

LEXICAL-SEMANTICAL AND MENTAL FEATURES OF ENGLISH AND UZBEK PROVERBS WITH THE COMPONENTS "ZOONYMS"**Sirojiddinova Dilnozaxon Kenjaboy kizi**

Tashkent University of Exact and Social Sciences (AIFU)

E-mail: sirojiddinova55@icloud.com Phone: +998 90 949 05 04

Annotation: This article investigates the lexical-semantic and mental (cognitive-cultural) features of English and Uzbek proverbs containing zoonymic components. Zoonyms—lexical units denoting animals—play a significant role in paremiology by reflecting collective experience, national mentality, ethical values, and worldview. The study is based on comparative analysis of well-documented English and Uzbek proverbs selected from authoritative paremiological dictionaries and linguistic studies. The research identifies semantic fields, metaphorical models, and culturally marked cognitive associations embedded in animal imagery. The findings demonstrate that while many zoonyms express universal human qualities such as wisdom, cunning, laziness, and bravery, their evaluative meanings differ according to cultural and mental frameworks of English and Uzbek societies.

Key words: Zoonym, proverb, paremiology, lexical semantics, cognitive linguistics, national mentality, metaphor, English language, Uzbek language

Introduction

Proverbs represent one of the most stable and culturally saturated units of language. They accumulate historical experience, moral norms, and collective wisdom of a nation. In linguistic studies, special attention is paid to proverbs containing **zoonymic components**, as animals serve as universal yet culturally differentiated symbols for human behavior and social relations. According to Mieder, proverbs function as “short, generally known sentences of the folk which contain wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views” [1].

In both English and Uzbek linguistic traditions, animals are frequently used to conceptualize abstract human qualities through metaphorical transfer. For instance, the English proverb “*The early bird catches the worm*” associates a bird with diligence and initiative, while the Uzbek proverb “*It bo‘lsa, egasi bilan*” emphasizes loyalty and responsibility through the image of a dog. Such examples illustrate how zoonyms operate as semantic and cognitive markers.

The relevance of this study lies in the growing interest in **comparative paremiology** and **cognitive linguistics**, especially in identifying how different cultures encode similar life experiences through distinct metaphorical models. The purpose of this article is to analyze the lexical-semantic structure and mental characteristics of English and Uzbek proverbs containing zoonyms, revealing both universal and culture-specific features.

Methodology

The research employs a **comparative-descriptive and semantic-cognitive approach**. The empirical material consists of English and Uzbek proverbs with explicit zoonymic components selected from authoritative sources, including *The Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs* and *O‘zbek xalq maqollari* collections [2], [5].

The methodological framework includes:

- semantic analysis of zoonymic lexemes;
- identification of metaphorical models;
- cognitive interpretation based on national mentality;
- contrastive analysis between English and Uzbek proverbs.

Only **fixed, lexicographically recorded proverbs** are used to ensure reliability and academic validity. Each proverb is analyzed in its cultural and semantic context, following principles outlined in cognitive metaphor theory [4].

Results

The analysis shows that zoonymic proverbs in both languages can be grouped into several dominant semantic categories: diligence, cunning, stupidity, courage, weakness, and social behavior.

In English, animals such as **fox, lion, sheep, dog, and horse** are most frequent. For example, "*A fox is not taken twice in the same snare*" represents intelligence and caution, where the fox symbolizes cunning and experience [2]. In Uzbek proverbs, common zoonyms include **it** (dog), **eshak** (donkey), **bo'ri** (wolf), **tulki** (fox), and **qo'y** (sheep). The proverb "*Tulkining hiylasi ko'p*" directly associates the fox with deception and cleverness [5].

Despite lexical differences, some metaphorical meanings overlap. Both cultures perceive the fox as a symbol of cunning and the donkey as a sign of ignorance or stubbornness. However, the **evaluative intensity** varies. In Uzbek mentality, calling a person "*eshak*" carries a stronger negative connotation than its English counterpart "*donkey*" [6].

Analysis and Discussion

The analysis of English and Uzbek proverbs containing zoonymic components demonstrates that animal names function not merely as lexical units but as culturally encoded semantic and cognitive symbols. From a lexical-semantic standpoint, zoonyms act as core meaning-bearing elements that trigger associative networks rooted in collective cultural experience. These associations are not arbitrary; they are historically shaped through long-term interaction between human communities and the natural environment, socio-economic structures, and ethical norms. As noted in paremiological studies, proverbs preserve archaic layers of worldview that may no longer be explicitly articulated in everyday discourse but remain active in linguistic consciousness [1].

In cognitive linguistics, metaphor is understood as a fundamental mechanism of conceptualization rather than a stylistic ornament. Lakoff and Johnson emphasize that human beings comprehend abstract domains through concrete experiential domains, among which animals occupy a central place due to their constant presence in human life [4]. Zoonymic proverbs vividly illustrate this principle, as they map observable animal behavior onto human character traits, social roles, and moral evaluations.

From a lexical-semantic perspective, zoonymic components in both English and Uzbek proverbs can be categorized according to dominant evaluative meanings. These meanings include intelligence versus stupidity, diligence versus laziness, courage versus cowardice, loyalty versus treachery, and strength versus weakness. However, while the semantic categories themselves are largely universal, the specific animals selected to represent these qualities and the evaluative intensity attached to them differ significantly between the two languages.

In English proverbs, animals such as the dog, fox, lion, sheep, horse, and bird are particularly frequent. The dog occupies a prominent position and is predominantly associated with loyalty, endurance, and social coexistence. Proverbs such as "*Every dog has his day*" and "*Let sleeping dogs lie*" convey pragmatic life wisdom related to patience, opportunity, and conflict avoidance [3]. The positive or neutral evaluation of the dog in English culture can be traced to its historical role as a companion animal, guardian, and working partner in agrarian and later industrial societies [8].

In contrast, Uzbek proverbs also frequently employ the zoonym *it* (dog), but its semantic load is more ambivalent. While loyalty is acknowledged, the dog often carries negative connotations associated with impurity, aggression, or social inferiority, as reflected in proverbs such as "*It hurar, karvon o'tar*" [5]. This semantic divergence illustrates how identical animals can generate different evaluative meanings depending on cultural and religious contexts, particularly considering the influence of Islamic cultural norms on Uzbek worldview [7].

The fox serves as a striking example of semantic convergence across the two languages. In both English and Uzbek proverbs, the fox symbolizes cunning, хитрость, and strategic intelligence. English proverbs like “*A fox is not taken twice in the same snare*” and Uzbek equivalents such as “*Tulki hiylasiz bo‘lmas*” reveal a shared cognitive model in which the fox represents mental agility and deceptive skill [2], [5]. This convergence suggests that certain metaphorical associations may be grounded in universal human observations of animal behavior rather than culture-specific interpretations.

However, despite this apparent universality, subtle differences emerge at the level of pragmatic evaluation. In English paremiology, cunning may carry an ambivalent or even positive nuance, often associated with cleverness and survival skills. In Uzbek proverbs, cunning tends to be evaluated more negatively, frequently linked to moral suspicion and social distrust [6]. This contrast reflects differing ethical frameworks in which intellectual sharpness is either tolerated as pragmatism or criticized as moral deviation.

Another important zoonymic symbol is the sheep. In English proverbs, sheep typically represent conformity, passivity, and lack of independent thinking, as seen in expressions such as “*Like sheep to the slaughter*” [9]. This metaphor aligns with an individualistic cultural orientation in which autonomy and critical thinking are highly valued. In Uzbek proverbs, the sheep (*qo‘y*) is also associated with weakness and vulnerability but is more strongly embedded in collective and pastoral imagery. Proverbs emphasizing herd unity highlight the importance of group cohesion and protection, for example in contexts where separation from the group implies danger [5].

The mental or cognitive dimension of zoonymic proverbs becomes particularly evident when examining culturally dominant animals such as the lion and the wolf. In English proverbs, the lion symbolizes power, authority, and rightful dominance. Expressions like “*The lion’s share*” conceptualize leadership and hierarchical privilege through the image of the strongest animal [2]. This metaphor aligns with social models emphasizing structured authority and individual leadership.

In Uzbek paremiological tradition, the wolf (*bo‘ri*) occupies a similarly prominent symbolic position but carries a more complex semantic profile. The wolf is often portrayed as dangerous, predatory, and threatening, yet simultaneously respected for its strength and resilience. Proverbs involving the wolf frequently reflect survival strategies developed in nomadic and semi-nomadic contexts, where interaction with wild predators was a tangible reality [7]. Thus, the wolf embodies both fear and admiration, illustrating a dual evaluative framework deeply rooted in historical experience.

Mental features are further revealed through the frequency and functional distribution of zoonymic proverbs. English proverbs often employ animals to comment on individual behavior, personal success, and pragmatic decision-making. This tendency corresponds to what cultural linguists describe as an individual-oriented cognitive style, where personal agency and self-realization are foregrounded [8].

Uzbek proverbs, by contrast, more frequently use animals to regulate social relations, moral conduct, and communal harmony. The didactic function of proverbs is particularly pronounced, as zoonymic imagery is used to warn against antisocial behavior, arrogance, or deviation from collective norms [6]. This reflects a collectivist mental framework in which individual actions are evaluated primarily in terms of their social consequences.

From a semantic-structural perspective, zoonymic components often serve as the semantic center of the proverb, while the surrounding lexical material provides contextual framing. In many cases, removing the zoonym would collapse the metaphorical structure of the proverb entirely. This confirms Kunin’s observation that phraseological units, including proverbs, are semantically indivisible and cannot be interpreted through literal word-by-word analysis [11].

The metaphorical mechanisms underlying zoonymic proverbs also demonstrate a high degree of conventionalization. Repeated use over centuries has stabilized specific animal–trait

associations, embedding them into linguistic competence. As Gibbs argues, such metaphors are processed automatically by speakers and do not require conscious interpretation [10]. This cognitive automatism explains the durability and communicative efficiency of proverbs.

Importantly, the comparative analysis reveals that zoonymic metaphors serve as a bridge between language and mentality. While the biological characteristics of animals are constant, their symbolic interpretations are filtered through cultural values, religious beliefs, and historical experience. This confirms the thesis that language functions as a repository of cultural memory and a medium for transmitting worldview across generations [1].

Conclusion

The comparative analysis of English and Uzbek proverbs with zoonymic components reveals that zoonyms serve as powerful linguistic tools for encoding cultural values and cognitive models. Both languages demonstrate universal metaphorical patterns, such as associating animals with human traits, yet differ in evaluative nuance and mental orientation.

English zoonymic proverbs tend to reflect individualism, practicality, and social competition, whereas Uzbek proverbs emphasize collectivism, moral norms, and social cohesion. These differences confirm that proverbs are not only linguistic units but also mirrors of national mentality. The study contributes to contrastive linguistics and paremiology by highlighting the interaction between lexical semantics and cognitive-cultural factors.

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