

# COMPARISON OF TURKISH AND NATIVE AMERICAN PROVERBS ABOUT NATURE\*

## Doğa Üzerine Söylenmiş Türk ve Amerikan Yerlileri Atasözlerinin Karşılaştırılması

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### ABSTRACT

Proverbs, defined as short, concise and smart words that our ancestors said as a result of their many years of experience, are one of the most important cultural heritage products reflecting the cultural values of every society. Proverbs are generally used as a metaphor and their meaning are indirect. However, when we think about the proverbs, we see that they have more meanings than their usages in daily life. A metaphorical proverb, which is normally used for a specific purpose, contains another meaning that has the same meaning as in real life. For instance, the proverb “the head of a fruity tree is inclined” refers to the fact that, although it is used to mean humbler as people mature, the branches hang down to the ground in real life because the trees have difficulty carrying the fruits. It is known that proverbs, especially about nature, mean both metaphorically and generally. Because they have taught how people should live in accordance with the nature by expressing the information they obtained as a result of observing nature carefully, based on many years. In this respect, proverbs are instructive. Throughout history, there are many proverbs on nature, because agriculture and farming were important in Turkish society. Inasmuch as it is very important to know when the rains will fall, how long the sunny days will last, how the functioning of nature, the time of grazing of animals in nature, and where the houses will be suitable will be known. For this reason, every society has proverbs where it describes the functioning nature of its own nature. In this respect, proverbs are national. Thus, every society has proverbs where it describes the functioning nature of its own nature. In this respect, proverbs are national. However, when these proverbs of national nature are compared with proverbs used by other nations, many of them appear to be similar or identical. In this respect, proverbs have universal values as well as national values. The proverbs, especially about nature, have many common features with other proverbs in the world. For this reason, the aim of this study is to compare the proverbs of Turkish and American natives on nature and to understand their perspective on nature. The method of the study is based on descriptive content analysis, which is one of the qualitative research methods. Content analysis in social sciences is a systematic examination of the information obtained from various documents in order to give a meaning from archives, documents, newspapers, etc. Descriptive analysis; the data obtained are summarized and interpreted under previously determined titles. According to the findings obtained as a result of the literature review and analysis of the data obtained through face to face interviews; It was observed that the American natives considered themselves a part of nature, they all consisted of a single holy spirit, believed that when they harm nature, they would be sick and that everyone was brothers. At the same time, it was understood that their words were not short and expressive words, they were long and explanatory words and were said by tribal chiefs. In this respect, rather than proverbs, they are terse words. Compared to Turkish proverbs, some proverbs were similar, but few were exactly the same.

### Key Words

Turkish proverbs, native American proverbs, proverb comparison, nature, culture.

### ÖZ

Atalarımızın uzun yıllara dayanan tecrübeleri sonucu söylediği kısa, özlü ve akıllıca sözler olarak tanımlanan atasözleri her toplumun kültürel değerlerini yansıtan en önemli kültürel miras ürünlerinden biridir. Atasözleri genelde mecazi anlamlarda kullanılır. Anlam ifadeleri dolaylıdır. Ancak Atasözleri üzerinde biraz düşünüldüğünde onların günlük hayattaki kullanımından çok daha geniş anlamlar taşıdıklarını görülmüştür. Normalde belli bir amaç için söylenmiş mecazi anlamdaki bir atasözü gerçek hayattakiyle aynı anlama gelen

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bir başka anlamı da bünyesinde barındırır. Örneğin “Meyveli ağacın başı eğik olur.” atasözü, insanlar olgunlaştıkça daha alçak gönüllü olur, anlamında kullanılmasına rağmen gerçek hayatta da ağaçların meyvesi çok olduğunda dalların meyveleri taşımakta güçlük çekmesinden dolayı dalların yere doğru sarktığı gerçeğini anlatır. Özellikle doğa üzerine söylenmiş atasözlerinin hem mecazi hemde genelde gerçek anlamlar ifade ettiği bilinmektedir. Çünkü ataların doğayı uzun yıllara dayalı olarak dikkatle gözlemlenmeleri sonucu elde ettikleri bilgileri kısa ve özlü sözlerle ifade ederek insanların doğaya uygun nasıl yaşamaları gerektiğini insanlara öğretmişleridir. Bu yönüyle de atasözleri öğreticidir. Tarih boyunca, Türk toplumunda tarım ve hayvancılık önemli olduğundan doğa üzerine söylenmiş pek çok atasözü vardır. Çünkü tarım ve hayvancılıkla uğraşan toplumlarda yağmurların ne zaman yağacağı, güneşli günlerin ne kadar süreceği, doğanın işleyiş düzeni, hayvanların doğada otlatılma zamanının bilinmesi, evlerin yerinin nereye yapılmasının uygun olacağı bilinmesi oldukça önemlidir. Bu nedenle her toplumun kendine has doğanın işleyiş düzenini anlattığı atasözleri vardır. Bu yönüyle atasözleri ulusaldır. Ancak ulusal nitelikteki bu atasözleri diğer ulusların kullandığı atasözleri ile karşılaştırıldığında, bunların pek çoğunun benzer ya da aynı olduğu görülür. Bu yönüyle, Atasözleri ulusal değerlerin yanı sıra aynı zamanda evrensel değerler de taşır. Özellikle doğa üzerine söylenen atasözleri dünyadaki diğer atasözleriyle pek çok ortak özelliğe sahiptir. Bu nedenle bu çalışmanın amacı Türk ve Amerikan yerlilerine ait doğa üzerine söylenmiş atasözlerini karşılaştırmak ve onları doğaya bakış açılarını anlamaktır. Çalışmanın yöntemi nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden betimsel içerik analizine dayanmaktadır. İçerik analizi sosyal bilimlerde arşivlerden, belgelerden, gazetelerden vb. çeşitli dokümanlardan, elde edilen bilgilerin bir anlam kazandırılması amacıyla sistematik olarak incelenmesidir. Betimsel analiz de ise; elde edilen veriler, daha önceden belirlenen başlıklar altında özetlenir ve yorumlanır. Literatür taraması ve yüzyüze görüşmelerle elde edilen verilerin analizi sonucu elde edilen bulgulara göre; Amerikan yerlilerinin kendilerini doğanın bir parçası kabul ettikleri, hepsinin tek bir kutsal ruhtan meydana geldikleri, doğaya zarar verdiklerinde hasta olacaklarına ve herkesin birbirinin kardeşi olduklarına inandıkları görülmüştür. Aynı zamanda söyledikleri sözlerinin kısa ve etkileyici sözler olmadıkları, uzun ve açıklayıcı sözler oldukları ve kabile şefleri tarafından söylendiği anlaşılmıştır. Bu yönüyle atasözlerinden ziyade veciz sözlerdir. Türk atasözleriyle karşılaştırıldığında bazı atasözlerinin benzediği ancak çok azının ise birebir aynı olduğu görülmüştür.

#### **Anahtar Kelimeler**

Türk atasözleri, Amerikan yerlileri Atasözleri, atasözü karşılaştırması, doğa, kültür.

### **1. Introduction**

Proverbs have many popular and academic definitions. Often “proverbs” are defined as relatively short and concise words associated with wisdom and used to perform various social functions. The wisdom of proverbs has guided people in their community lives for thousands of years (Aksoy, 1988; Dundes, 1989; Mieder, 1989; Acaroğlu, 1992; Taylor, 1994; Acaroğlu, 2006). In this respect, proverbs belong to the society and the owner of it is anonymous (Karataş, 2004). Some proverbs reflect the relationship between human and nature which are always leads to the society, from the past to the present (Yazıcı et. all, 2005: 415). Since geographical conditions are determinant of agriculture, agricultural societies have followed weather conditions and other geographical events in a long period. Therefore, they gained experience by learning many things about nature and transferred their experiences to new generations in short and concise words. Important question especially for the farmer; “what will happen next season?” The correct answer for the farmer will tell him what plants are to be cultivated and where to plant: what and how best farming will be, whether it is a hill, a plain, a sun or a heavy soil. This is vital to his success. Although proverbs are filled with meteorology, success is expected even so depending on seasonal and daily forecasts (Humphreys,1960:374).

The culture of societies’ can be understood by from the proverbs of that society (Easton, 2012; Ron, 2013; Kállay, 2007; Lau, Tokofsky, Winick, and Mieder, 2004; Mieder, 1989). For this reason, in this study, the similarities and differences of proverbs about Turkish and American natives were compared in order to understand the culture and view of these two communities. Because the way of life of these two communities is

different from each other. While Turkish society has been a mass-settled life and agriculture society for centuries, American Indians are generally hunters and tribes. Therefore, proverbs are also different. They are mostly quotations. Because their proverbs are often said by the chieftain. For this reason, what is said is clear. Moreover, their proverbs are not short and concise, but long and explanatory words. They are not metaphor; they always explain the real situation. From this point of view, they differ from Turkish proverbs.

There are many studies on comparative proverbs. However, this study is different from the others because it is the first study comparing proverbs about Turkish and Native American natives. Some of the studies on proverbs are as follows; Elke, 1998 and Sundstedt, 2012 compared China, Nigerian and American proverbs; Zona, 1996 and Reitman, 2000 collected Native American and American proverbs; Bulut, Yürüdü and Kazancı, 2013; Güner and Şimşek, 1998; Deniz, Diker and Çetinkaya, 2017; studied proverbs about climate and folk calendar. Yaşar and Yaşar, 2010; Gülüm, 2009; Gülüm, 2010 researched geographical analysis of proverbs. This study seeks answers to following questions:

-Which nature factors are in the Turkish and Native American Proverbs?

-Which nature factors are similar and common in Turkish and Native American Proverbs?

-Which nature factors are differing from each other in Turkish and Native American Proverbs?

## 2. The Method of Research

This research is continued by the descriptive content analysis. Data was obtained by literature review and face to face interviews. Literature review is carried out both in the USA and Turkey. Literature review was completed at the library of Michigan State University, National Library in the Michigan State, New York Public Library, Harvard Library in Boston. This study is a combination of literature review and field interviews. Interviews were carried out with American people with the aim of collecting new American Proverbs in Florida, New York and Michigan, East Lansing. In the other hand, museums and some places were visited where Native American people live for to understand how the native American people. After literature review and field interviews, the data gathered were analyzed. Proverbs were separated according to the subjects and arrangement data are compared with the hypothesis.

## 3. Findings

In this section, the proverbs are compared to each other. Firstly, corresponding proverbs are compared, after then unique proverbs of each cultures were compared.

The proverb '*Those who have one foot in the canoe, and one foot in the boat, are going to fall into river- (Tuscarora)*' has the same meaning with a proverb in Turkish. The proverb 'If the hound dog pursues two rabbits, it doesn't catch any of them' is used to describe a situation where someone tries to do two things at the same time and fails both of them. Likely, the proverb '*One rain doesn't make crop*' (Creole) also has a corresponding proverb in Turkish, which is 'Spring doesn't start with only one rain'. These two proverbs are similar in that they imply that one simple thing is not enough for the desired outcome.

While there are some proverbs that has the exact same meaning while using different metaphors and structures, some other proverbs are not only similar in regard to their

meanings but also with the metaphors and words used. For instance, the proverb '*We are made from Mother Earth and we go back to Mother Earth*' (Shenandoah) is used to state that Earth is both the beginning and the end of life' both has the same meaning and words with the Turkish proverb 'we came from the soil and we will go back to the soil'. But aforementioned proverb is not a Turkish proverb. It belongs to the belief system and has a philosophical context rather than being solely cultural. Another example of this kind of proverb is the equivalent of the proverb '*A rocky vineyard does not need a prayer, but a pick axe*' (Navajo). In Turkish; 'Vineyard doesn't miss Mashallah, it misses only hoe' and 'Vineyard doesn't do with prayer, it only does with hoe' proverbs have same meanings. Similarly, the proverb '*Don't allow yesterday to spend up too much of today*' (Cherokee) 'don't leave your work to tomorrow' has same meaning. Other examples are listed below.

-*A dry spring, a rainy summer* (Utah). We use this proverbs in the same way. But we prefer rainy spring, dry summer. In Turkish: 'the weather never stops raining in April and it never drops even a raindrop in May.'

-*It is going to rain; the cow is bawling* (Chamula Tzotzil Indians). In Turkey, we use the same proverb with frog. "if the frogs bawling, it will rain". But this belief or observation is generally regional, not cover the whole country.

It is also noteworthy that Turkish equivalences of some proverbs stand out with their cultural bonds. In other words, while some Native American proverbs describe or tell the story of a situation by utilizing and/or referring to conceptual words, the Turkish equivalences seem to be closely related with the cultural myths and everyday life practices such as rural traditions, phrases taken from animal husbandry routines etc. The proverb '*There is a right time and place for everything*' (Cherokee) and its equivalents in Turkish, 'if the rooster crows before time, its head is cut', 'the trees never give fruits before blossom' are good examples of this.

While these examples display a similarity in terms of both meaning and structure, some proverbs are only similar in their meanings. An example of this is the proverb '*No river can return to its source, yet all rivers must have a beginning*' (Hopi). In Turkish; the proverb '*Water flows and it finds its way*' has the same meaning, although the words don't directly match.

The similarity of the meanings might also have a degree that renders them 'Very Close' or 'Lightly Close' in meaning. For instance, the proverb '*The rain falls on the just and unjust*' (Hopi) has not an exact equivalent in Turkish. But some Turkish proverbs have slightly similar meanings. 'There is snow (it has been) according to the mountain' and 'if the clouds are untidy, the rain is hurriedly' are good examples of such proverbs. Other examples of this 'lightly similar proverbs are listed below.

-*Day and night cannot dwell together* (Duwamish). We can use this proverb in the same way. 'There is always a day after a day.'

-*We must be like the water, subordinated from everything but the stronger than the rocks* (Oglala Sioks). In Turkish, we have only an idiom like this 'to be sacred like water.'

Some proverbs are directly made meaningful by referring to deeply rooted rituals and codes of certain nations that share a history of both language and culture. For this reason, it is unlikely to find exact equivalences of these proverbs. Although it is hard to find direct equivalences, some proverbs might be considered pointing out to a common ground from a different perspective when deconstructed. However, such deconstruction of the meanings of proverbs involves the danger of over interpretation, which should be

either avoided or carried out soulfully. Following proverbs can be considered as falling into this category.

- *Let your nature be known and proclaimed (Huron)*. There aren't any proverbs exactly equivalent in Turkish, but we always use "nature always does everything in the best way" in the daily life.

- *The bird who has eaten cannot fly with the bird that is hungry (Omaha)*. This proverb is resembling Turkish proverb 'satiated doesn't understand hungry situation.'

- *The frog doesn't drink up the pond in which lives (Sioux)*. In Turkish, a similar meaning is expressed in the proverb 'if you eat a lot, you get a load of.'

- *Everything has a reason in the world. Every plant grows for curing an ill, every people is created for a duty (Quote)*. There is no exactly Turkish equivalent for this proverb, but we can use some sentences in Turkish like proverbs such as 'nothing is reasonless in the life', 'if there is not any reason, you don't get beaten up.'

- *What are people without animal? If the all animals extinct in the world, human being would die in a seclusedness. Everything is tied each other. Whatever is done for animals, it exactly has been for human beings (Quote)*. There isn't any Turkish equivalent. But we can use 'everything is created for people', 'everything is for human in life' but these are not proverbs, there are only philosophic sentences.

- *Everything takes breathe from the same place. Animals, people, trees. If there weren't animals in the world, what would people do. They are drowned due to lonesome (Quote)*. There isn't any exactly Turkish equivalent. We can use these proverbs different; we use only for people not for animals. For example, 'one neighbor needs another one's ash', 'don't buy house, buy only neighbor.'

- *What is life? It is the flash of a firefly in the night. It is the breath of a buffalo in wintertime. It is the little shadow which runs across the grass and loses itself in the sunset (Blackfoot)* There isn't any exactly Turkish equivalent. But in Turkish we can use the proverb in only philosophical sentences. For instance, 'life is three days', 'life is short.'

- *When you see a rattlesnake poised to strike, strike first (Navaho)*. There isn't any exactly equivalent in Turkish, but we always use 'if someone strikes the first in the fight, he/she always wins' like a proverb.

- *Every fire is the size when it starts (Omaha)*. In Turkish, it is used in the same way 'every fire begins from small spark.'

- *When a fox walk lames the old rabbit jumps (Oklahoma)*. In Turkish it is used a bit different, but it means the same thing. 'when the wolf grows old, it is ridiculed by dogs.'

- *To touch the earth is to have harmony with nature (Oglala Sioux)* There isn't any exactly equivalent in Turkish. But this proverb is similar to 'if you care (your land) it becomes a vineyard, if you don't care it becomes a mountain.'

Some proverbs on the other hand, has no equivalence in Turkish language and culture. These proverbs can be defined as being highly cultural and contextual. Some examples are listed below.

- *Walk lightly in the spring, mother earth is pregnant (Kiowa)*. There isn't any exact equivalent in Turkish.

- *When a man moves away from nature his heart becomes hard (Lakota)*. There isn't any exact equivalent

- *We are all one child spinning through Mother sky (Shawnee)*. There isn't any exactly equivalent

*-There are plenty of different paths to a deep understanding of the universe (Blackfold).* There isn't any exactly equivalent in Turkish.

*-The earth you see is not just earth—it contains the blood, flesh, and bones of our ancestor. It is consecrated (Crow).* There isn't any exactly equivalent in Turkish.

*-Listen to nature's voice—it contains treasures for you (Huron).* There isn't any exactly equivalent in Turkish.

*-The clear sky and the green fruitful earth are good; but peace among men is better (Omaha).* There isn't any exactly equivalent in Turkish proverbs. But in Turkish we have wisdom saying by our leader M. Kemal Atatürk "peace at home, peace on the earth" and "if the eyes don't see green they are deprived without visual pleasure." Another proverb resembles is 'thousands sheep lie under one tree's shadow.'

*-Listen to her, our Earth, our Mother; listen to what she is saying (Mohawk).* There isn't any exactly equivalent in Turkish but we can use 'mother earth' for soil because it is fertile and productive.

*-From a grain of sand to a great mountain, all is sacred. (Mohawk).* There isn't any exactly equivalent in Turkish but Anatolian people, especially farmers accept that the soil is sacred.

*-If you continue to contaminate your own home; you will eventually suffocate in your own waste (Lakota).* There are some proverbs in Turkish exactly equivalent. For example, 'cleaning come from faith', 'lion can be understood from its bed', 'if you want to live in a clean environment, first clean in front of your door.'

*-My words are tied in one with the great mountains, with the great rocks, with the great -trees, in one with my body and my heart. All of you see me, one with this world (Yokut).* There isn't any exactly equivalent in Turkish.

*-All Native American people must dance continuously. In the summer, great spirit will come. It will bring, all hunting animal, hunting is will be plenty, all death Native American people come back and live again (Quote).* There isn't any exactly equivalent in Turkish.

*-The earth isn't inherited from our ancestors, we borrowed it from our children (Chief Seattle).* There isn't any exactly equivalent in Turkish

*-Cows can't catch no rabbit (Missipipi Indians).* There isn't any exactly equivalent in Turkish.

*-Reach for the high apples first, you can get the low ones anytime (Newyork).* There isn't any exactly equivalent in Turkish but this the proverb 'the ripest fruits always on the topmost' is similar.

*-Every man has an axe for a grind (Oregon).* There isn't any exactly equivalent in Turkish.

*-An Indian, a partridge and a spruce tree cannot be tamed (Cheyenne).* There isn't any exactly equivalent in Turkish but we have a wisdom saying resembling which is said by our leader M.K. Atatürk 'freedom and independence are my character.'

*-Life is both giving and receiving (Misisipi).* This proverb is resembled in Turkish 'only God gives the life and It will receive.'

*-With all things and in all things we are relatives (Siox).* There isn't any exactly equivalent in Turkish.

*-When we show our respect for other living things, they respond with respect for us (Arapaho).* There is a similar proverb in Turkish which is 'if you respect me I will show

you my respect' Native American people use this proverbs for earth but in Turkish people use them only for society.

-*Not westward, but eastward seek the coming of the light (Dakota)*. There isn't any exactly equivalent in Turkish proverbs.

-*We stand somewhere between the mountain and the ant (Onondag)* There isn't any exactly equivalent in Turkish proverbs.

-*There is nothing as eloquent as a rattlesnake's tail (Navajo)*. There isn't any exactly equivalent in Turkish proverbs.

-*We made from mother earth and we go back to mother earth (Shenandoah)*. This proverb is similar to 'we came from the soil and we will go back to the soil.'

-*When the last river is dried, the last tree is disappeared and the last fish is death, white man will understand that the money is not eaten (Quote)*. There isn't any exactly equivalent in Turkish proverbs.

-*All plants are our brothers and sisters. They talk us and if we listen we can hear them (Arapaho)*. There isn't any exactly equivalent in Turkish proverbs.

-*Every animal knows more than you do (Nez perce)*. There isn't any exactly equivalent in Turkish proverbs.

-*Great spirit's words is the leaf of pine tree that are always green, is not like leaf of oak that are always fall down turn pale (Mohawk)*. There isn't any exactly equivalent in Turkish proverbs.

-*Even animals have their own taboos (Northern Plains Indians)*. There isn't any exactly equivalent in Turkish. However, we are using different proverbs generally for every animal. For example, 'wolf changes its feather but it never changes its character', 'goat falls down the cliff for only a bunch of grass', 'horse is friend for hero', 'two roosters don't sign in the one garbage dump', 'every rooster signs in its garbage dump.'

-*Listen to voice of nature, for it holds treasures for you (Huron)*. There isn't any exactly equivalent in Turkish proverbs.

-*The moon is not shamed by the barking of dogs (Southwest)*. This proverb is similar to Turkish saying 'sun can't get puddled by clay', 'the dogs bark, but the caravan goes on', 'if a dog's prayers were answered, bones would rain from the sky.'

-*Mother Nature is always there to watch and care for her own (Kiowa)*. In Turkish we are using this proverb for God not for Mother Nature.

-*A shady lane breeds mud (Hopi)*. In Turkish, we use 'don't measure the length of you by staring at your shadow.'

-*Flowers are for our souls to enjoy (Sioux)*. There isn't any exactly equivalent in Turkish.

-*The old days will never be again, even as a man will never again be child (Dakota)*. In Turkish, we are using this proverb in the same way.

-*My grandfather, the first breath of wind, has accepted his last breath, and the same wind gives the soul of life to our children. (Reis Seattle; Duwarmish)*. We are using this proverb for God which is 'Giving lives and taking them back belongs to the God.'

-*An Indians prefer the soft voice of the wind, the cleanup of the rain, the pine-scented wind all over the puddle of water (Reis Seattle; Duwarmish)*. There isn't any exactly equivalent in Turkish.

-*The world is our ancestor. If there is evil in the world, the same evil will happen to their son (unknown).* This proverb has the same meaning in Turkish which is 'his father eats unripe grape, and his son's teeth sets on edge.'

-*If people spit out, they spit on their faces (unknown).* This proverb is used in the same way. There is not any difference.

-*Tell Me, who needs mountains? Who needs oceans? "How many people on the Earth know that they need mountains from which rivers flow into the Ocean? Most people take water not from rivers, they just turn on a faucet in the kitchen Nevertheless, they too drink water from My Mountains! (Yakui).* There isn't any exactly equivalent in Turkish.

#### 4. Result

Proverbs often provide us with metaphorical expressions of advice, courage, morale, morality and strength. But what is said about them especially on nature reflects the real situation. It is known that geographical conditions reflect the culture of the society. Therefore, we can find the cultural characteristics of societies in proverbs that are said on nature.

These two communities are very far apart and have different geographical conditions. Thus, their culture life style and proverbs are different from each other. While the culture of Turkish society is determined by settled life and agriculture, hunting and tribal life determine the culture of the American natives. Therefore, their view of life and culture are different. This difference is understood when the Proverbs that are said about nature are compared.

As a result of this study; it has been seen that the Native Americans consider themselves as a part of the world. Earth and nature are their mother, and their spirit comes from the earth mother. The earth mother has created everything. At the same time, all animals, plants, sky and all other beings in the world are siblings or children of each other. The world mother breathes everything in the world. They believe that if they leave nature, their souls will be sick. They never think to live apart from nature. Therefore, their proverbs are generally organized, protected and respectful to the nature. On the other hand, however, it has been observed that some proverbs are similar to Turkish proverbs, and a few proverbs are exactly the same as Turkish proverbs.

Proverbs are different from each other because life style, life perspective and culture are different. But also the proverbs' pronunciation is different too. Their proverbs are often said by the chieftain. That's why what he says is certain. Moreover, proverbs are short and they are long and explanatory sentences, not concise. They always explain the truth; they do not contain metaphor. Therefore, they differ from Turkish proverbs in many ways. The differences or similarities between these two communities can be understood better if not only proverbs, but all proverbs, are compared..

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