

**ANIMAL METAPHORS IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK IDIOMS: A
LEXICAL STUDY**

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ANNOTATION: *This article conducts a lexical-semantic exploration of animal-based metaphors in English and Uzbek idiomatic expressions. The research examines how animals are used metaphorically to depict human characteristics, actions, and societal norms. Idioms containing animal-related terms in both languages are grouped by semantic categories to identify similarities and contrasts. The study demonstrates that although some metaphors are present in both linguistic systems, their interpretation and cultural resonance differ due to divergent cultural perspectives and traditions. Ultimately, the article emphasizes the way animal idioms act as cultural indicators, offering insights into national cognition and value systems.*

Keywords: *metaphorical expressions, animal-based idioms, lexical-semantic approach, cultural significance, phraseological analysis.*

ANNOTATSIYA: *Mazkur maqolada ingliz va o'zbek tillaridagi hayvon nomlari ishtirokidagi idiomalar leksik-semantik jihatdan o'rganiladi. Tadqiqot davomida hayvonlar orqali insoniy xususiyatlar, xatti-harakatlar hamda jamiyatdagi stereotiplar qanday ifodalangani tahlil qilinadi. Har ikkala tildagi hayvonlarga oid iboralar semantik toifalarga ajratilib, ularning ma'nosi va madaniy mazmuni qiyosiy tahlil qilinadi. Tadqiqot natijalari shuni ko'rsatadiki, ayrim metaforalar ikki tilda ham mavjud bo'lsa-da, ular turlicha talqin qilinadi, bu esa madaniy tafakkur va qadriyatlarning farqli ekanini aks ettiradi. Maqola hayvon obrazlari vositasida milliy ong va madaniyatni anglashga xizmat qiladi.*



Kalit soʻzlar: hayvon obrazlari, idiomatik ifodalar, leksik-semantik tahlil, madaniy mazmun, frazeologik birliklar.

АННОТАЦИЯ: В статье проводится углублённый лексико-семантический разбор идиом с зоонимами в английском и узбекском языках. Основное внимание уделяется тому, как образы животных используются для передачи человеческих черт, моделей поведения и общественных установок. Сопоставляя идиомы, включающие зоонимы, автор классифицирует их по семантическим полям и выявляет культурные различия. Несмотря на наличие похожих выражений в обоих языках, их значение и культурная интерпретация зачастую сильно различаются, что обусловлено различиями в мировоззрении. Работа подчеркивает значимость зоометафор в отражении культурных кодов и национального сознания.

Ключевые слова: зоометафоры, идиоматические выражения, лексико-семантический анализ, культурная специфика, фразеология.

Introduction. Idiomatic expressions featuring animal metaphors represent a rich and dynamic area of linguistic research, as they encapsulate both semantic creativity and cultural specificity. In many languages, including English and Uzbek, animals are frequently used as metaphorical referents to express human traits, behaviors, or social roles. Such idioms are not only stylistic devices but also serve as reflections of a community's worldview, moral values, and collective experiences. Their presence in everyday language, literature, media, and oral traditions underlines their relevance to both communication and cultural heritage.

Animal-based idioms typically exhibit a high degree of expressiveness, carrying strong evaluative connotations and figurative meanings. Expressions such as “as sly as a fox” in English or “*tulkidek ayyor*” in Uzbek serve as illustrative examples. While these phrases may seem structurally and semantically equivalent, closer examination often reveals cultural divergences in usage, emotional intensity, or social acceptability. This suggests that idiomatic metaphors involving animals are



not merely linguistic parallels but culturally embedded phenomena shaped by historical, ecological, and social contexts.

The comparative study of English and Uzbek animal idioms offers valuable insights into how two distinct linguistic communities conceptualize the human experience through animal imagery. Moreover, it sheds light on universal and culture-specific aspects of metaphor formation, revealing the interaction between language, thought, and cultural identity.

This research aims to investigate the semantic and pragmatic characteristics of animal metaphors in English and Uzbek idiomatic expressions. Using the theoretical frameworks of cognitive semantics and conceptual metaphor theory, the study categorizes selected idioms into conceptual domains such as intelligence, cunning, bravery, cowardice, and social roles. Authentic examples from dictionaries, literary texts, and spoken discourse form the empirical basis of the analysis.

By exploring how animal imagery is encoded and interpreted in idiomatic usage across two languages, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of metaphorical thinking, enriches the field of comparative phraseology, and fosters greater intercultural awareness in linguistic research.

Methodology. To ensure a comprehensive examination of animal metaphors in English and Uzbek idioms, the research employed a combination of established linguistic and cultural methods.

*Contrastive linguistic analysis*¹, as outlined by Lado (1957), served as the foundational approach for comparing idiomatic expressions across the two languages. Through this method, structural and semantic parallels and divergences between English and Uzbek idioms were systematically identified. Particular attention was given to how similar metaphorical functions are realized in different cultural and linguistic environments.

¹ Lado R. *Linguistics across cultures: Applied linguistics for language teachers*. University of Michigan Press. 1957. - P. 27.



A *cultural conceptualization framework*² was applied to uncover the underlying cognitive and cultural models that shape metaphor usage. This approach provided valuable insights into the traditional beliefs, social values, and collective worldviews that inform how animals are metaphorically interpreted in each language. The analysis focused on how metaphorical meanings are influenced by the cultural experience of the speaker community.

The *contextual interpretation technique* was also utilized to explore idioms in their authentic usage. This involved analyzing instances of idioms found in literary works, spoken discourse, and media texts. Evaluating idioms within their natural settings allowed for a deeper understanding of their pragmatic force, stylistic effect, and emotional connotation.

In addition, *lexicographic examination* was carried out by consulting authoritative dictionaries and phraseological references in both languages. This ensured the precision and reliability of selected idioms and enabled distinctions to be drawn between colloquial usage and standardized or literary forms.

Together, these methods provided a multidimensional perspective on the formation, function, and cultural significance of animal metaphors in idiomatic language.

Results. The analysis of idiomatic expressions containing animal metaphors in English and Uzbek revealed a clear semantic structure, allowing these units to be grouped into several interconnected categories. Rather than existing in isolation, the idioms form systematic networks that reflect culturally embedded associations and values linked to animals. The classification into semantic fields provides insight into how both languages metaphorically map human experience using animal imagery.

a) Metaphors Reflecting Personality Traits and Human Qualities

A large portion of the examined idioms relate to individual temperament, moral

² Sharifian F. *Cultural cognition and language: The cognitive interface between language and culture*. John Benjamins Publishing Company. 2017. -P. 112.



character, and habitual behavior. These expressions metaphorically assign animal features to human nature, enabling speakers to convey judgments or observations with vivid imagery. For example, the metaphor of a *donkey* (English) or *eshak* (Uzbek) is often used to imply stubbornness or dullness; *fox/tulki* embodies cunning or strategic intelligence; while *lion/sher* signifies courage, dominance, or leadership. These idioms are integral to how speakers in both cultures evaluate personality in informal and formal settings.

b) Idioms Denoting Emotional Reactions and Mental States

Another major category includes idioms that associate animal behavior with inner emotional experiences. Such expressions allow for nuanced communication of feelings, often invoking imagery that resonates deeply with cultural understandings of emotions. Instances include English idioms like “*Cat got your tongue?*” (representing hesitation or silence), “*to have butterflies in one’s stomach*” (indicating anxiety), and the frequently repeated “*as sly as a fox*.” These metaphors extend the expressive capacity of language by linking abstract psychological states with observable animal traits.

c) Expressions Indicating Social Roles and Power Relations

Some idioms metaphorically convey social standing or interpersonal dynamics through analogies to the animal world. For instance, “*top dog*” in English refers to a dominant figure, while “*wolf in sheep’s clothing*” suggests hidden danger or deceit. In Uzbek, the word *kuchuk* (dog) can imply submissiveness or loyalty depending on context. These idioms reflect deeper cultural ideas about hierarchy, authority, trust, and social behavior, often carrying implicit moral undertones.

d) Idioms Related to Movement and Physical Behavior

The fourth category focuses on idioms that metaphorically mirror animal movements or behavioral tendencies to describe human action. These include expressions such as “*to chicken out*” (meaning to back away out of fear), or “*to be a sitting duck*” (implying vulnerability). In Uzbek, “*o’rdakdek suzmoq*” is used to describe awkward or ungraceful movement. These expressions capture physical or



situational dynamics and make abstract actions more relatable through familiar imagery.

In line with *Prototype Theory*³, certain idioms within each category emerge as central or prototypical examples due to their widespread usage and cognitive accessibility. For instance, “*as sly as a fox*” functions as a core representation of cleverness, recognized and used in both English and Uzbek. Meanwhile, more context-specific or less frequent idioms form the peripheral areas of each semantic field, offering nuanced or culturally specific meanings.

Additionally, several idioms have evolved beyond their literal animal references to function as general metaphorical expressions in broader linguistic and social contexts. For example, “*to have a tiger by the tail*” (signifying being caught in a complex situation) and the Uzbek expression “*eski ayiqqa o‘xshash*” (describing someone sluggish or irritable) illustrate how metaphorical extensions operate within both languages. These patterns support *Conceptual Metaphor Theory*⁴, which holds that metaphor is a fundamental mechanism by which humans comprehend abstract experiences through embodied or concrete imagery.

Lastly, the corpus study highlighted variation in the frequency, style, and communicative function of idioms depending on the context. While some expressions are prevalent in casual speech and folk narratives, others appear more often in journalistic or academic texts. This range reflects the pragmatic adaptability of animal metaphors, showing their relevance across different registers and discourses in both languages.

Discussion. The findings of this study highlight the intricate link between metaphorical language, cultural cognition, and linguistic expression in both English and Uzbek idioms involving animal imagery. These idioms function not as mere

³ Rosch E. Cognitive Representations of Semantic Categories. *Journal of Experimental Psychology*. 1975. -P. 63.

⁴ Lakoff G. & Johnson M. *Metaphors We Live By*. University of Chicago Press. 1980. -P. 74.



stylistic elements, but as condensed representations of collective values, traditional beliefs, and conceptual thought patterns prevalent in each culture.

Shared Concepts and Divergent Cultural Interpretations. Certain animal metaphors appear in both English and Uzbek due to common human interactions with animals, suggesting a level of cognitive universality. A notable example is the fox, associated with intelligence and cunning in both languages. Yet, the nuances differ: “*as sly as a fox*” in English often conveys admiration for strategic thinking, whereas “*tulkidek ayyor*” in Uzbek tends to carry a more negative connotation, implying manipulation or deceit. This contrast illustrates how cultural norms influence the moral judgment attached to metaphorical expressions.

Cultural Conditioning of Metaphorical Associations. Some metaphorical associations are rooted in local environmental or socio-economic realities. For instance, the donkey metaphor in English (“*as stubborn as a donkey*”) highlights dullness or resistance to change. In contrast, Uzbek culture, particularly in rural contexts, regards “*eshak*” as a symbol of resilience and hard labor. This variation reflects how daily experience with animals in a particular society shapes the metaphorical meanings attributed to them.

Idioms as Cognitive Tools for Social Description. Animal idioms often serve as efficient cognitive devices to express social roles or personality assessments. Expressions like “*a snake in the grass*” (English) or “*ilonday suzmoq*” (Uzbek) succinctly describe deceitful or unpredictable behavior, enabling quick communication of complex social evaluations. The reliance on metaphor here supports the idea that such idioms encode shared mental models and provide interpretive shortcuts in discourse.

Variability in Pragmatic Use. The meaning and impact of animal idioms can shift depending on communicative context. In academic or formal writing, their usage may be limited due to their emotive or evaluative tone. However, in informal conversation, folklore, or media, they enhance expressiveness and relatability. Consider the metaphor “*a real shark in business*” in English, which portrays an



aggressive and highly strategic entrepreneur. In Uzbek, the comparable idiom “*bozorda haqiqiy bo‘ri*” evokes a similarly assertive but potentially more fearsome figure. These examples demonstrate how similar metaphors may emphasize different aspects—ambition in one, dominance in the other—based on cultural framing.

Cultural Sensitivity in Translation and Pedagogy. One major implication of the study is the challenge of translating animal idioms across languages. Because many of these expressions are deeply embedded in cultural scripts, direct translation often results in semantic loss or confusion. For instance, the English idiom “*to cry wolf*” lacks a direct Uzbek equivalent and must be rephrased to convey the intended meaning. This highlights the importance of cultural awareness in both translation and foreign language instruction, especially when dealing with figurative language. Educators should emphasize not only the literal meaning of idioms but also the underlying cultural logic that gives them significance.

In sum, animal metaphors in idioms act as mirrors of cultural consciousness. Their semantic variability and usage patterns reveal not only linguistic preferences but also broader social attitudes and value systems. Recognizing both the similarities and differences in metaphorical thinking between English and Uzbek enriches our understanding of intercultural communication and highlights the necessity of culturally informed language teaching strategies.

Conclusion. This lexical investigation into animal metaphors in English and Uzbek idioms confirms that such expressions are not simply decorative elements of speech, but fundamental linguistic units reflecting the worldview, cultural values, and collective cognition of each society.

One of the key outcomes of this research is the identification of a rich and culturally embedded idiomatic vocabulary in both languages. English idioms frequently associate animal characteristics with personality traits—“*as sly as a fox*” is a clear example of how animal behavior is metaphorically mapped onto human attributes. Meanwhile, Uzbek idioms often derive from traditional narratives or folk wisdom, such as “*it hurar — karvon o‘tar*”, which metaphorically encourages



perseverance in the face of criticism. These idioms not only serve communicative functions but also preserve cultural memory.

The comparative approach adopted in this study reveals both shared metaphorical frameworks and culturally specific differences. For instance, while animals like the donkey (*eshak*) are metaphorically linked to stubbornness in both languages, other concepts vary. The English term “*eagle-eyed*”, denoting sharp observation, lacks a direct idiomatic counterpart in Uzbek, highlighting different metaphorical mappings of perception and attention in the two cultures.

Moreover, applying theoretical models such as Sharifian’s Cultural Conceptualizations provided a deeper understanding of how these idioms are shaped by local worldviews. The camel in Uzbek, representing endurance and resilience, reflects a pastoral heritage and social ideals tied to patience and strength. In contrast, the English expression “*black sheep*” connotes social exclusion, rooted in moral judgment and group conformity. Such metaphors are meaningful beyond the linguistic level—they encapsulate cultural narratives and values.

The contextual dimension of idiom usage was another critical finding. Depending on the communicative setting—be it informal speech, journalistic writing, or formal address—animal metaphors can shift in tone, function, and interpretation. For instance, “*lion*” in English may signify courage in one context and pride or arrogance in another. Understanding these subtleties is essential for accurate interpretation and translation.

Furthermore, the study analyzed idioms across lexicographic sources and real-life discourse, demonstrating their frequency and variation. This insight is particularly valuable for educators and translators, as it supports more culturally sensitive language instruction and effective cross-linguistic communication.

In essence, this research underscores the relevance of idiomatic metaphors in bridging language and culture. Exploring animal-based expressions offers valuable perspectives for linguists, language learners, and intercultural scholars alike. It reveals



how metaphor operates not only as a linguistic mechanism but as a mirror of cultural identity and social cognition.

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