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THE STUDY OF ZOOMORPHIC METAPHORS IN SCIENTIFIC SOURCES

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ABSTRACT

Zoomorphic imagery has remained an integral component of literary expression from the culture of antiquity to the present day. Throughout different stages of human history, people's understanding and interpretation of the world were significantly influenced by their interactions with animals. By observing animals' behavior, habits, physical appearance, and ways of life, humans gradually developed specific perceptions of various animal species as carriers of particular symbolic meanings and cultural representations. As human cognition evolved, these perceptions and attitudes toward animals underwent continuous transformation, giving rise to diverse cultural interpretations and symbolic associations. Over time, the emergence and further development of zoomorphic representations have led to the formulation of various theories concerning their origins, evolution, and perception in human consciousness across different historical periods. This article examines primitive conceptions of animals, the earliest manifestations of zoomorphism, and its various forms. It also explores the extent to which these representations were reflected in subsequent stages of cultural and linguistic development and how they were preserved in later periods of antiquity. Particular attention is paid to the historical continuity and cultural significance of zoomorphic imagery as a means of conceptualizing human experience and understanding the surrounding world.

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Keywords: zoomorphic metaphor, metaphorical units, zoomorphic imagery, animal representation, metaphorical conceptualization, anthropocentrism, comparative analysis.

INTRODUCTION

Language is one of the most significant instruments created and utilized by members of society. It serves not only as a means of communication but also as a mechanism through which individuals perceive, conceptualize, and interpret the surrounding world. Among the numerous linguistic devices employed to enrich discourse, zoomorphic metaphors occupy a prominent position. They are widely used to enhance figurative expression, emotional impact, and stylistic vividness in both everyday communication and literary discourse.

Despite their prevalence, zoomorphic metaphors often present challenges for interpretation and translation because they are deeply embedded in specific cultural and historical contexts. Native speakers frequently use such expressions unconsciously; however, zoomorphic metaphors attract considerable scholarly attention due to their ability to reflect cultural perceptions, collective experiences, and value systems through animal imagery. These metaphorical expressions establish associations between human characteristics and animal traits, thereby serving as powerful cognitive and linguistic tools.

The interpretation of animal imagery varies significantly across cultures. For instance, while stupidity is frequently associated with a chicken in Russian linguistic culture, Chinese speakers often attribute this characteristic to a pig. Such differences demonstrate that zoomorphic metaphors are not universal but are shaped by culturally specific perceptions and symbolic traditions. Historical evidence indicates that the worldview of ancient civilizations was largely expressed through myths, legends, and religious beliefs. Primitive forms of religion, including totemism, animism, and fetishism, were based on notions of the immortality of the soul and the supernatural power attributed to natural

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phenomena. Totemism, in particular, reflected the belief that certain human groups were ancestrally connected with specific animals, birds, plants, or mythical creatures. Consequently, animals such as horses, wolves, snakes, dogs, and bulls became objects of reverence and symbolic identification among many ancient communities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The close relationship between humans and animals throughout centuries has inevitably left a profound imprint on human consciousness. As a consequence, these interactions have found expression in language, giving rise to zoomorphic metaphors across numerous linguistic communities. Such metaphors typically associate animal images with human qualities, character traits, physical appearance, and behavioral patterns. The names of animals belong to one of the oldest lexical strata of human language and have served as a rich source of figurative expression throughout history.

Phraseological units containing animal-related lexical elements constitute a substantial part of the phraseological systems of many languages. Human characteristics are frequently described through comparisons with animals, reflecting culturally established perceptions and value systems. As an essential component of the linguistic worldview, the zoomorphic cultural code is preserved in vocabulary and phraseology through the conceptualization of personality traits, moral values, intellectual abilities, interpersonal relations, and physical appearance. Consequently, language reveals both universal and culture-specific features of human cognition.

Since animals have been an inseparable part of human existence, they function as important referential sources for metaphorical nomination in virtually all linguistic cultures. The semantic field of zoomorphism is determined by national traditions, cultural practices, and historical experiences. Therefore, animal

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imagery serves not only as a linguistic phenomenon but also as a reflection of collective cultural consciousness.

At different stages of human history, the perception of the world was strongly influenced by human interaction with animals. By observing their behavior, habits, appearance, and lifestyles, people developed particular mental representations of different animal species. These representations subsequently became the basis for transferring animal characteristics to human beings. As a result, stereotypical perceptions of animals emerged and gradually evolved into metaphorical models used to describe human behavior and personality traits. According to Kövecses (2010), humans have consistently attributed human characteristics to animals, thereby creating anthropomorphic representations that facilitated the understanding of human behavior through animal imagery. Such processes contributed significantly to the formation of zoomorphic metaphors, which constitute one of the most productive and culturally meaningful layers of vocabulary. As Talebinejad and Dastjerdi observe, human characteristics are frequently conceptualized through animals and subsequently reflected in animal-based metaphors.

Conceptual metaphor theory, originally developed by Lakoff and Johnson, provides an important framework for understanding the cognitive mechanisms underlying zoomorphic metaphors. Conceptual metaphors establish systematic relationships between source and target domains, allowing speakers to comprehend abstract concepts through more concrete and familiar experiences. In the case of zoomorphic metaphors, the source domain is represented by animals, while the target domain typically consists of human characteristics, emotions, behaviors, or social roles.

Merzlikina defines zoomorphic metaphor as one of the most widespread metaphorical nomination models, in which a particular characteristic of an animal serves as the source domain and a human being functions as the target domain. In this regard, zoomorphic metaphors represent cognitive projections through

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which animal images are employed to conceptualize specific human attributes or social phenomena.

Similarly, Ryzhkina and Chakiroglu include lexical-semantic nominations of birds and insects within the category of zoomorphic metaphors, emphasizing their role in characterizing individuals from various perspectives. The use of animals as symbolic images demonstrates that people tend to associate particular species with specific characteristics. These culturally established images subsequently become a source of metaphorical interpretation and evaluation. Through such associations, zoomorphic metaphors perform important cognitive, communicative, and evaluative functions in language. The representation of animals in folklore and oral traditions also reflects elements of mythological consciousness. In Turkic epic literature, for example, animals such as horses, camels, and geese frequently function as symbolic embodiments of totemic beliefs.

The renowned Uzbek epic *Alpomish* provides numerous examples of such representations, illustrating the close connection between animal imagery and the spiritual worldview of early societies. Historical written sources indicate that zoonyms were extensively employed in the social and cultural life of Turkic peoples not only as metaphorical markers of strength, courage, and heroism but also as personal names and indicators of social status. Animal names such as wolf, hyena, fox, lion, tiger, boar, bear, and elephant were widely used for these purposes.

These metaphorical designations often emerged within the narrative structure of epic texts, where they functioned either as part of the storyteller's discourse or as expressive elements in the speech of epic heroes. Consequently, metaphors, similes, and epithets based on primitive mythological perceptions became dominant stylistic devices in folk epics. Such expressive means acquired a shared character throughout Turkic epic traditions and eventually developed into conventional epic formulas and stylistic clichés.

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The semantic field of zoomorphism is largely determined by cultural values and collective experiences. Different societies assign different symbolic meanings to the same animal, depending on their historical development, social environment, and worldview. Among Turkic peoples, for instance, the wolf has traditionally symbolized strength, bravery, freedom, and resilience. It has long been regarded as a sacred and totemic animal, often associated with leadership and noble ancestry. As a result, individuals possessing courage and determination are frequently compared to wolves in Turkic linguistic and cultural traditions. The significance of the wolf is reflected not only in folklore but also in naming practices. Numerous Turkic personal names contain references to wolves, highlighting their symbolic importance within collective consciousness. The character Boybo‘ri in the epic *Alpomish* is a notable example. Similar representations can be found in other literary traditions, where wolves are portrayed not only as symbols of power but also as creatures capable of loyalty, protection, and parental care.

Zoomorphic metaphors serve as powerful evaluative mechanisms through which both positive and negative human characteristics can be expressed. Physical appearance, intellectual abilities, social status, moral qualities, temperament, and behavioral patterns are frequently conceptualized through animal imagery. Animal names therefore acquire evaluative meanings that extend far beyond their literal denotations.

However, the interpretation of zoomorphic metaphors requires consideration of the cultural factors that shape the symbolic image of a particular animal. Ethnocultural perceptions play a decisive role in determining the metaphorical associations attached to animal representations. As scholars have noted, speakers interpret animal metaphors not through objective biological knowledge but through culturally conditioned conceptual frameworks. Consequently, metaphorical meanings often reflect collective beliefs, stereotypes, and traditional values rather than scientific observations.

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This phenomenon can be illustrated by the image of the sheep. In Russian linguistic culture, sheep are commonly associated with such characteristics as stupidity, slowness, stubbornness, timidity, and submissiveness. Contemporary scientific research, however, challenges these stereotypes. Studies demonstrate that sheep possess remarkable cognitive abilities, including long-term memory, facial recognition, social bonding, and emotional responsiveness.

Research conducted by Kendrick confirms that sheep can recognize both humans and other sheep by their faces and retain such memories for extended periods. These findings demonstrate that zoomorphic metaphors are not based solely on objective knowledge about animals. Instead, they emerge from culturally mediated perceptions shaped by historical experience, collective imagination, and social values. People observe animals through the lens of their own cultural environment and subsequently construct metaphorical meanings that may differ significantly across societies.

As a result, identical animals may symbolize entirely different qualities in different cultures. While one linguistic community may associate a particular animal with wisdom, another may perceive the same animal as a symbol of foolishness or weakness. Such differences reveal the inherently subjective and culture-dependent nature of zoomorphic metaphors.

The Uzbek linguistic worldview provides a particularly illustrative example. Unlike Russian culture, where sheep frequently symbolize intellectual limitations, Uzbek and broader Turkic traditions often associate sheep with gentleness, calmness, humility, and peacefulness. These associations are deeply rooted in the pastoral lifestyle and historical experiences of Turkic peoples. Consequently, sheep-related metaphors in Uzbek discourse often carry meanings that differ substantially from those found in other linguistic cultures.

The study of zoomorphisms and their semantic interpretation occupies a significant position in both Uzbek and German linguistics. Phraseological units containing animal names demonstrate both universal and culture-specific

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characteristics, reflecting the anthropocentric nature of language and the cultural worldview of particular speech communities. Owing to their vivid imagery and expressive potential, zoomorphic metaphors have become an important object of linguistic investigation.

German scholars such as Kramer and Sauer have made substantial contributions to the study of the etymological and cultural foundations of animal-based metaphorical expressions. The phraseological systems of both Uzbek and German contain numerous references to animals, birds, and insects that function as symbolic representations of human behavior and character. Among these, the image of the dog occupies a particularly prominent position.

In German culture, dogs are generally regarded as loyal companions and faithful friends of human beings. Throughout history, they have accompanied people in everyday life, hunting activities, protection, and companionship. Consequently, the dog is frequently associated with positive qualities such as loyalty, devotion, reliability, and trustworthiness. Nevertheless, certain expressions in German linguistic culture also attribute negative characteristics to dogs, demonstrating the ambivalent nature of zoomorphic symbolism.

A similar situation can be observed in Uzbek culture. Dogs have traditionally been considered domestic animals that assist humans in hunting, guarding property, and ensuring security. Despite this positive perception, dog-related metaphors in Uzbek frequently convey negative evaluations. For instance, expressions comparing a person to a stray dog are commonly used to describe individuals who are neglected, unwanted, socially isolated, or lacking social status. Likewise, other dog-based metaphorical expressions may denote laziness, helplessness, poverty, or social marginalization.

These examples demonstrate that the metaphorical potential of animal images is not determined solely by their practical role in human life. Rather, metaphorical meanings emerge through a complex interaction of historical experience, cultural values, social attitudes, and collective imagination. Consequently, the same

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animal may evoke both positive and negative associations within a single linguistic culture.

The extensive use of animal imagery in literature further illustrates the expressive capacity of zoomorphic metaphors. Writers frequently employ animal characters and symbolic animal names to enhance narrative impact, broaden the semantic scope of literary texts, and attract readers' attention. In many literary traditions, cunning individuals are compared to foxes, foolish people to wolves or other negatively evaluated animals, wise yet dangerous individuals to snakes, and carefree people to bears. Such metaphorical associations perform important stylistic and evaluative functions within literary discourse. It is noteworthy that negative personality traits are often associated with predatory or dangerous animals, whereas positive human qualities are frequently represented through animals perceived as noble, useful, or harmless. These metaphorical patterns reveal the evaluative mechanisms underlying zoomorphic conceptualization and demonstrate how cultural perceptions of animals influence linguistic expression.

From a cognitive perspective, zoomorphic metaphors facilitate the interpretation of abstract human qualities through concrete and familiar images derived from the natural world. They function as conceptual tools that enable speakers to categorize, evaluate, and communicate complex aspects of human experience. Consequently, zoomorphic metaphors occupy an important position at the intersection of language, cognition, and culture.

CONCLUSION

Metaphor occupies a central place in human cognition and serves as an indispensable component of linguistic expression. As an integral part of human thought and communication, metaphor often operates unconsciously, shaping the way individuals conceptualize and interpret reality. Throughout the history of human civilization, close interaction with the animal world has contributed

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significantly to the emergence and development of zoomorphic metaphors across numerous languages and cultures. The observation of animals enabled humans to identify and interpret various behavioral, physical, and psychological characteristics, which subsequently became sources of metaphorical projection. However, these observations were rarely objective. Instead, they were filtered through the cultural experience, beliefs, traditions, occupations, and value systems of particular communities. As a result, metaphorical representations of animals reflect not biological reality but culturally constructed perceptions and symbolic interpretations.

The present study demonstrates that zoomorphic metaphors possess a pronounced ethnocultural character. The symbolic meanings associated with particular animals vary considerably across linguistic communities, depending on historical development, social environment, cultural traditions, and collective experience. Consequently, understanding the meaning of a specific zoomorphic metaphor requires knowledge not only of the language itself but also of the cultural and historical background of its speakers.

Furthermore, the analysis confirms that zoomorphic metaphors constitute an important lexical and conceptual layer of language. They enrich communication, enhance expressiveness, and facilitate the transmission of cultural knowledge and collective experience. Their ethnocultural specificity makes them unique indicators of national identity and cultural worldview. Therefore, the investigation of zoomorphic metaphors contributes not only to linguistic theory but also to broader studies of cognition, culture, intercultural communication, and conceptual metaphor. Future research may further explore cross-cultural variations in zoomorphic symbolism and their implications for translation, language teaching, and intercultural understanding.

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