) period; after this watershed year, inequalities
are said to have been eliminated in favor of an egalitarian, classless socie-
ty. Such transformative discourses are common in historical narratives, yet
the remembered proverbs continue to portray a society with clear class
distinctions. Moreover, they reveal a distinct lack of optimism regarding
the possibility of economic mobility:

(27) *Bir genzi otun tešilmes, bir kiš barlanmes.*
'One stick won't catch fire, one man won't become rich.' [9.104]

(28) *Qonax etǰani yoxlenmes, uǧri etǰani barlanmes.*
'Inviting guests doesn't make one poor, stealing doesn't make one
rich.' [9.32]

The poor can at least console themselves with their moral superiority:

(29) *Volǧan kiši yirex gøz yemen; yoqqan kiši iči baǧïrï yaxši.*
    [D008]
'The heart of a rich man is bad at the core, the viscera of the poor man
is good at the core.'

(30) *Bar kiš altunni galer, yox kiš oğulni galer.*
'The rich covet gold, the poor covet sons.' [9.101]

(31) *Dunyade sajün qamasiği dusi yox der, kiš išinde bar kiš qamasiği
dusi yox der.*   [9.23]
'In the world, nothing is as poisonous as wasps; among people, no one
is as cruel as the rich.'

Semantically, these proverbs of class and gender (see below) constitute
a different sub-class in that the referential elements are not metaphorical:
instead, through their use speakers make authoritative statements about
how the world "is": how wealth and poverty come to be, and what pre-
dictable behaviors the rich and the poor engage in. That the proverbs con-
tradict the socialist narrative of egalitarianism not only reflects collective
but distributed historical memory, but it also may be a anti-hegemonic
discourse mechanism to cope with actual instances of the psychological
violence committed in the name of the great Chinese nation during that
period against local indigenous peoples (cf. Mueggler 2001). Not coinci-
dentally, these proverbs are non-metaphorical.

True to the discourse of miraculous economic improvement, most vil-
lages, even those of modest means, are now surrounded with well-
irrigated fields. But beginning with economic liberalization in the 1980s,
many Salar men began to do regional and long-distance business (e.g.
transporting sheepskins or medicinal plants between central and northern
Tibet), and those who were successful began accumulating wealth, as can
be seen from their two-story private houses built with tile and elaborately
carved pillars, popping up in villages with the usual adobe houses. Yet
some, usually more remote Salar areas still lack electricity, and many vil-
lagers there live on thin noodle soups for most of the year. In 21st-century
China, despite overall economic gains, the Salars continue to be one of the
more impoverished ethnic groups. So it is not surprising that proverbs
about the rich and the poor continue to be salient. Ironically, it is likely
that the categorical distinction in the 1950s and 1960s between 'rich peas-

ants' (*kulak*s or indentured farm labor, termed in Mandarin and Eastern Salar *funong*, in Western Salar *bar dihan*) and 'poor peasants' (Eastern Salar *pinnong*, Western Salar *jox dihan*) likely heightened the salience of these proverbs. Whatever *material* gains China may have made, it is their inequalities that are most salient in the Salar memory.

Similarly, gender inequalities are highlighted in proverbs contrasting male and female behaviors, which also are largely non-metaphorical. They read like a playbook for expected gendered behavior: first, men are to be served by their wives:

(32) *Otkangda zoğzağuĭi volsa, yerde tiğiluĭi nee yox ari?*
'If someone is sitting on the *kang*, how can there be no [woman] standing on the floor?' [9.22]
(The *kang* is heated platform upon which guests are received and meals take place; guests or household superiors are served from the floor.)

Second, men are normally reticent, and certainly never weep:

(33) *Er kiš uslïsa ziqirer, qadun kiš uslïsa yiğler.*
'A man will chatter when he is grieving, a woman will weep.' [9.86]
Weeping is a sign of weakness and is taboo:

(34) *Omaš puxriğanni vaxquma, qaden kiš yiğliğannï vaxqume.*
'Don't look at boiling porridge, don't look at weeping women.' [9.68]
A virile man has license be in control; he does not let himself be bullied:

(35) *At mundang volsa kiš miner, kiš mundang volsa kiš kemĭiler.*
'If a horse is obedient it will be ridden, if a man is obedient he will be bullied.' [9.83]
Nonetheless, it is acknowledged that men are fundamentally dependent on women:

(36) *Agu ulini yürgen dosgen, yürgen dosgen toluxi {qama}.*

'A man who has lost his wife, {is like} a grinding stone put aside after threshing.' [9.110]

(lit., 'An uncle whose main wife is gone...')

The only *metaphorical* gender proverb in the corpus provides general advice on not evaluating individuals based on their appearance, akin to the cross-linguistically common "Don't judge a man by the size of his hat..." or "Don't judge a book by its cover":

(37) *Zorax dağangǔji er ki̇̌si emes dur; getu dağangu ̌ji qatïn ki̇̌si emes dur.*

'You can't tell a man by his hat; you can't tell a woman by her veil.' [D 012] (=9.28)

(lit., 'Those who wear caps aren't [necessarily] men, and those who wear the veil aren't [necessarily] women.')

The above proverb does not make evaluative judgments of behavior that is specifically male or female, and could refer metaphorically to a wide range of (non-gendered) behaviors, as could the majority of proverbs in the corpus. Cross-linguistic evidence leads to the expectation that most but not all proverbs in any one corpus would be highly iconic (e.g. meta-phorical) and abstract, and therefore maximally generic. Non-metaphorical proverbs, I suggest, are central to maintaining continuity in collective memory. Some of these reflect common-sense knowledge (such as the 'medical proverbs'); others constitute a distributed repository for experi-ences, behaviors, and attitudes of the past. These may well be deployed more as a means of remembering than as a didactic tool for the young. Besides Salar proverbs about gender and wealth, which clearly show the salience of maintaining social and economic dynamics proscribed by offi-cial discourse, consider these:

(38) *ǰadax ki̇ǰi volsada begur dïr, uzun xïsqa volsada bengur ar dïr.*

'Whether big or small, a person can be an official; whether long or short, a stick can be a club.'

(39) *Dağdiği balalar böriden xorğ emes, geshongdigi balalar beğden horğ emes.*

'Mountain children are not afraid of wolves, town children are not afraid of officials.' [9.78]

Not only are local government officials subject to contempt in these proverbs, but the very term used, *beğ,* is archaic: until the early 20th century, it referred to a Central Asian ruler, usually of an oasis. The north Tibetan Yellow River valley where most Salars today live is far from Central Asian oases, yet it is these officials rather than the currently-used Chinese-language equivalents that remain salient in proverbs. That the Salar proverbs reflect collective if distributed memories of inequalities contradicts Wertsch's (2008: 129) findings that older, Soviet-educated citizens replicated state discourses in elicited historical narratives. Chinese state discourses continue to de-emphasize class and gender disparities, yet these disparities figure prominently in proverbs. The Salar proverb rememberers are also middle-aged and elderly. That proverbs do not reflect state discourses may be due to their genre and to their formal conservatism. My Salar narratives corpus, in contrast to the proverbs corpus, is replete with examples of state-controlled rhetoric in oral histories. But the form of such macro-narratives more closely approximates state media discourses, whereas the comparatively rigid form of the micro-narrative proverb is less syntactically amenable to such modification. The formal conservatism of proverbs furthermore allows older collocations to persist in the language. When those collocations are metaphorical, they can be applied generically to current contemporary situations. When they are non-metaphorical, a proverb persists because it is an instrument of collective memory.

Proverbs as the locus of change

Rememberers employ proverbs as a cognitive strategy to cope with state discourses of economic harmony and gender parity; as seen above, such

resistance appears to have facilitated the distributed preservation of collective memory in an otherwise rapidly disappearing genre. But if proverbs as an instrument of past experience embody continuity, why then do we find an example of the opposite: of proverbs as the locus of change?

The difference stems from a generation gap, one which I believe indicates rapid language shift away from the mother tongue and toward the dominant language. All Salar language domains are losing currency to the dominant regional languages, northern Tibetan and northwestern Mandarin, especially the latter. Despite the rarity of contextualized proverbs, one conversation in my larger Salar corpus contains a rare example of a proverb used in a spontaneous discourse situation. That proverb is articulated not in Salar, but rather in Mandarin Chinese.

Given the stylistic and co-textual conservatism of Salar proverbs, and given that the speakers were Salars engaging in a monolingual Salar conversation, that the proverb was uttered in the state language is perhaps surprising. Three men (A, B, and C) from neighboring villages are discussing their households' comparative well-being; the underlined proverb in Chinese is uttered by speaker B in the second to last line of the excerpt:

(40)

B:Piser sï siler, siler qamasï
futandan qata var a diğen keler.

B: You have no idea how much better off people like you are compared to us here.

A:Ren xe ren bir ira bele.
Ayso, sen futan ira mu?

A: Everybody's the same.
Ayso, are you well off?

C:Futanur qata voğur i?

C: How am *I* well off?!?

B: "Ge jia tu yu yi ben nan nien de
jing."

B: 'Every household has its troubles.'

A: Zhenzhende eleği ira.

A:Isn't that the truth.[10]

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[10]   Text SA_053 recorded with permission by Arienne Dwyer on 7 May 1992 in Upper Sikseng village, Gandu area, Hualong county, China

Speaker B has embedded the Chinese proverb 各家都有一本难念的经 'Every household has its troubles' (lit., every household has a book of difficult scriptures') into an otherwise Salar-language discourse. The speakers continue to converse in Salar; the above proverb use is thus an example of sentential code-switching with Salar as the matrix language.

If proverbs convey 'kin words,' then by uttering a proverb in Mandarin, the speaker has transferred this authority from Salar ancestors to the Chinese. Speaker A, by remarking 'Isn't that the truth,' immediately confirms the power of the Chinese proverb in capturing the perceived parity of the participants lives. And in so doing, Speakers A and B, at least, are implicitly acknowledging the authority of the distributed wisdom of Chinese elders.

Looking more closely at the surrounding dialogue, we notice a preponderance of Northwest Mandarin lexical items: *futan* 舒坦 'comfortable, well-off,' *ren xe ren* 人和人 'everyone,' and *zhenzhende* 真真的 'truly.' These words are now part of the Salar lexicon, so that their appearance in Salar conversational discourse does not constitute code-switching. The heavy lexical borrowing certainly confirms that Salar speakers are increasingly using Mandarin as an communicative tool; but the embedding of a Mandarin Chinese proverb indicates that at least some Salars are also looking to Han Chinese society for the authority that Salar ancestors used to provide. The prestige associated with Mandarin accelerates language shift much more rapidly than functional demands: who doesn't want to use the language of authority, morality, and economic success? Thus, such uses of proverbs are likely the locus of language change, rather than a by-product of it.

How do we then reconcile the conservatism of the proverb genre in collective memory of past experience (section 7) with the innovation of proverbs in the above conversation? I would suggest that we are witnessing a generational divide, one which indicates an acceleration of language change. Our proverbs corpus is the product of two speakers, one who was ca. 81 years old (and who provided most of the proverbs) and one who was ca. 51 years old at the time of collection. They constitute elderly and

middle-aged rememberers, respectively. In contrast, the two speakers uttering and validating the Mandarin proverb in (40) above were both only 34 years of age. They are not old enough to remember the "pre-Liberation" society directly, but instead rely on elderly rememberers and state discourses of history. The young men also had more exposure to Mandarin through more schooling and through trade, where they recognize the economic value of the dominant language.

This is therefore unlikely to be an isolated example; I would expect that a larger corpus would reveal that those born after 1950 use predominantly Mandarin proverbs. And in this way, their deployment is an indicator not only of language change but of a transferring of authority. Proverbs serve as cultural repositories; they substantiate authority as 'words of the ancestors.' Therefore, they are the locus of contest. We have seen above both how elderly rememberers use proverbs to resist state discourses, and conversely, how younger speakers code-switch into the state language in order to validate and draw power from these very same state discourses.

Recontextualizing a genre: gossip and evidence in discourse

Speakers deploy and re-form speech genres in a range of discourse contexts, such as proverbs strung together into the wedding speech. These are examples of speakers re-using highly salient, culturally meaningful discourse chunks in different contexts. This agile re-deployment of proverbs is necessary for the continued recollection and transmission of morality and experience, as well as to aid the cognitive processing of negative experiences. In so doing, speakers are not only expanding functional domains and manipulating a discourse form in its diachronic context, but they also can control the intended interpretation of a re-deployed proverb. These three domains are what Seitel (1977: 76) has called the interaction situation, the proverb situation, and the context situation, respectively.

We have seen how both the interaction situation in which the proverb is deployed and the proverb situation (its formal potential) can be manipulated over time in the performance of proverbs as part of an elegant, poetic wedding speech sequence or in the above conversation. For the context situation —the intended target of a proverb deployment— besides the

conversation in (40), we have mostly indirect evidence: the proverbs came to us decontextualized and are in any case largely recollections, due to multilingualism and the gradual loss of Salar speech domains.

There remains one intriguing example of the functional and formal metamorphosis of the proverb genre into a grammatical category. This dynamic allows us to indirectly explore cognitive aspects of interactions between the three above domains. The grammatical distinction in question is evidentiality, which is obligatorily marked in only some languages; Salar is one such language. Evidentiality concerns the degree of certainty and reliability of an assertion: reliable evidence (i.e. direct knowledge) could be marked as evidential if the speaker had for example witnessed the event him- or herself, while unreliable, uncertain evidence could be marked as nonevidential (i.e. indirect knowledge) if it was based on hear-say. So a Salar narrator could say with great certainty (marked in the past and perfective with the suffix *-ǰi*):

(41) *Iǰaniǧi jahtuǧiuni gün apparǰi* 'The sun maidens took your mother's pillows.' (Dwyer 2000: 48).

If the narrator instead added the non-evidential suffix *-miš*, (as in *apparmiš* 'took away'), she indicates that she is not certain or that the assertion is based on reported knowledge. In both instances, the verb has the same meaning, but the perceived veracity of the information differs.

The Salar language requires that this perceived truth value be expressed for anterior experience, and evidentiality also is marked in nonanterior tenses as well. For example, indirect, non-evidential marking is used in the nonpunctual present to express timeless perceived truths, such as the particle *a* in Speaker B's second utterance in (40): *Ayso, sen futan ira mu*? 'Ayso are you well off?' B would not presume to know how Ayso felt, and thus the indirect marker is appropriate.

Speakers furthermore have the option to deploy evidentiality strategically to express intentionality, for example using indirect markers in order to distance oneself from an event (Dwyer 2000: 51–52), or using direct

markers to emphasize the authority of an assertion. These markers provide guidance to listeners as to how to interpret the event or action. Given that proverbs often express seemingly timeless collective opinions, the majority of proverbs in the corpus are marked with indirect evidentials. Those that are not (e.g. (4), (7), and (11) that appear in the wedding speech) are marked as direct experience so that the bride, groom, and audience will not doubt the veracity and importance of the advice in the wedding speech.

Not all Turkic languages mark evidentiality, and those that do tend to have less-elaborated evidential systems than Salar does. The Salar evidential system partially resembles that of other Oğuz Turkic languages like Turkish, but also owes much to the neighboring Amdo Tibetan language for the semantics and some of the syntax of evidentiality (Dwyer 2007). The evidential function of these grammatical markers —the quality and veracity of information— is echoed by the content of quite a few of the proverbs in the present corpus. I propose that these proverbs indicate a direct embodiment of the grammatical categories, in the societal taboos about gossip.

Salars do not appreciate excessive, idle talk (*gača atux* literally, 'talk excessively'), and the only agent noun for a garrulous person is quite negatively charged: *dodaxǰin* 'blabbermouth, rumor-monger, liar.' Salars equate gossiping people with donkeys, dogs, and thorns:

(42) *Kiš atux volsa gača atuxlener, ešek atux volsa, neme atux keler.*
'The more people, the more gossip; the more donkeys, the more food is needed.' [9.82]
(43) *Mush dalda tigin atux dïr, atux kiš išinde gača atux dïr.*
'Prickly ash trees have many thorns, the crowd has much gossip.' [9.85]

(44) *Bengur tütquǰini išt görelmes, gača dašağuǰini kiš görelmes.*
'Dogs despise a person holding a cudgel, people despise a person who gossips.' [9.100]

(45) *Yaxši gača qodan čix barmes, yaman gači yel qama čix barer.*
'Good words will not go out the gate, bad words will go out like wind.'
[9.87]

Gossip, besides being negatively viewed, is perceived as indirect, non-evidential experience. The events associated with gossip are indeed rarely witnessed or experience directly by the gossiper him- or herself. The following example (46) states in proverb form what is also expressed in Salar grammar, namely it clearly explains the logic behind Salar grammatical evidentiality:

(46) *Gözinge görani ǰing dïr, qulaǧïngï dingniane yalǧan dïr.*
'What you see with your eyes is true, what you hear with your ears is false. [9.34]

The language has enacted this dictum grammatically; most every Salar sentence now wears its reliability on its sleeve, thanks to the evidentials. Societal taboos about gossip and evidence in discourse appear to be inter-related, since Salar grammar requires the encoding of evidence. Intentionality, whereby speakers signaling a stance to listeners, is encoded both by poetic and grammatical means.

This grammar-proverb-poetics linkage leads us to re-evaluate our initial views of how one genre, here proverbs, could be re-formed and re-emerge as another genre. It is not just forms and functions of proverbs and other salient discourse chunks which speakers strategically deploy, but also their intended interpretation.

Concluding remarks

Proverb lists alone provide no basis for interpretation and deny agency to speakers. Here I have treated proverbs not as a static genre but rather as a dynamic form, malleable and portable to suit speakers. Acquired discursive patterns such as proverbs and idioms serve as micro-narratives and are unusually flexible and mobile compared to other discourse genres. Through macro- and micro-stylistic means (e.g. elision or using direct

evidentials), speakers signal a complex relationship between himself and participants in the context situation, the co-text (or 'proverb situation'), and the intended interpretation. Such complexity is, as we have seen, quite possible even in a language like Salar is ceding communicative ground to a dominant language.

We explored how collective memory is a powerful instrument of continuity (as a voice of the ancestors) and of resistance and healing. Salar proverbs of economic and gender disparities endure because they capture perceived generic contemporary truths, even if *and precisely because* they are diametrically opposed to state discourses of socialist egalitarianism.

Contrary to the initial impression that a list of proverbs makes, Salar speakers demonstrate a high degree of control over a wide range of means to express current and past experience through this genre. Haring writes of a tension in the situation referred to by a communicative genre; such a tension is particularly apparent in Salar genres demonstrating necessity of evidence and the social inequities lingering below the surface:

[C]ertain interaction situations evoke recurrent context situations, which they symbolize for their hearers in familiar worlds. History shows that the more tension there is in the context situation, the more likely the poems performed will be elaborately controlled, embedding their most powerful message in quotations within quotations. This degree of control in artistic language implies a similar degree of control in social life...There is continual dialogue among genres. (Haring 1992: 123–124).

The complex tools available to speakers imply that proverbs and other idiomatic genres can simultaneously be the locus of archaic discourse fossilization and of cultural change. As a communicative medium, Salar-language proverbs may have already been replaced by Mandarin ones, at least for younger speakers, but the genre proverb nonetheless continues to re-emerge in other discourse contexts. The wedding speech, which is a fine example of a long proverb poem, has also been superseded. Still, we can make use of these materials, their contexts and co-texts not only to understand the processes of genre metamorphosis and the connections

between cognitive and poetic processes in Salar, but potentially in any group.

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