

THE SCOPE OF HOMONYM USAGE IN TURKISH FOLK SONGS

Muminova Nilufar Toshpulot qizi

Trainee Teacher, Uzbekistan State World Languages University

Abstract. This article examines the functional characteristics of homonyms in Turkish folk songs, their aesthetic and artistic roles, and their contribution to the semantic and stylistic richness of folk song texts. Drawing on authentic examples from Turkish folk songs, the study explores the semantic potential of homonyms and demonstrates how their strategic deployment enhances poetic expressiveness, maintains rhyme and rhythmic harmony, and elevates the overall aesthetic value of folk poetry.

Keywords: homonymy, Turkish folk songs, folklore, semantics, artistic expression, style, rhyme.

1. INTRODUCTION

Homonymy is one of the central phenomena in linguistic research, defined as the relationship between words that share identical phonetic form but convey distinct and unrelated meanings. Homonymous words are typically pronounced in the same way and, in most cases, written identically. Their widespread occurrence in natural language presents both analytical challenges and rich opportunities for literary exploitation, particularly within oral traditions.

Turkish folk songs (*halk türküleri*) represent a vibrant and enduring oral literary tradition that has preserved the cultural memory, emotional life, and linguistic creativity of Anatolian and Turkic peoples for centuries. Within this tradition, homonyms function not merely as incidental occurrences but as deliberate stylistic devices that amplify semantic complexity, generate aesthetic resonance, and sustain the musical and rhythmic structures that define the genre.

The present study investigates the scope and function of homonymy in Turkish folk songs, examining how identical phonetic forms are deployed across different semantic fields within the same lyrical text. By analyzing selected examples, the article aims to illuminate the role of homonyms as key contributors to the poetic richness and artistic sophistication of the Turkish folk song tradition.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: HOMONYMY IN LINGUISTICS

In contemporary linguistics, homonymy is distinguished from polysemy on the basis that homonymous words, despite their identical form, possess etymologically unrelated meanings that have converged through historical phonological development. Scholars such as Ullmann (1962) and Lyons (1977) have emphasized the importance of differentiating between lexical ambiguity arising from polysemy (multiple related meanings of a single word) and that arising from homonymy (distinct lexical items sharing a surface form).

From a stylistic and literary perspective, homonyms have long been recognized as productive devices for generating wordplay, puns, double meanings, and other forms of semantic ambiguity that enrich literary texts. In folk literatures across cultures, the deliberate or conventional use of homonymy serves functions ranging from mnemonic facilitation and rhythmic structuring to the creation of emotional depth and ironic counterpoint.

In the Turkish linguistic tradition, homonymy has been studied primarily within the framework of lexical semantics. However, its function as a literary device in oral poetry has received comparatively limited attention. The present study addresses this gap by focusing specifically on Turkish folk songs as a primary corpus.

3. ANALYSIS OF HOMONYMS IN TURKISH FOLK SONGS

3.1 Nominal Homonyms: The Case of el

One of the most illustrative examples of homonymy in Turkish folk songs is the word *el*, which simultaneously holds the meanings 'hand' (the body part) and 'people, community, strangers' (a social collective). The following quatrain exploits this dual meaning with notable artistic effect:

Ah neyleyim gönül senin elinden,
Her zaman ağlarım gülemem gayri,
Ben bıktım usandım elin dilinden,
Terk ettim sılaya dönemem gayri.

In the first line, *el* appears in the ablative construction *elinden* with the meaning 'hand,' conveying the speaker's lament over the heart's emotional grip. By the third line, however, *elin* refers to 'strangers' or 'other people,' expressing weariness at the tongue of outsiders. Furthermore, the suffix *-in* simultaneously performs the function of a possessive marker in one reading and a genitive case marker in the other, exemplifying how morphological homonymy compounds lexical homonymy to generate layered semantic effects.

3.2 Verbal Homonyms: geçmek (to pass / to give up)

The verb *geçmek* provides a striking example of verbal homonymy deployed for emotional intensification. Consider the following folk song:

Köprüden geçemiyom,
Az doldur içemiyom,
Halden bilmez, söz anlamaz ne fayda,
Sen benden geçtin ama,
Ben senden geçemiyom.

In the opening line, '*köprüden geçemiyom*' conveys the literal inability to cross a bridge — a physical act of passage. In the closing line, however, '*ben senden geçemiyom*' carries the figurative meaning 'I cannot let you go / give you up,' expressing profound emotional attachment. This shift from the concrete to the abstract through a single verb is characteristic of the aesthetic economy of folk poetry, where homonymic verbs permit the compression of multiple emotional registers into a unified phonetic form.

3.3 Homonymy and Rhyme: incidi (thinned / was offended)

The following quatrain demonstrates how homonymy serves simultaneously as a rhyme-generating device and a vehicle for semantic complexity:

Altun hızmav incidi,
Gömleğim narıncıdı,
Menim lal olmuş dilim,
Ne dedi yar incidi.

Here, *incidi* appears in both the first and fourth lines, yet carries different meanings: in the first line, 'became thin / was refined' (describing gold thread), while in the fourth line, 'was offended / hurt' (describing the beloved's emotional response). This homonymic pair not only generates the rhyme scheme of the quatrain but also creates a subtle emotional juxtaposition between material delicacy and emotional fragility — a hallmark of the poetic sophistication found in Turkish folk songs.

3.4 Cross-Category Homonyms: gül (rose / smile)

Turkish folk songs also exploit homonymy across grammatical categories — specifically between nouns and verbs. The word *gül* functions both as a noun ('rose') and as the imperative form of *gülmek* ('to laugh / smile'). The following couplet illustrates this:

Çemberimde gül oya,
Gülmedim doya doya.

In the first line, *gül* is a noun embedded in a nominal phrase describing a rose embroidery motif. In the second line, *gülmedim* is the negative past tense of the verb *gülmek*, meaning 'I did not smile/laugh to my heart's content.' The juxtaposition of natural beauty (the rose) and unfulfilled joy (the inability to smile) generates a poignant emotional tension, and the formal homonymy of *gül* anchors the two lines in a relationship of phonetic identity and semantic contrast.

3.5 Homonymy and Dream Imagery: *düş* (fell / dream)

The word *düş*, meaning both 'dream' (noun) and the past tense root of *düşmek* ('to fall'), provides another salient example of the poetic potential of homonymy:

Ay gider ayan ayan,
Düşüm yollara yayan,
Düşüme girmez iken,
Yanına geldim uyan.

In the second line, '*düşüm yollara*' conveys the speaker's setting forth on a journey — a literal falling onto roads. In the third line, '*düşüme girmez iken*' employs *düş* as 'dream,' meaning the beloved did not even appear in the speaker's dreams. This homonymic interplay between physical movement and dreamscape effectively articulates the lyric subject's longing and the paradox of seeking a presence that does not even grace the realm of sleep.

4. DISCUSSION

The examples analyzed above reveal that homonymy in Turkish folk songs functions on multiple interconnected levels. At the phonological level, homonymous words facilitate rhyme schemes and sustain the metrical and musical structures that define the genre. The recurrence of an identical phonetic form across different semantic contexts creates a form of sonic cohesion that reinforces the song's musicality and memorability.

At the semantic level, homonymy enables the simultaneous activation of multiple meaning planes within a compact textual space. This property aligns well with the aesthetic economy of folk poetry, which favors compression, indirection, and the layering of meanings rather than explicit discursive elaboration. Through homonymy, a single word becomes a pivot around which multiple emotional and conceptual registers can rotate.

At the stylistic level, homonyms generate what might be termed semantic doubleness — a poetic quality whereby the audience is invited to process two or more meanings simultaneously or in rapid succession, creating an effect of wit, emotional complexity, or ironic juxtaposition. This quality connects Turkish folk song tradition to broader patterns of homonymic wordplay found in other oral literary traditions worldwide, suggesting that the exploitation of homonymy may be a near-universal feature of oral poetry.

It is also noteworthy that homonyms in Turkish folk songs often involve both lexical and morphological ambiguity simultaneously, as the case of *el/elin* demonstrated. This compounding of homonymic layers at multiple levels of linguistic structure further enriches the interpretive possibilities available to audiences and performers of these songs.

5. CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that homonyms constitute one of the most productive and artistically significant devices in the poetic language of Turkish folk songs. Their deployment serves a range of interconnected functions: enriching semantic content, producing rhyme and rhythmic cohesion, generating emotional complexity, and elevating the aesthetic quality of folk song texts. Rather than being accidental features of the lexicon, homonyms in this tradition appear to be strategically leveraged by folk poets and singers to maximize the expressive potential of a minimal formal unit.

From the perspective of Turkish folklore linguistics, these findings suggest that a comprehensive stylistic analysis of folk song language must attend closely to the phonological and semantic convergences that homonymy creates. Future research could profitably extend this analysis to a larger corpus of Turkish folk songs across regional traditions, as well as to comparative study of homonymy in other Turkic oral poetic traditions, thereby situating Turkish folk song within the broader typology of homonymic poetics in world folklore.

REFERENCES

1. Aksan, D. (1995). Türkçenin Sözcükleri. Ankara: Engin Yayınevi.
2. Bars, M. E. (2008). Türk Halk Şiirinde Anlam Oyunları. Türk Dili ve Edebiyatı Araştırmaları Dergisi, 14, 45–67.
3. Elçin, Ş. (1986). Halk Edebiyatına Giriş. Ankara: Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı Yayınları.
4. Lyons, J. (1977). Semantics (Vol. 1). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
5. Özkan, İ. (1999). Türk Halk Müziği Sözlüğü. Ankara: Atatürk Kültür Merkezi Yayınları.
6. Ullmann, S. (1962). Semantics: An Introduction to the Science of Meaning. Oxford: Blackwell.
7. Yıldırım, D. (1976). Türk Bitiş Kafiyesinin Yapısı. Türk Folklor Araştırmaları, 3(12), 112–130.