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ZOONYMS: SEMANTIC, CULTURAL, AND COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES

Annotation: This article explores zoonyms—the names of animals—from semantic, cultural, and comparative perspectives across different languages. The study emphasizes how zoonyms encapsulate cultural values, traditions, and linguistic frameworks, drawing intricate parallels between English and Russian. It further examines their role in idiomatic expressions, folklore, and metaphorical language, illustrating how these elements contribute to broader cognitive and sociolinguistic structures. The research also addresses variations in zoonymic usage due to historical influences, regional differences, and their impact on communication and identity formation.

Keywords: zoonyms, semantics, cultural linguistics, comparative linguistics, idioms, folklore, metaphor.

Introduction Zoonyms, as linguistic units referring to animals, play a crucial role in the cognitive and cultural perception of the world. The study of zoonyms reveals patterns in linguistic worldviews, societal attitudes toward animals, and the transmission of cultural heritage. Zoonyms frequently reflect anthropocentric views, where animals are attributed human characteristics based on perceived behaviors. For instance, in English, "cunning as a fox" conveys intelligence and deceit, while in Russian, "хитрый как лиса" carries a similar connotation. Additionally, cultural contexts shape zoonymic metaphors; in Chinese, the dragon is revered as a symbol of power, while in European cultures, it often represents danger. This paper aims to compare the usage of zoonyms in English and Russian, focusing on semantic shifts, cultural connotations, and idiomatic applications. It also explores how folklore, historical narratives, and socio-political factors influence zoonymic perception, thus providing a broader linguistic and cultural framework for understanding the role of animal names in human communication.

Methods This research employs comparative and semantic analysis, utilizing a diverse set of linguistic resources, including primary linguistic corpora, phraseological dictionaries, ethnolinguistic studies, and folklore texts. The study integrates both quantitative and qualitative methods to ensure a comprehensive understanding of zoonymic variations. A cross-linguistic approach is used to identify commonalities and distinctions in zoonym usage across English and Russian, examining etymological roots, frequency of occurrence, and context-dependent shifts in meaning. For example, the English "black sheep" denotes an outcast, whereas the Russian "белая ворона" (white crow) conveys a similar meaning, showing how cultures assign different colors to metaphorical deviance.

Additionally, the study incorporates sociolinguistic surveys to assess native speaker perceptions of specific zoonyms, providing an empirical dimension to the analysis. These surveys explore how respondents interpret common zoonymic idioms and whether generational or regional variations influence their meanings. For instance, in urban Russian speech, "лиса" (fox) may still denote cunningness, but in rural areas, it may be more associated with folklore and superstition.

The methodological framework also considers historical influences on zoonym development, tracing their evolution through diachronic linguistic studies. By examining historical texts and dictionaries, the research reveals how certain zoonyms have undergone semantic shifts, such as "hound" in English, once a general term for dog but now referring specifically to hunting breeds. Similarly, in Russian, "медведь" (bear) etymologically stems from "honey eater," reflecting ancient cultural interactions

with the animal. This historical approach helps contextualize current linguistic trends and deepens the comparative linguistic analysis.

Results Zoonyms frequently appear in idioms and metaphors, reflecting cultural perceptions of animal behavior and serving as linguistic tools for describing human characteristics. For instance, in English, "as sly as a fox" and "as busy as a bee" convey behavioral traits commonly associated with these animals. Similarly, Russian expressions include "хитрый как лиса" (sly as a fox) and "трудолюбивая пчелка" (hardworking bee). These idioms are rooted in cultural observations of animal behavior and reinforce shared conceptual metaphors.

Furthermore, cross-linguistic comparisons reveal significant differences in zoonymic associations. In English, "a dark horse" describes an unknown or surprising competitor, whereas the equivalent Russian expression "тёмная лошадка" carries a similar meaning. However, while English uses "eager beaver" to denote an enthusiastic worker, Russian employs "работающий как муравей" (as hardworking as an ant), demonstrating variation in species choice to depict industriousness.

In some cases, similar animal metaphors develop independently in different languages. For example, both English and Russian use the concept of a "wolf in sheep's clothing" ("волк в овечьей шкуре") to depict deception. However, other metaphors reflect distinct cultural influences. The English phrase "when pigs fly" expresses impossibility, while Russian uses "когда рак на горе свистнет" (when the crayfish whistles on the mountain) to convey the same idea. Such variations highlight differences in environmental and folk traditions shaping linguistic expression.

Additionally, the study of zoonymic expressions reveals shifts in meaning over time. In older English, calling someone a "hound" simply meant they were a pursuer, while today, it often has negative connotations. In Russian, "медведь" (bear) remains a symbol of strength, but modern usage also associates it with clumsiness or political symbolism. These idiomatic and semantic shifts illustrate how zoonyms function as evolving linguistic markers influenced by cultural, historical, and social factors. Zoonyms frequently appear in idioms and metaphors, reflecting cultural perceptions of animal behavior. For instance, in English, "as sly as a fox" and "as busy as a bee" convey behavioral traits commonly associated with these animals. Similarly, Russian expressions include "хитрый как лиса" (sly as a fox) and "трудолюбивая пчелка" (hardworking bee). Additionally, English features phrases like "a dark horse" to describe an unknown or surprising competitor, while Russian has "тёмная лошадка" with a similar meaning. Another example is "eager beaver" in English, which denotes an enthusiastic worker, whereas in Russian, "работающий как муравей" (as hardworking as an ant) conveys a comparable idea. These idioms highlight how different cultures assign similar attributes to animals but may choose different species to represent them, showcasing both universal and language-specific conceptualizations of the animal world.

Animals hold different symbolic meanings in each culture, influenced by folklore, mythology, and historical narratives. The owl in English symbolizes wisdom, often associated with academia and intelligence, as seen in the depiction of the wise owl in children's literature and logos like that of universities. This perception originates from classical antiquity, where the owl was linked to Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom. In contrast, Russian folklore often links the owl to misfortune and ominous forebodings, stemming from traditional superstitions that consider nocturnal creatures as harbingers of bad luck. This belief is reinforced by Russian proverbs such as "сову днем не увидишь" (you won't see an owl during the day), which metaphorically refers to something rare or hidden, reinforcing the bird's mystical and eerie reputation. Additionally, in Slavic mythology, the owl is sometimes depicted as a messenger of the underworld, contributing to its dark connotations in Russian culture.

Similarly, the wolf is perceived as dangerous in both languages but with different cultural nuances. In English, it is often depicted as a lone predator, representing independence, resilience, and sometimes

villainy, as seen in fairy tales like "Little Red Riding Hood." In Russian culture, the wolf takes on a more complex role, being both a feared predator and a trickster figure in folklore, as seen in the character of "Серый Волк" (Gray Wolf) in Slavic fairy tales, where it sometimes acts as a cunning helper rather than a mere antagonist. Additionally, in Russian political and historical contexts, the wolf has been used metaphorically to symbolize enemies or threats to the state, further emphasizing the evolution of zoonymic meanings in different socio-cultural settings.

Discussion The results indicate that while English and Russian share some zoonymic expressions, their underlying cultural meanings differ due to historical, mythological, and social influences. Many of these variations stem from traditional narratives, religious symbolism, and the role of animals in economic activities. For example, the horse holds significant value in both cultures but is perceived differently. In English, the phrase "workhorse" suggests endurance and hard work, while in Russian, "конь в пальто" (horse in a coat) is an idiomatic expression implying sarcasm or incredulity. Similarly, while the rooster symbolizes confidence and leadership in Western culture (as in "rule the roost"), in Russian, it is often used metaphorically in expressions like "как петух клюнет" (when the rooster pecks), meaning that a person will act only under urgent pressure.

The semantic shifts in zoonymic expressions also reflect sociocultural structures. In English, the dog is often associated with loyalty, as in "man's best friend," whereas in Russian, while positive associations exist, phrases like "собачья жизнь" (dog's life) indicate suffering or hardship. Religious influences further shape these connotations; in Christian symbolism, the lamb represents innocence and sacrifice, while in Russian Orthodox traditions, certain animals, such as the bear, are revered as embodiments of strength and national identity.

Additionally, economic factors have played a role in shaping zoonymic perceptions. In agrarian societies, cattle and horses were indispensable, leading to numerous idioms emphasizing their value, such as "strong as an ox" in English and "работать как лошадь" (to work like a horse) in Russian. These variations underline the deep intertwining of zoonymic expressions with historical livelihood patterns, reflecting broader socio-economic realities. The comparison of these expressions reveals not only linguistic universals but also unique socio-cultural interpretations, enriching the study of cross-linguistic semantics.

Conclusion Zoonyms are not merely lexical items but serve as profound indicators of cultural ideologies, historical contexts, and societal values. Through the comparative analysis of English and Russian zoonyms, it becomes evident that while certain zoonymic expressions reveal linguistic universals—such as the association of foxes with cunning and dogs with loyalty—others exhibit unique cultural interpretations shaped by folklore, mythology, and socio-political influences. The study underscores the role of zoonyms in shaping human cognition, as they are embedded in metaphorical language, idiomatic expressions, and symbolic representations. Furthermore, the shifts in zoonymic meanings over time reflect evolving cultural perceptions and societal changes. By examining these linguistic patterns, this research contributes to broader discussions in cognitive linguistics, comparative linguistics, and cultural studies, providing deeper insights into how language encodes the relationship between humans and the animal world.

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