

## ARTICLE

# Metaphors in the Language of Zhyrau: Structural Features and Functional Role

*Daulet Zhalelov* , *Amanzhol Altay* , *Sagymbai Zhumagul* \*, *Maktagul Orazbek* , *Meruyert Zhalelova* 

*Department of Kazakh Literature, L. N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Astana 010008, Kazakhstan*

## ABSTRACT

This article explores the structural and functional characteristics of metaphors in the poetic language of zhyrau, who played a pivotal role in shaping Kazakh national consciousness and identity. The study investigates metaphors not only as stylistic devices but also as essential cognitive and discursive structures rooted in historical, social, and cultural contexts. Drawing on cognitive, structural-semantic, mythopoetic, and comparative-historical methods, the authors classify metaphors found in tolgau poetry into individual (authorial), conceptual, archetypal (symbolic), and discourse-based types. The article demonstrates how metaphors in zhyrau poetry express philosophical reflections, national ideology, and social critique, functioning as tools for political communication and historical narration. The poetic texts of prominent zhyrau such as Bukhar, Makhambet, Kaztugan, and Dospambet are analyzed to reveal the depth and diversity of metaphorical expressions, including equestrian, martial, and natural imagery. Through detailed textual analysis, the authors show how metaphor serves as a bridge between artistic expression and conceptual thought, enabling zhyrau to convey complex ideas on leadership, aging, conflict, and unity. The research emphasizes the syncretic role of the zhyrau—as poet, advisor, strategist, and ideologue—within the governance structure of the Kazakh Khanate. Ultimately, the study concludes that metaphor in zhyrau poetics is a multidimensional phenomenon that preserves and transmits national values, worldview, and historical memory, making it an integral part of Kazakhstan’s literary and cultural heritage.

**Keywords:** Metaphor; Zhyrau; Structural Features; Functional Role; Individual (Authorial)

### \*CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Sagymbai Zhumagul, Department of Kazakh Literature, L. N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Astana 010008, Kazakhstan;  
Email: [sagymbai.zhumagul@mail.ru](mailto:sagymbai.zhumagul@mail.ru)

### ARTICLE INFO

Received: 6 March 2025 | Revised: 31 March 2025 | Accepted: 7 April 2025 | Published Online: 8 April 2025  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v7i4.8979>

### CITATION

Zhalelov, D., Altay, A., Zhumagul, S., et al., 2025. Metaphors in the Language of Zhyrau: Structural Features and Functional Role. *Forum for Linguistic Studies*. 7(4): 353–365. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v7i4.8979>

### COPYRIGHT

Copyright © 2025 by the author(s). Published by Bilingual Publishing Group. This is an open access article under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>).

# 1. Introduction

The study and comprehension of the multifaceted nature of metaphors are closely associated with the works of Aristotle, Rousseau, and Hegel. In classical scholarly works, metaphors are examined as artistic devices, with their key characteristics thoroughly analyzed. Aristotle approached metaphor from a rhetorical perspective, emphasizing its poetic significance. He noted that linking one concept to another or renaming something is based on semantic resonance<sup>[1]</sup>. Similarly, Cicero associated metaphor with the art of oratory and discussed its impact on the audience<sup>[2]</sup>.

Compared to other tropes, metaphors have attracted the attention of researchers such as E. Cassirer and Ortega y Gasset<sup>[3]</sup>. Interest in understanding the nature of metaphors continues to grow. The theoretical foundations and scope of metaphor studies have been expanded by extensive research works, including Cassirer's *The Power of Metaphor*<sup>[4]</sup>, Richards' *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*<sup>[5]</sup>, Black's *Metaphor*<sup>[6]</sup>, and Wheelwright's *Metaphor and Reality*<sup>[7]</sup>.

In contemporary global research, metaphor is no longer considered merely a stylistic device but is widely studied as a cognitive, logical-philosophical, and psycholinguistic phenomenon. In the 1990s, metaphor theory was enriched with new scientific perspectives, leading to interdisciplinary studies. Among the widely recognized works is the collective volume *The Theory of Metaphor*<sup>[8]</sup>. There are various perspectives on metaphors. Maslova<sup>[9]</sup> argues that "metaphor reflects cultural values and systematizes human perception of the world". Researchers who analyze metaphor from cognitive and philosophical perspectives have established its connection to thought processes. In their study *Metaphors We Live By*, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson argue that metaphors influence not only language but also human cognition, demonstrating that everyday thought structures are based on metaphorical frameworks<sup>[10]</sup>.

Richards<sup>[5]</sup>, in *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, explores the structural models of metaphors, while E. Cassirer's<sup>[4]</sup> *The Power of Metaphor* examines their symbolic nature and cognitive function. Ortega y Gasset<sup>[3]</sup>, in *Two Great Metaphors*, focuses on the cultural and philosophical dimensions of metaphors, uncovering their significance as value-laden concepts. McCormack<sup>[11]</sup>, in *The Cognitive Theory*

of Metaphor, identifies key characteristics of metaphors, arguing that they are integral to cognitive processes, shaping world perception and facilitating the formation of new hypotheses. According to McCormack<sup>[11]</sup>, metaphor serves as a cognitive mechanism that establishes interconnections between human consciousness and culture.

Metaphor has not only been examined from cognitive, logical, and philosophical perspectives but also from pragmatic and communicative standpoints. Wheelwright<sup>[7]</sup>, in *Metaphor and Reality*, asserts that metaphors are not limited to linguistic phenomena but also play a crucial role in shaping our understanding of reality.

Donald Davidson<sup>[12]</sup> approaches metaphor from a linguistic perspective, stating that "the interpretation of a dream requires the collaborative efforts of the dreamer and the interpreter. Likewise, the meaning of a metaphor depends on both its creator and its interpreter". Vico<sup>[13]</sup> regarded metaphor as a form of myth. As an expert in aesthetics, he asserted that "each metaphor, upon closer examination, turns out to be a small myth. Every era creates its own myths, differing only in the metaphors they employ". This perspective highlights that metaphors are not merely aesthetic devices but also function as cultural codes, transmitting cognitive models across generations.

Miller<sup>[14]</sup> made significant contributions to cognitive psychology, particularly in studying how humans process and interpret information. His concept of apperception suggests that the perception of textual information is influenced by prior knowledge. The relationship between apperception and metaphor is evident in Miller's studies on cognitive systems: when individuals accumulate information, they rely on past experiences and assimilate new data through metaphorical frameworks.

In Kazakh linguistics, metaphorical expressions have been systematically studied by Khasanov<sup>[15]</sup>. In his work on metaphors, he states: "Objects and phenomena are transferred either as a whole or in part based on commonalities in form, properties, and movement; similarity in shape, color, smell, and sound; as well as their internal relationships. The use of metaphor involves the integration of visual, auditory, and sensory impressions".

Before analyzing metaphors in the language of zhыrau, it is essential to distinguish between two main types of metaphor: linguistic metaphor and poetic metaphor. Nur-

dauletova states that “the origins of linguistic metaphors lie in their linguistic genesis. Linguistic metaphors have become such an integral part of speech that, in some cases, the semantic connection between the objects they represent becomes obscure”<sup>[16]</sup>. Poetic metaphor, on the other hand, is one of the fundamental elements of literary expression, conveying a poet’s thoughts and emotions in an artistic manner, creating an aesthetic impact on readers and listeners. The language of zhyrau features both general metaphors and poetic metaphors characteristic of the zhyrau tradition, as well as individualized, authorial metaphors shaped by reflections on the meaning of life.

In her study of metaphors in zhyrau’s language, B. Nurdauletova categorizes them based on semantic motivation into several groups:

1. The juxtaposition of two different entities (adjacent, similar, opposite, or sometimes unrelated) within a single context;
2. The representation of abstract concepts through tangible objects, phenomena, or actions;
3. The emergence of metaphorical meaning through the process of occasionalization in metaphorical structures;
4. The use of symbolic words as semantic dominants in metaphor formation;
5. Metaphors with comparative or simile-based meanings<sup>[16]</sup>.

Metaphors, first and foremost, are the result of an author’s perspective, which does not emerge in isolation but is shaped by various factors such as language, nationality, beliefs, and personal worldview. These factors influence the formation of metaphors, which in turn shape cognitive frames and concepts. Therefore, metaphor does not arise spontaneously but develops through culturally and linguistically recognized attributes and symbols. This characteristic makes metaphor not only a subject of literary studies but also a key concept in cognitive linguistics. A comprehensive analysis of metaphor allows for a deeper understanding of its function.

Thibodeau and Boroditsky argue that “metaphors in language reflect frame-based knowledge structures and lead to structurally coherent inferences. Metaphors influence not only rhetoric but also our conceptualization of knowledge and decision-making on significant social issues”<sup>[17]</sup>. They further assert that “metaphors affect not only the initial

choices people consider but also what they perceive as the best decision”, highlighting the role of metaphor as more than just a descriptive tool but a cognitive force influencing decision-making<sup>[18]</sup>.

In addition, the use of artistic devices, especially metaphors, in Kazakh oral poetry enhances the expressive power of the *tolgau* and strengthens its impact on the listener. This issue has also become relevant in modern literary studies. In particular, the functional role and structural features of metaphors in oral poetry have been subjected to scientific analysis in works such as *Introduction to Literary Studies*<sup>[19]</sup>, Zhanabayev’s<sup>[20]</sup> *Formulaic Units and Poetic Vocabulary in the Language of XV–XVIII Century Oral Poets*, and Adilbek’s<sup>[21]</sup> *The Words of Oral Poets - The Eyes of History*<sup>[22]</sup>. The authors consider metaphor not only as an aesthetic device but also as a means of conveying cognitive and worldview content, serving as a key to socio-philosophical reflection.

In this regard, metaphorical expressions in collections such as *Seven Centuries of Song*<sup>[22]</sup>, *Poetry of Oral Poets*<sup>[23]</sup>, *Kenessary–Nauryzbay*<sup>[24]</sup>, *The Swift Poet – Kashagan*<sup>[25]</sup>, *Masters of Song*<sup>[26]</sup>, and *Works of Nauryzbek Oral Poet*<sup>[27]</sup> have been analyzed to reveal the system of traditional poetic images and their typological characteristics. These works clearly demonstrate that metaphors form the core of poetic language in oral poetry, highlighting their significance in reflecting the national mentality. The research also shows that metaphors in oral poets’ language perform not only artistic but also pragmatic and discursive functions.

The following sections will analyze the mechanism of authorial metaphor formation, its role in the zhyrau tradition, and the poetic and conceptual aspects of fixed metaphorical patterns that hold a special meaning in zhyrau’s linguistic expression.

## 2. Methodology

In the systematic study of metaphors in the language of zhyrau, various methods were employed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic. To determine the structural, semantic, and functional characteristics of metaphors in zhyrau poetics, the research was based on cognitive, comparative-historical, mythopoetic, lexical-semantic, and contextual analysis methods.

As the linguistic material underlying the research,

metaphorical usages from the poetic works (tolgaus) of Kaztugan, Dospambet, Shalkiyiz, Bukhar, Makhambet, and Shal Akyn, who lived during the XV–XIX centuries, were selected. The metaphors were chosen from works encompassing the creativity of these poets, such as Kobyz Saryny, Zheti Gasyr Zhyrlaidy, and Aldaspan<sup>[28]</sup>.

In identifying and analyzing the metaphors in the poets' language, the scientific concepts and typological foundations proposed by researchers such as Omiraliev<sup>[29]</sup> and B. Nurdauletova<sup>[16]</sup> regarding metaphor classification were taken as the main guideline. During the writing of the article, more than 30 poetic works (tolgaus) were examined, and about 50 metaphorical usages were selected. The metaphors were analyzed according to their cognitive and poetic features, and their semantic fields and conceptual foundations were identified.

During the initial content review, figurative expressions and phrases with figurative meanings were included. They were also analyzed within a historical and cultural context, with metaphorical components being specified. Metaphorical expressions were classified into symbolic, conceptual, discursive, and individual types. Finally, the manifestation of each metaphor within the poetic work and its connection to life's reality were summarized.

During the selection process, special emphasis was placed on authorial metaphorical patterns and unique poetic images. Additionally, metaphors in the poets' works that bear historical, political, and social significance were subjected to specific analysis.

The cognitive approach was central to identifying metaphors in the language of zhyrau. This is because metaphor is not only a poetic phenomenon but also a reflection of conceptual structures in human cognition. Through this method, the conceptual frameworks used by zhyrau to interpret reality and their connection to contemporary thought systems were examined. Additionally, the impact of fixed metaphorical expressions in zhyrau poetry on national consciousness was analyzed.

To identify and analyze individual (authorial), conceptual, symbolic (archetypal), and discourse metaphors in zhyrau's works, the aforementioned and other methodological tools were applied. For instance, the mythopoetic method was essential in determining symbolic (archetypal) metaphors, while the semasiological method was used to

study individual (unique) metaphors. Moreover, contextual analysis was employed to understand how metaphors functioned within specific historical and cultural contexts. This approach allowed for an exploration of the relationship between metaphors in zhyrau's compositions and historical events, as well as their political and social implications.

The integrated application of these methods enabled a deeper exploration of the nature of metaphors in zhyrau's works, providing insights into their semantic significance, poetic function, and linguistic role.

### 3. Results and Discussion

Metaphors used in the art of zhyrau represent a symbolic system formed within a specific historical and cultural context and passed down through generations. These metaphors were not chosen randomly; rather, they were analyzed through conceptual structures characteristic of traditional ways of thinking. Zhyraus strive to influence the listener's perception by portraying reality both directly and metaphorically.

The cognitive components underlying the metaphors resonate with the zhyraus' methods of perceiving, evaluating, and narrating life's realities. Metaphorical expressions in zhyrau works often address themes of power, warfare, political issues, and relationships between the khan and the people, conveying meanings indirectly.

Each metaphor, while serving as a lexical unit within the poetic text, also functions as a tool for conveying historical consciousness and national worldview.

The use of metaphor as a stylistic device continues to evolve. Based on their semantic properties, metaphors have developed into anthropomorphic, biomorphic, technical, and natural phenomena-based types. Structurally, they range from simple to complex metaphors, expanding in accordance with linguistic and cognitive demands. Functionally, poetic, scientific, and cognitive metaphors play a significant role in shaping human thought, scientific terminology, and the artistic potential of literary works.

In zhyrau poetry, metaphors played a crucial role in addressing societal issues and enhancing the power of warrior-themed zhyrau songs. Academic Kaskabasov notes that "Kazakh zhyrau poetry, from a historical, social, and spiritual perspective, can be traced back to the era of the Turkic Kha-

ganate. The writings of the renowned Yollig Tegin indicate that he was a zhyrau during the time of Kül Tegin, Bilge Khagan, and Tonyukuk, advocating for unity, national honor, and the glory of the state. Similarly, figures like Korkyt Ata from the Oghuz period, Ketbuga (Ulyq Jyrshy) from the time of Genghis Khan, and Sybyr from the Golden Horde era were the predecessors of Kazakh zhyrau who emerged in the 15th–16th centuries”<sup>[28]</sup>.

Zhyrau functioned as a bridge between the khan and the people, strengthening the foundation of the nation. They inspired warriors and citizens alike, instilling courage through their *tolgau*. “The zhyrau was not only a visionary strategist in the khan’s court but also an advisor, the state’s chief ideologue, a mentor to the people, a commander, and a powerful poet”<sup>[28]</sup>.

The metaphors used by zhyrau were diverse, including those based on natural phenomena, as well as political, social, and military themes. Most metaphors in zhyrau poetry are authorial, serving as stylistic markers of their distinctive artistic language. These metaphors, unique to zhyrau, can be referred to as “individual metaphors,” “creative metaphors,” or “new metaphors.” They can be further classified into different subcategories: individual (unique), conceptual, symbolic (archetypal), and discourse metaphors. In some cases, multiple types of metaphors coexist within a single *tolgau*.

For example, in the poem “Sadyr, where are you going?” by Bukhar Kalqamanuly, who was a trusted advisor to Abylai Khan, metaphors serve a significant role. This *tolgau* addresses misunderstandings among clans, advocating for peace and unity through philosophical reflections. Unlike many other zhyrau compositions, this poem is not directed at a khan but at a particular clan, urging them to reconsider their stance and choose a path of reconciliation.

The historical context of this *tolgau* is tied to an incident where a young man from the Sadyq clan of the Nayman tribe unintentionally killed Akmyrza, a member of the Arghyn tribe. Fearing retribution, the Sadyq people planned to move temporarily to the Sarysu region. Recognizing the potential for tribal conflict and social instability, Bukhar zhyrau pursued them and delivered this *tolgau* to persuade the clan leaders to remain and resolve the dispute peacefully. In doing so, he spoke not just as a representative of the Arghyn tribe but as a voice of the entire Kazakh Khanate.

#### 1st Excerpt (Bukhar Zhyrau)

Transliteration:

“Sen tanymay ketip barasyń,  
Men – Arǵın degen aryspyn,  
Azyýy kere qaryspyn.  
Sen – búzaý terisi shónshiksin,  
Men – ógiz terisi talyspyn,  
Abylai aldynda sen bitseń,  
Qúdandaly tanyspyn!  
Eger Abylai aldynda bitpeseń,  
Atasyn bilmes alyspyn.”

Translation:

“You walk away without recognizing me,  
I am an Arghyn, a mighty pillar,  
My teeth are strong and unyielding.  
You are but a calf’s rawhide pouch,  
I am an ox’s sturdy leather strap.  
If you resolve this before Abylai,  
I shall be a kin by alliance!  
But if you do not settle before Abylai,  
I shall be an adversary unknown to his ancestors.”

In this passage, Bukhar Zhyrau employs powerful metaphors to assert his authority and position. The contrast between a “calf’s rawhide pouch” and an “ox’s leather strap” symbolizes the difference in strength, resilience, and experience. The metaphor “a mighty pillar” (*arys*) represents leadership and foundational support within the tribal system. The line “If you resolve this before Abylai, I shall be a kin by alliance” suggests a diplomatic resolution, whereas “an adversary unknown to his ancestors” hints at severe conflict if the dispute is not settled peacefully.

#### 2nd Excerpt (Bukhar Zhyrau on Old Age)

Transliteration:

“Toqsan bes degen tor eken,  
Dáim janyń qor eken.  
Qargıyn deceń, eki jaǵy or eken;  
Naıza boıy jar eken,  
Túsip ketsen tǵbine,  
Túbi joq teren kól eken,  
El qonbartyn shól eken,  
Kelmeituǵyn neme eken.”

Translation:

“Ninety-five is a trap,  
Where life is in constant fear.  
If you try to leap, there are cliffs on both sides;  
A chasm as deep as a spear’s length,  
If you fall,  
It is a bottomless abyss,  
A barren desert where no people settle,  
A place from which none return.”

This passage metaphorically describes old age as an inescapable trap, an abyss, and an arid desert—places of no return. The imagery of cliffs, deep chasms, and desolation evokes the hardships and loneliness of aging. The metaphor “a bottomless abyss” suggests the uncertainty and inevitability of death.

3rd Excerpt (Shal Aqyn)

Transliteration:

“Men bir shapqan jýirik at,  
Bir jeliksem basylman.  
Óttiń bir dúnie, ótiń-aı,  
Teńsele basyp kettiń-aı,  
Men bir júrgen jorǵa tai,  
Jylı da basyp kettim-aı.  
Dombyra qolda qaraǵaı,  
Qolǵa da on alǵan soń,  
Áriden berı salam-aı.”

Translation:

“I am a galloping, swift steed,  
Once I run wild, I do not stop.  
Oh, fleeting world, you have passed,  
Swaying gently as you left.  
I am a pacing colt on the move,  
Stepping lightly as I go.  
The dombra is in my hands, made of black pine,  
And when I hold it,  
I play melodies from times long past.”

Shal Aqyn uses equestrian metaphors (“swift steed” and “pacing colt”) to describe the fleeting nature of life. Horses were highly valued in Kazakh culture for their speed and endurance, making them a powerful metaphor for vitality

and passage through time. The image of the dombra (a traditional Kazakh instrument) symbolizes the poet’s connection to cultural memory and oral tradition.

4th Excerpt (Bukhar Zhyrau on Horses and War)

Transliteration:

“Jal-qúıryǵy qaba dep – jabydań aıǵyr salmańyz,  
Qalyń maly arzan dep – jamannan qatyn al-  
mańyz.  
Jabydań aıǵyr salsańyz – jauǵa mıner at tumaǵ,  
Jaman qatyn alsańyz – topqa kirer ul tumaǵ.”

Translation:

“Do not breed a stallion from a rough-maned horse,  
Do not marry a woman just because her dowry is cheap.  
If you breed from a rough-maned horse,  
It will never sire a steed fit for war.  
If you marry a bad woman,  
She will never bear a son fit to lead.”

This passage reflects the values of zhyrau culture, where lineage and strength were crucial. The metaphor of horses represents not only military power but also the inheritance of strong and capable offspring. The comparison between horses and people emphasizes the importance of careful selection in both breeding and marriage, highlighting social responsibility in sustaining a strong nation<sup>[29]</sup>.

These poetic excerpts demonstrate the profound role of metaphors in zhyrau poetry. The imagery of animals, nature, and warfare serves to convey deep philosophical messages about leadership, unity, aging, and the passage of time.

- Bukhar Zhyrau often used authoritative and symbolic metaphors to emphasize his political role and the importance of national unity. His use of metaphors like “pillar,” “ox leather,” and “abyss” showcases the harsh realities of leadership and life’s struggles.
- Shal Aqyn focused on more personal, reflective themes, using horse metaphors to illustrate life’s transient nature.
- The equestrian metaphors across multiple poets reflect

Kazakh culture's deep bond with horses, symbolizing strength, endurance, and social status.

These examples highlight how zhyrau poetry was not only a medium of artistic expression but also a powerful tool for shaping societal values, preserving historical narratives, and guiding decision-making processes<sup>[30]</sup>.

Since metaphors represent the minimal expression of national perception, their usage requires broader interpretation<sup>[31]</sup>. Metaphors are not used arbitrarily; rather, they are integrated into a text with a specific purpose, often emphasizing a particular aspect of a work. Sopory states: "The power of metaphor is always connected to how it is perceived, and studying metaphors through their semantic, pragmatic, and cognitive aspects is justified"<sup>[32]</sup>.

The contextual invariants of metaphors can be observed in Makhambet's works. For example, in his poem directed at Zhangir Khan, he writes:

Transliteration:

"Han emessin, Qasqyrsyn,  
Qas albasty basqyrsyn,  
Dostaryn kelip tabalap,  
Dushpanyn seni basqa ursyn!"

Translation:

"You are no khan, you are a wolf,  
A wretched demon to be cursed,  
May your friends scorn you,  
And may your enemies strike you down!"

In this passage, the metaphor "wolf" carries a negative connotation, portraying the khan as a ruthless and deceitful ruler.

However, in another poem, "Men – men edim, men edim!" ("I was who I was!"), Makhambet uses the word böri (wolf) in a positive sense:

Transliteration:

"Men – men edim, men edim!  
Men Narynda júrgende  
Eñiregen er edim.  
Isataidyń barynda  
Eki tarlan böri edim."

Translation:

"I was who I was, I was!  
When I roamed in Naryn,

I was a fearless warrior.

While Isatai was with me,

We were two mighty wolves!"

Although böri and qasqyr both mean "wolf," their metaphorical meanings shift according to context. In the first instance, "wolf" is used to describe the khan negatively, implying treachery and cruelty. In the second, it symbolizes strength, unity, and warrior spirit. This demonstrates that metaphor usage is not solely dependent on the author's perception but also on the context and the author's intention<sup>[33]</sup>.

Since metaphors serve as minimal representations of national consciousness, their usage requires broader interpretation. A metaphor is never employed arbitrarily; rather, it is embedded in a specific context, with a particular purpose, to emphasize a certain aspect of a literary work. Sopory<sup>[32]</sup> notes: "The power of a metaphor is always linked to its reception, and it is appropriate to study metaphors through their semantic, pragmatic, and cognitive aspects."

The invariants of metaphors in different situations can be observed in the works of Mahambet. For example, in his poem addressed to Zhangir Khan:

Transliteration :

"Khan emessin, Qaskyrsyn,  
Qas albasty baskyrsyn,  
Dostaryn kelip tabalap,  
Dushpanyn seni basqa ursyn!"

Translation:

"You are no khan, you are a wolf,  
A cursed demon upon us!  
May your friends mock you,  
May your enemies strike you down!"

In this excerpt, the metaphor "qaskyr" (wolf) carries a negative connotation. However, in the poem "Men – men edim, men edim!" ("I was, I was!"), Mahambet uses böri (wolf) as a positive metaphor:

Transliteration (Latin Script):

"Men – men edim, men edim!  
Men Narynda júrgen'de  
Eñiregen er edim.  
Isataidyń barynda  
Eki tarlan böri edim."

Translation:

“I was, I was!  
When I lived in Naryn,  
I was a fearless warrior.  
When Isatai was with me,  
We were two mighty wolves.”

Essentially, *bōrı* and *qaskyr* denote the same concept—a wolf. However, as metaphors, their meaning shifts depending on the context. This demonstrates that the use of metaphors depends not only on the author’s perception but also on the situation and the author’s intent.

Metaphorical expressions are also masterfully integrated into the poetry of Kazakh *zhyrau* (bards) who lived during the foundation of the Kazakh Khanate. The metaphors in the *tolgau* (poetic monologues) of Asan Kaigy, Qaztugan, Dospambet, and Shalgyiz shape the structural features of bardic poetry and vividly depict the nomadic lifestyle and warrior spirit of the Kazakhs. As part of this study, we analyze the metaphors in the *tolgau* of the warrior-bards Qaztugan and Dospambet<sup>[34]</sup>.

The metaphors in Qaztugan *zhyrau*’s poetry enrich the artistic potential of the Kazakh language and reflect the social, cultural, and spiritual values of that era. His metaphors predominantly employ vivid imagery, systematically combining sound harmony and associations. For example, in his self-introductory poem “Madaq Jyry” (Song of Praise):

Transliteration:  
“Būdurağan eki shekeli,  
Mūzday ūlken köbeli,  
Qary ūnymy sūltandayın jūristi,  
Adyrnasy shayı jibek oqqa kiristi,  
Aydasa qoidyñ kösemi,  
Söilese qyzyl tildyñ shesheni,  
Ūstasa qashaqannıñ ūzyn qūryǵı,  
Qalayılahan qasty ordanıñ syryǵı,  
Biler otty bi soñy,  
Bi ūlynyñ kenjesi,  
Buqyrshynnyñ būta shayn’ar azuy,  
Bidayıqtyñ kól jaiqahan jylǵyzy,  
Būlt bolǵan aydy asqan,  
Mūnar bolǵan kūndy asqan,  
Mūsylman men kăuirdiñ,  
Arasyn ótıp būzyp dindi asqan,  
Sūyinişūly Qaztugan!!!”

This *tolgau* reveals Qaztugan’s grandeur, his personal qualities, and his high status in the nation. The metaphors used in this poem illustrate the symbolic power of traditional Kazakh poetry. Through nature imagery, the poet conveys values such as bravery, warrior spirit, and leadership. For instance, the line “Mūzday ūlken köbeli” (literally, “like ice, great, with armor”) describes the Kazakh warrior’s characteristics. The phrase “ūlken köbeli” (great with armor) symbolizes the strength of his defense. Contextually, the word *mūz* (ice) might originally have been *būz* (iceberg), which in Kazakh perception signifies something massive and unbreakable. If we interpret *būz* as “iceberg,” it suggests that Qaztugan was as strong as a man wearing an armor as vast as an iceberg, someone who could not be easily defeated. Meanwhile, *köbeli* metaphorically corresponds to *sauyt* (armor), indicating not just physical protection but also spiritual resilience.

Another example is the line “Ūstasa qashaqannıñ ūzyn qūryǵı”, where the metaphor *qūryq* (lasso, long stick) symbolizes a tool used to capture wild horses and, by extension, to restrain enemies. Statistically, *ūzyn qūryq* (long lasso) metaphorically conveys the image of a leader who can control adversaries and maintain order. In bardic poetry, such objects often symbolize power, as seen in Dospambet *zhyrau*’s works. His *tolgau* exudes the energy and determination of a military commander. In his famous poem “Qaraǵaily kólik boynda” (On the banks of the Karagaily River), the phrase “qamshy” (whip) functions as a symbol of authority. Historically, whips were essential to both rulers and warriors, signifying governance<sup>[35]</sup>.

Thus, Qaztugan’s metaphor *qūryq* signifies not only the warrior’s strength but also his role in governance and maintaining order in the khanate. By subduing the *qashaqan* (wild stallion), the *zhyrau* emphasizes the value of leadership in ensuring peace and stability. This reinforces Qaztugan’s status as both a military leader and a *zhyrau* responsible for guiding his people.

During the time of *zhyrau* like Qaztugan, their position became more established, and their mission shifted toward maintaining national unity, advising the khan and the military, and inspiring the people. In the literature of the Khanate era, the question “Who is a *zhyrau*?” can be redefined: a *zhyrau* is a creative representative of the government. This artistic tradition originates from the ancient Turkic period,



with its roots tracing back to Korkyt Ata.

“Whenever the Oghuz people faced a dilemma, Korkyt Ata provided the resolution. All significant matters had to pass through him. His words were final: what he declared white was a blessing, and what he declared black was a curse”<sup>[34]</sup>.

During the Kazakh Khanate, the zhyrau tradition evolved into a more institutionalized role, and the term zhyrau itself became a title within the governing system. The art of the zhyrau was not limited to poetry or epic storytelling (jyryshylyq); their primary position was as creative figures who actively participated in state affairs and contributed to decision-making. The literature of the Khanate era elevated zhyrau to the status of stable political figures within the ruling elite.

Magauin<sup>[35]</sup> highlights this transformation: “In the literature of the 15th–18th centuries, zhyrau carried the main burden. Their most beloved genre was the *tolgau* (poetic monologue). In these works, the zhyrau expressed their thoughts on life and existence, reflected on the era, and shared their views on significant events.”

After the Khanate era, the *tolgau* genre continued to appear in the works of poets and epic storytellers (jyryshylar). However, once zhyrau, who had served as pillars of the Kazakh Khanate, became more involved in governance, their syncretic functions expanded. The creative tradition of the zhyrau was carried forward by later artists. Many researchers claim that poets (aqyndar) continued the zhyrau tradition. However, the zhyrau tradition cannot be measured solely by the *tolgau* genre. Other aspects of their syncretism are evident in the contributions of creative figures who held significant roles at the state level.

It would be incorrect to assume that zhyrau existed only during the Khanate period simply because their poetic traditions evolved into the works of aqyndar and jyryshylar. Although the zhyrau title was established during the Kazakh Khanate, their mission was continued by creative individuals such as poets, singers, storytellers, writers, and spiritual leaders, who influenced local and national governance through their artistic mastery. A zhyrau was not only a creative figure but also a leader with the legal power to correct the khan’s mistakes and participate in decision-making on equal terms with the ruler.

This raises the logical question: What were the characteristics and functions of a Kazakh zhyrau?

According to the Dictionary of Literary Terms, the term zhyrau is defined as follows:

- He is, first and foremost, a wise advisor to the people, a critic of the times, a visionary.
- He is either a judge or a sage of his nation.
- He is an advisor to the khan and beks who govern the nation. When the khan cannot resolve an issue, the zhyrau offers a solution.
- In peaceful times, he is a mediator who reconciles estranged relatives.
- In difficult times, he is a strategist who finds solutions and guides the people.
- His words are influential, sharp, and poetic (delivered in *tolgau* or *taqpaq*).
- His speech is always about the concerns and welfare of the people, imbued with a social message.
- A zhyrau is a critic of his era.
- He is an advisor (delivering counsel and moral teachings).
- When necessary, he serves as an unyielding judge for both the khan and the common people.

This definition confirms the syncretic nature of the Kazakh zhyrau tradition<sup>[36]</sup>.

Thus, the zhyrau was more than just a poet or storyteller; he was a visionary, an advisor to rulers, a judge, a strategist, and a protector of his people’s cultural and political integrity. The zhyrau was a bridge between the people and the state, using his artistry to shape the course of history and governance.

The origins of the art of zhyrau (жырай) lie in the people’s deep belief in an unparalleled mystical force that they have internalized as part of their own existence.

One of the metaphorical expressions used by Kaztugan Zhyrau (Қазтуған жырай) is the line:

“Buırshynnyñ būta shaynar azuy” – “The fangs of a young camel that chews branches”.

The dictionary defines “buırshyn” (буыршын) as: “A four-year-old young male camel born from an aruan (a type of camel) and a male camel, not yet used for breeding, and strong enough to break a mother camel’s dominance”<sup>[36]</sup>.

The sharp teeth of the young camel (buırshyn), which

have not yet dulled, symbolize its strength to chew branches. This metaphorically reflects the zhyrau's own fearless and unwavering character in fierce battles. In this context, the word "buürshyn" represents the young camel and its innate power, while "fangs that chew branches" serve as a metaphor for the zhyrau's resilience in overcoming difficulties for the sake of his people in times of hardship.

Another notable line:

"Bidaiyqtyñ kól zhaıqaghan zhyıǵyzy" – "The solitary bird of the feather grass swaying over the lake."

Here, the term "bidaiyq" (бидайық) is metaphorically associated with a bird. The dictionary describes "bidaiyq" as:

A predatory bird belonging to the falcon family<sup>[34]</sup>. Among its chicks, only the strongest and most determined one survives, adapting to life and eventually becoming a full-fledged bidaiyq bird.

In Dospambet Zhyrau's poem:

"Azau, Azau degeniñ" – some words acquire new and transformed meanings.

For instance, the line:

"Bolatsyz qylysh keserín" – "A sword cuts without steel".

This is a metaphor. Here, the sword is not merely a weapon but a symbol. The word "bolat" (steel) does not refer to physical hardness but rather to the significance of spiritual willpower. This metaphor enhances the weight and scope of the poem, serving as a powerful tool to convey the idea of heroism.

Another striking passage states:

"Qan zhusanday egılse, Aqqan sūдай tóǵılse" – "If blood falls like wormwood, if it spills like flowing water". As a zhyrau of military campaigns, Dospambet often employed battle-related metaphors. In this line, bloodshed is compared to natural phenomena and associated with the flow of water. This reflects both the hardships of warrior life and the harmony between war and the laws of nature. The poet skillfully interweaves opposing concepts:

- "Qan" – "blood" symbolizes the defeat of enemies

- "Aqqan su" – "flowing water" represents nature's constant change and the unceasing dynamics of life

This metaphor suggests that in wartime, death is inevitable, and survival requires an endless struggle, much like the ceaseless flow of water. Through such literary devices, the poem conveys that war is not a source of joy but rather a tragic force that disrupts life. Researcher B. Momynova identifies several metaphors in Dospambet Zhyrau's poems, such as:

- "Azaulyda aǵa bolǵan erler köp edi" (Азаулыда аға болған ерлер көп еді) – "There were many elder warriors in Azau."
- "Sere, sere, sere qar, Asty kıleng, ústı múz" (Се́ре, се́ре, се́ре қар, Асты кілең, үсті мұз) – "Snow lay in heaps, its bottom solid ice."
- "Tuǵan ayдай nurlanyp" (Туған айдай нұрланып) – "Shining like the crescent moon."
- "Zerli oryndyq üstinde" (Зерлі орындық үстінде) – "On a gilded throne."
- "Al shyımýldyq işinde" (Ал шымылдық ішінде) – "Inside a silk curtain."
- "Shyrmauyǵı – altyn, saby – jez" (Шырмауығы – алтын, сабы – жез) – "Its embroidery is gold, its hilt is bronze."

Now let's analyze one of these metaphors:

"Azaulyda aǵa bolǵan erler köp edi" (Азаулыда аға болған ерлер көп еді) – "There were many elder warriors in Azau."

The word "aǵa" (аға) does not only indicate kinship here. Instead, it serves as a metaphor. In Dospambet Zhyrau's works, "aǵa" is used frequently, not as a familial term but as a title of leadership. The Kazakh Literary Language Dictionary<sup>[34]</sup> states that one of the meanings of "aǵa" is a rank or position of power. This is confirmed in another of Dospambet's lines:

"Er Dospambet aǵanyñ, Han úlyna nesı joq, Bi úlynan nesı kem?" (Ер Доспамбет ағаның, Хан ұлына несі жоқ, Би ұлынан несі кем?) –

"Brave Dospambet, what does he lack compared to a Khan's son? What makes him lesser than a nobleman's son?" This suggests that Dospambet himself held the

status of “ağa”—a leader or ruler. In a 2012 article “Dospambet Azauly”, A. Alibekuly explained that the word “ağa” was not limited to age but also referred to a military rank among medieval Turkic states. The Janissary commanders in 15th–17th century Ottoman Turkey were also called “ağa”. Similarly, in Kazakh, Nogai, and Karakalpak traditions, “ağa” had both a familial and a military title meaning. This connection to leadership is also seen in the term “qol ağalyq” (қол ағалық), meaning military commander.

Thus, in Dospambet Zhyrau’s poetry, the word “ağa” functions as a metaphor for leadership, power, and responsibility.

The structural and functional characteristics of metaphors in zhyrau poetry make it possible to define their conceptual understanding of reality. Metaphor is not merely an artistic device; it also remains a discursive phenomenon that determines the role of zhyraus in society and their function within the power system.

In zhyrau poetry, metaphorical expressions were not only aesthetic tools but also served as instruments for conveying and preserving the ideological, pragmatic, and axiological foundations of the khanate era. Research findings indicate that metaphors in zhyrau poetry were shaped by specific social, political, and cultural contexts, reinforcing the dynamic power of national consciousness. Through metaphorical structures, the relationship between the khan and the people, perspectives on historical events and figures, and the perception of reality were articulated.

Moreover, metaphors played a significant role in enhancing the harmony between authority and society, preserving the historical memory of the people, and shaping the national identity. The study of zhyrau poetry from a metaphorical perspective provided insights into their cognitive and philosophical worldview. This research contributed to a deeper understanding of the syncretic nature of zhyrau art.

Ultimately, the metaphorical language of zhyraus serves as a guardian of the national spiritual code, functioning as a conceptual and artistic tool passed down through generations. This study has transformed the perception of zhyrau art, not only from a literary perspective but also in terms of its cultural, social, and historical significance.

## 4. Conclusions

The art of zhyrau serves as a guardian of the spiritual and cultural values of the Kazakh people, embodying the fundamental characteristics of formative phenomena. Metaphorical devices found in the language of zhyraus are considered artistic reflections of national consciousness and the way of life of the people. In this study, the metaphors in zhyrau creativity are analyzed as manifestations of poetic style, cognitive systems, historical consciousness, and discursive significance.

Metaphor is not merely a linguistic phenomenon; it acts as a significant semantic tool in conveying the zhyraus’ concepts of reality, their personal perspectives on historical events, and the relationship between the khan and the people. The metaphors in zhyrau poetics exhibit complex and multifaceted features in both structure and function. Through symbolic images that form the foundation of national spirituality, the art of zhyrau preserves its unique significance, delivering conceptual evaluations related to social and political changes. In individual usages, the artistic distinctiveness of the zhyrau becomes evident, and their creative identity is revealed through metaphor. Additionally, the poetic images are enriched with discursive content that reflects the ideological orientation of society.

The established metaphors in zhyrau works are not merely artistic devices but rather conceptual structures capable of characterizing national identity. As a result of this study, the social and political functions of metaphorical expressions in zhyrau creativity have been examined. Analyzing the structure and functional features of metaphors in the art of zhyrau opens new opportunities for expanding the artistic potential and cognitive scope of Kazakh literature, as well as deepening the understanding of traditional worldviews. In this regard, examining the place and discursive function of metaphors in a historical context paves the way for a new scientific understanding of the art of zhyrau.

## Author Contributions

Conceptualization, D.Z. and S.Z.; methodology, D.Z.; software, M.Z.; validation, A.A., M.O. and D.Z.; formal analysis, D.Z.; investigation, D.Z.; resources, D.Z.; data curation, S.Z.; writing—original draft preparation, D.Z.; writing—review and editing, D.Z. and A.A.; visualization, A.A.; supervision, S.Z.; project administration, M.Z.; funding acquisition,

D.Z. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

## Funding

This article was prepared within the framework of the grant project approved by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, titled «New Media Dialogue on a Digital Platform: Kazakh Zhyrau Art and Turkish Ashik Tradition» (AP25797027).

## Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable.

## Informed Consent Statement

Not applicable.

## Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article. No new datasets were generated or analyzed during the current study. Additional textual materials used in the analysis, such as poetic excerpts from published zhyrau collections, are publicly accessible in referenced sources.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## References

- [1] Aristotle, 1978. Rhetoric (Book III). In: Kuznetsov, I., Petrov, O. (eds.). Aristotle and Ancient Literature. Nauka: Moscow, Russia.
- [2] Cicero, 1936. Riddle. In: Utchenko, S., (ed.). Ancient Theories of Language and Style. OGIZ: Moscow, Russia.
- [3] Ortega y Gasset, J., 1990. Two main metaphors. In: Arutyunova, N.D. (ed.). Theory of Metaphor. Progress: Moscow, Russia.
- [4] Cassirer, E., 1990. The power of metaphor. In: Petrov, A., (ed.). Theory of Metaphor. Progress: Moscow, Russia.
- [5] Richards, A., 1990. The philosophy of rhetoric. In: Arutyunova, N.D. (ed.). Theory of Metaphor. Progress: Moscow, Russia.
- [6] Black, M., 1990. Metaphor. In: Arutyunova, N.D. (ed.). Theory of Metaphor. Progress: Moscow, Russia. pp. 153–172.
- [7] Wheelwright, P., 1990. Metaphor and reality. In: Sazonov, F., Karpov, T. (eds.). Theory of Metaphor. Progress: Moscow, Russia. (in Russian).
- [8] Arutyunova, N.D., Zhurinskaya, M.A., (eds.). 1990. Theory of Metaphor: Collection of Papers. Progress: Moscow, Russia.
- [9] Maslova, V.A., 2012. The theory of conceptual metaphor and its role in modern linguistic studies. Linguistics and Linguoculturology. 5, 18–26.
- [10] Lakoff, G., Johnson, M., 2004. Metaphors We Live by. Editorial URSS: Moscow, Russia. pp. 1–256.
- [11] McCormack, E., 1990. Cognitive theory of metaphor. In: Sergeev, S., (ed.). Theory of Metaphor. Progress: Moscow, Russia.
- [12] Davidson, D., 1990. What metaphors mean. In: Arutyunova, N.D. (ed.). Theory of Metaphor. Progress: Moscow, Russia. pp. 172–193.
- [13] Vico, G., 1994. The New Science on the Common Nature of Nations. Nauka: Moscow/Kyiv, Russia. pp. 113–114.
- [14] Miller, J., 1990. Images and models, similes and metaphors. In: Bergen, L. (ed.). Theory of Metaphor. Progress: Moscow, Russia.
- [15] Khasanov, B., 1966. Metaphorical Use of Words in the Kazakh Language. Mektep: Almaty, Kazakhstan.
- [16] Nurdauletova, B., 2008. The Conceptual Image of the World in Zhyrau Poetry (Western Zhyrau School). Nura-Astana: Astana: Kazakhstan. pp. 1–432.
- [17] Thibodeau, P.H., Boroditsky, L., 2011. Metaphors we think with: The role of metaphor in reasoning. PLoS ONE. 6(2), e16782. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0016782>
- [18] Thibodeau, P.H., Boroditsky, L., 2013. Natural language metaphors covertly influence reasoning. PLoS ONE. 8(1), e52961. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0052961>
- [19] Zhusip, K.O., 2020. Introduction to Literary Studies. Gylym: Almaty, Kazakhstan.
- [20] Zhanabayev, K., 2023. Poetic vocabulary of formulaic units frequency in the language of XV–XVIII century oral poets. 1, 17 02 2025.
- [21] Adilbek, A., 2021. The Words of Oral Poets - The Eyes of History. Arys: Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan. pp. 1–170.
- [22] Kaskabasov, S. 2001. Seven Centuries of Song: Two Volumes (Vol. 1). Zhazushy: Almaty, Kazakhstan.
- [23] Mazmundama Public Foundation, 2022. Poetry of oral poets. 3, 14 01 2025.
- [24] Nysanbay Oral Poet, 2022. Kenessary–Nauryzbay. Mazmundama: Almaty, Kazakhstan.
- [25] Jailau, B.S., Kabdolkaiyrov, G., 2021. The Swift Poet – Kashagan: An Academic collection Dedicated to the

- Poet and Oral Poet K. Kurzhimanuly. Kazakh Book: Almaty, Kazakhstan.
- [26] Kaskabasov S. 2021. Masters of Song: Educational Literature for Children. Bayan Zhurek Publishing: Almaty, Kazakhstan.
- [27] Nysanbai, N., 2021 Works of Nauryzbek Oral Poet: Termes, Tolgaus, Epic Songs, and Memories About the Oral Poet. Print-Plus: Gylym: Almaty, Kazakhstan. pp. 1–9.
- [28] Kaskabasov, S. (2014) Selected Works. Astana: Foliant, p. 344. Omiraliyev, Q., 1976. The Language of Kazakh Poetry from the 15th–19th Centuries. Gylym: Almaty, Kazakhstan. pp. 1–269.
- [29] Magauin, M., 2006. Aldaspan: An Anthology of Ancient Kazakh Poetry (15th–18th Centuries). Atamura: Almaty, Kazakhstan. pp. 1–312.
- [30] Magauin, M., 2004. Seven Centuries of Poetry. Zhazushy: Almaty, Kazakhstan. pp. 1–400.
- [31] Sopory, P., 2006. Metaphor and attitude accessibility. Southern Communication Journal. 71(3), 251–272.
- [32] Kaliyuly, G. 2011. Kazakh Literary Language Dictionary. Atamura: Almaty, Kazakhstan.
- [33] Margulan, A., 1971. Ancient Poems and Legends. Zhazushy: Almaty, Kazakhstan. pp. 1–398.
- [34] Magauin, M., 1968. The Sound of Kobyz: Kazakh Poets and Zhyraus of the 15th–18th Centuries. Zhazushy: Almaty, Kazakhstan. pp. 1–154.
- [35] Akhmetov, Z., 2006. Dictionary of Literary Terms. Taler-Press: Semey-Novosibirsk, Kazakhstan. pp. 1–397.
- [36] Zhakulayev, A., Takirov, S., Khassenov, B., 2024. Literary text and historical discourse: A questionnaire study. International Journal of Innovative Research and Scientific Studies, 7(3), 1174–1181.