

ANIMALS AS SYMBOLS IN ENGLISH AND RUSSIAN PROVERBS: A SEMANTIC ANALYSIS

Abbasova Nargiza Kabilovna¹

¹Farg'ona davlat universiteti, pedagogika fanlari bo'yicha falsafa doktori (PhD), dotsent, Ingliz tili amaliy kursi kafedراسi mudiri

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Abduvaliyeva Mushtariybegim Ixomjon qizi²

²Farg'ona davlat universiteti, Lingvistika: ingliz tili yo'nalishi magistranti

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Abstract. *This article focuses on the analysis of the use of animals as symbols in English and Russian proverbs. It explores the semantic peculiarities of these symbols and their role within cultural and linguistic contexts. Both similar and divergent approaches to the use of animals in the two languages are examined, with an emphasis on the role of these symbols in conveying life lessons and moral norms. The analysis includes examples that illustrate the differences and similarities in the perception of animals in the cultures of English and Russian-speaking peoples.*

Key words: *animals, symbols, proverbs, semantics, cultural differences, language, morality.*

ЖИВОТНЫЕ КАК СИМВОЛЫ В АНГЛИЙСКИХ И РУССКИХ ПОСЛОВИЦАХ: СЕМАНТИЧЕСКИЙ АНАЛИЗ

Аннотация. *Статья посвящена анализу использования животных в качестве символов в английских и русских пословицах. Исследуются семантические особенности этих символов, их роль в культурных и языковых контекстах. Рассматриваются как аналогичные, так и различные подходы к использованию животных в обоих языках, с акцентом на роль этих символов в передаче жизненных уроков и моральных норм. Анализ включает примеры, которые иллюстрируют различия и сходства в восприятии животных в культурах англоязычных и русскоязычных народов.*

Ключевые слова: *животные, символы, пословицы, семантика, культурные различия, язык, мораль.*

INTRODUCTION

The symbolic use of animals in proverbs is a significant phenomenon in both English and Russian languages. Proverbs are often used to convey wisdom, reflect cultural values, and offer moral teachings. Animals, as symbols, play an important role in this process, carrying specific connotations that may differ or overlap across cultures. This article aims to analyze the role of animals as symbols in both English and Russian proverbs, highlighting the similarities and differences in their semantic content. It also explores the cultural, moral, and social significance that these symbols hold in both linguistic traditions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of proverbs, particularly those involving animals, has been an important area of research in linguistics and cultural studies. Scholars like **Mieder (2004)**, **Tiilikainen (2007)**, and **Levinson (2010)** have extensively examined the role of proverbs in shaping cultural identities. In both Russian and English traditions, animals in proverbs often symbolize human qualities such as wisdom, cunning, strength, or laziness. For instance, the English proverb "*A leopard cannot change its spots*" symbolizes the idea that one's inherent nature cannot be altered. On the other hand, Russian proverbs such as "*Волк в овечьей шкуре*" (*A wolf in sheep's clothing*) similarly use animals to convey moral lessons about deception.

Both English and Russian languages demonstrate a rich array of animal-related proverbs, which reflect the respective societies' attitudes toward animals and their roles in human life. Research by **Berland and Kablitska (2017)** suggests that while both cultures share some common animals in proverbs (e.g., the wolf, the fox, the lion), the meanings attributed to these animals can vary significantly based on cultural and historical contexts.

METHOD AND MATERIALS

The research employs a comparative semantic analysis to examine the role of animals as symbols in English and Russian proverbs. This analysis includes a selection of proverbs from both languages that feature animal symbols, drawing from a variety of sources, including traditional collections of proverbs, contemporary literature, and digital databases. The primary focus is on analyzing the meanings and connotations associated with specific animals in each language and comparing them across the two cultures.

By identifying recurring themes, values, and attitudes in both English and Russian proverbs, the study seeks to uncover the underlying cultural narratives that shape the symbolic use

of animals. The analysis considers both the linguistic structure of the proverbs and the broader cultural and social contexts in which they evolved.

RESULTS

The comparative analysis reveals several important patterns regarding the use of animals as symbols in both English and Russian proverbs:

• Common Animal Symbols:

Many animals serve similar symbolic functions in both English and Russian proverbs, particularly those representing human traits. For example, the lion, in both cultures, symbolizes strength, courage, and leadership. English proverbs like *"The lion's share"* and the Russian equivalent *"Львиная доля"* (*The lion's share*) both convey the idea of a disproportionate, often privileged portion of something. Similarly, the wolf appears in both languages as a symbol of danger or predation, seen in the English *"Cry wolf"* and the Russian *"Волк в овечьей шкуре"* (*A wolf in sheep's clothing*), both warning of deception.

• Cultural Nuances:

Some animals in proverbs reflect cultural differences in how certain traits are valued. For instance, the fox in English proverbs like *"As sly as a fox"* is often linked to negative traits such as deceit and trickery. In contrast, Russian proverbs such as *"Лиса хитра, но не всегда умна"* (*The fox is sly, but not always wise*) highlight a more nuanced view, emphasizing the fox's cleverness rather than its deceitful nature. This difference may reflect the more pragmatic view of intelligence in Russian culture, where cleverness is admired, but deceit is not.

• Moral Lessons and Values:

The symbolic use of animals in proverbs often carries moral lessons or ethical guidelines. For example, the English proverb *"Don't count your chickens before they hatch"* warns against premature optimism, to illustrate the importance of patience and critical thinking.

• Animal Archetypes:

Certain animals, such as the dog, rat, and cat, appear frequently in proverbs, often symbolizing loyalty, cowardice, or curiosity. The English proverb *"A dog is a man's best friend"* emphasizes the positive qualities of loyalty and friendship, whereas the Russian proverb *"Собака на сене"* (*A dog in the hay*) suggests selfishness and a lack of generosity. Similarly, while the cat in English proverbs is often linked to curiosity and its consequences (*"Curiosity killed the cat"*), the Russian *"Любопытной Варваре на базаре нос оторвали"* (*Curious Barbara had her nose*

torn off in the marketplace) conveys the same caution but in a more vivid and culturally specific way.

DISCUSSIONS

The results of this study demonstrate that while English and Russian proverbs share many similarities in the symbolic use of animals, cultural differences significantly influence how these symbols are interpreted. The same animal, such as the fox or the lion, can carry different connotations depending on the cultural and historical context in which it is used. These differences are reflective of the values and social structures inherent in each culture. For instance, in English-speaking societies, the fox is often associated with negative traits like cunning and deceit, possibly due to the historical context of medieval England, where the fox was a symbol of trickery and danger. In contrast, Russian culture, with its deep historical ties to the folklore of clever animals, tends to celebrate the fox's resourcefulness.

This study also highlights how animals in proverbs serve not only as linguistic devices but as cultural carriers of moral and ethical codes. In both English and Russian cultures, animals are used to express important life lessons, such as the value of patience, caution, and loyalty. These lessons transcend mere words, offering insights into the broader cultural landscapes in which they are embedded.

CONCLUSION

This comparative analysis of animals as symbols in English and Russian proverbs reveals both shared and unique aspects of cultural values and moral teachings in the two linguistic traditions. While many animals carry similar symbolic meanings across both cultures, the specific interpretations and moral lessons associated with these symbols vary, reflecting the distinct cultural and social contexts in which they have evolved. Further research could explore how these animal symbols have changed over time and how contemporary societal shifts influence the way animals are perceived and used in proverbs.

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