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THE REFLECTION OF THE HUMAN IMAGE THROUGH ZOONYMIC PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS IN THE ENGLISH AND UZBEK LANGUAGES

Ziyatov Akmal Tursunovich

Associate Professor, Department of Foreign Languages
Karshi State Technical University

Abstract

This study explores the linguistic manifestation of human characteristics through zoonymic phraseological units (ZPUs) – idiomatic expressions involving animal names – in English and Uzbek. By employing a comparative-typological analysis, the research identifies how different cultures project human traits, social behaviors, and physical appearances onto the animal kingdom. The findings reveal that while both languages share universal metaphors such as, the “brave lion” or “stubborn donkey”, they diverge significantly based on historical lifestyle and religious influences. This article highlights the anthropocentric nature of language and the role of “animal-metaphor” in shaping national-cultural identities.

Keywords: Zoonymic phraseology, comparative linguistics, English language, Uzbek language, linguaculture, anthropocentrism, animal metaphors.

Introduction

Phraseology is often called the “mirror of the soul” of a nation. Among the vast array of idioms, zoonymic phraseological units (ZPUs) are particularly significant because they reflect the ancient connection between humans and

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nature. Humans have historically observed animal behavior to find parallels for their own social structures, moral failings, and physical attributes. The problem lies in the fact that the same animal can evoke different connotations across cultures. While a “dog” might represent loyalty in English, it can carry different emotional weights in traditional Uzbek contexts due to Islamic cultural nuances or pastoral history. This study aims to analyze the similarities and differences in the “human image” as reflected through Zoonyms in these two genetically and structurally unrelated languages.

Methods

The research utilized a qualitative and comparative-typological approach. 400 ZPUs (200 in English, 200 in Uzbek) were extracted from authoritative phraseological dictionaries such as, Kunin’s English-Russian Phraseological Dictionary and Rahmatullaev’s Annotated Dictionary of Uzbek Idioms. Units were categorized based on the human trait they describe physical appearance, intellect, character / temperament, and social status. The cognitive-semantic features were compared to identify “universal” and “culture-specific” zoonyms.

Results

1. Physical appearance – in both languages, ZPUs are frequently used to describe a person’s build or beauty. In English physical appearance uses varied fauna. “Thin as a rake” (non-zoonymic) and “Blind as a bat” or “Sly as a fox.” In Uzbek physical appearance often relies on livestock and birds. “Otday baquvvat” (Strong as a horse) or “Qalamqosh” (referring to bird-like grace). For beauty, Uzbek utilizes the “Ohu” (Gazelle), whereas English might use “Graceful as a swan.”
2. Character and temperament – this category showed the highest density of ZPUs. The lion (Arslon/Sher) symbolizes courage in both cultures. The donkey (Eshak) consistently represents stubbornness or stupidity. In English, a sheep is often seen as “timid” or “following the crowd” (a black sheep). In Uzbek, the

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sheep (qo'y) is frequently used to describe a person who is exceptionally "meek" or "quiet," often with a positive or neutral connotation of harmlessness ("Qo'y og'zidan cho'p olmagan").

3. In English social and intellectual qualities frequently use the dog in social contexts such as "A top dog," "Underdog," "Work like a dog". In Uzbek they reflect a more cautious approach to dogs in idiomatic speech, often using them to describe enmity or bad character for instance "It bilan mushukdek" – like cat and dog. Intellectual inferiority in Uzbek is often linked to the camel (Tuya) in specific folk contexts, despite the animal's physical utility.

Discussion

The human image reflected in these languages is shaped by Linguacultural Codes:

- The Pastoral code: The dominance of domestic animals (horse, camel, sheep) in Uzbek ZPUs highlights the nomadic and agricultural roots of the people. The horse (Ot) is a symbol of nobility and a close companion.

- The Naturalistic / Maritime code: English utilizes a wider range of wild animals and birds, reflecting a history of sea exploration and a diverse geographical contact with fauna such as "A shark," "A cold fish," "To whale on someone").

- The Religious factor: In Uzbek, certain ZPUs involving "unclean" animals are used more disparagingly than in English, where secularization has softened the impact of such metaphors.

The study confirms that ZPUs serve as a cognitive shortcut, allowing speakers to convey complex emotional assessments through simple biological analogies.

Conclusion

The comparative analysis of zoonymic phraseological units (ZPUs) in the English and Uzbek languages reveals that the "animal-metaphor" is not merely a linguistic ornament, but a profound cognitive mechanism used to decode the complexities

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of human nature. Through the prism of zoonyms, we observe how human beings have historically sought to understand their own psychological, physical, and social existence by projecting it onto the natural world. The study reaches several definitive conclusions:

- ✓ Anthropocentric universality: Both languages exhibit a high degree of “anthropocentrism,” where animals are used as a yardstick for human qualities. The conceptual cores of “bravery” (lion), “stubbornness” (donkey), and “cunning” (fox) transcend geographical boundaries, suggesting a shared human cognitive foundation in observing biological traits.
- ✓ Linguacultural divergence: Despite these overlaps, the specific imagery used is deeply rooted in the “cultural memory” of each nation. The English language’s reliance on a diverse, often global fauna reflects Britain’s history as a maritime power and its colonial expansion. Conversely, the Uzbek zoonymic fund is a testament to a centuries-old pastoral-nomadic and settled agricultural lifestyle, where the horse, sheep, and camel are not just animals, but symbols of social status, survival, and moral integrity.
- ✓ The power of connotation: The research highlights that the semantic value of a zoonym is rarely neutral. In Uzbek, zoonyms often carry a heavy didactic or moralizing weight, frequently used in folk sayings to steer social behavior. In English, while similar moralizing exists, there is a prominent trend toward using zoonyms for humorous, ironic, or descriptive “character sketches” in informal discourse.
- ✓ Pragmatic implications: For translators and linguists, the findings underscore the danger of “equivalence traps.” Translating an Uzbek ZPU into English by simply substituting the animal name often results in a loss of the original’s emotional intensity or cultural nuance. True equivalence requires an understanding of the internal form of the idiom – the specific human trait being targeted – rather than the biological label attached to it.

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In summary, zoonymic phraseology serves as a living archive of the English and Uzbek civilizations. While modern globalization continues to bridge the gap between these languages, their zoonymic systems remain resilient guardians of their respective national identities, continuing to reflect the human image through the enduring and evocative mirror of the animal kingdom. This study paves the way for further research into the “zoonymic picture of the world” and its role in modern intercultural communication.

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