

THE ROLE OF ZOONYMS IN EXPRESSING HUMAN CHARACTERISTICS IN ENGLISH AND RUSSIAN LANGUAGES

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ABSTRACT: This article explores the role of zoonyms in describing human characteristics and behavior. It focuses on how animal names are used metaphorically in English and Russian languages to express personal traits and emotions.

KEY WORDS: zoonyms, linguoculturology, metaphor, culture, human characteristics, semantics, figurative language, symbolic meaning.

INTRODUCTION

Language is not only a means of communication but also a mirror of culture, mentality, and worldview. Every language contains a large number of words and expressions that reflect people's experiences, traditions, and ways of thinking. One of the most interesting and expressive groups of such words are zoonyms - names of animals that are used metaphorically to describe human qualities, emotions, and behaviors.

The use of animal names in describing people is universal. Since ancient times, humans have observed animals closely and connected their behavior with human nature. For example, a *lion* is usually associated with strength and bravery, while a *fox* represents cleverness or cunning. These associations have been fixed in language through idioms, proverbs, and phraseological units. Such expressions not only enrich vocabulary but also help people express attitudes, evaluations, and emotions more vividly and clearly.

Zoonyms are a rich source for linguocultural analysis, because they reveal how people from different cultures perceive and interpret the world around them. The same animal can have opposite symbolic meanings in different linguistic communities. These differences in meaning while using zoonyms demonstrate how language reflects cultural values and national mentality. Zoonym-based expressions are frequently used in everyday speech, forming part of the phraseological system of a language.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research explores the linguistic, cultural, and semantic features of zoonyms and their role in expressing human characteristics across different languages using a comprehensive, mixed-methods approach. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were employed. The primary methodologies included comparative analysis, semantic classification and contextual interpretation.

Firstly, a corpus of phraseological units, proverbs, and idiomatic expressions containing zoonyms was collected from English and Russian linguistic sources. These materials were drawn from dictionaries, literary works, and online corpora. The selection criteria focused on expressions that describe human behavior, emotional states, and moral qualities through animal imagery. The content and linguistic analysis methods were based on the theoretical frameworks of A. V. Kunin (1996) for phraseological studies and G. Lakoff and M. Johnson (1980) for conceptual metaphor theory.

Then collected zoonymic expressions were subjected to semantic and cultural interpretation. Each zoonym was analyzed in terms of its connotative meaning (positive, negative, or neutral). Special attention was paid to similarities and differences in how the same animal image represents human qualities in different linguistic communities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The analysis of zoonymic expressions across English and Russian languages demonstrates that animal names are frequently used to describe human character traits, social behavior, and moral values. The data reveal that while many zoonyms share universal symbolic meanings, some have unique culture-specific connotations.

1. Positive zoonyms

Positive zoonyms express admirable human qualities such as bravery, hardworking, wisdom as shown in the table below

Animal (zoonym)	Language	Example (expression)	Meaning/interpretation
Lion	English	He is brave as a lion	Bravery, courage
Lion	Russian	Храбр как лев (khrabr kak lev).	Heroism, strength
Bee	English	Busy as a bee	Hardworking, energetic
Eagle	Russian	Орлиный взгляд (orlinyy vzglyad)	Wisdom, far-sightedness

2. Negative zoonyms

Negative zoonyms describe undesirable traits, including greed, stupidity and others that are shown in the table:

Animal (zoonym)	Language	Example (expression)	Meaning/interpretation
Donkey	English	Don't be such a donkey!	Stupidity, stubbornness
Pig	English	Eat like a pig	Greed, rudeness

Snake	Russian	Змея подколодная (zmeya podkolodnaya)	Treachery, hypocrisy
Crow	Russian	Белая ворона (belaya vorona)	Outsider, strange person

These examples show that negative connotations are mostly associated with animals that are viewed as unclean, aggressive, or foolish in traditional culture. The symbolism of animals often reflects social stereotypes and moral lessons rooted in folklore.

3. Neutral or context-dependent zoonyms

Some animal-based expressions can have either positive or negative meanings depending on the context, tone, or cultural setting.

Animal (zoonym)	Language	Example (expression)	Meaning/interpretation
Cat	English	Curiosity killed the cat / Cool cat	Can mean reckless curiosity or stylish calmness
Dog	English	Lucky dog!	Positive – lucky person
Dog	Russian	Собачья жизнь (sobach'ya zhizn')	Negative – miserable life
Fox	English	Cunning as a fox.	Cleverness (positive or negative)
Monkey	Russian	Мартышка (martýshka)	Playfulness or foolishness

The analysis indicates that context plays a significant role in interpreting zoonymic meanings.

Additionally, the use of zoonyms also demonstrates the universal human tendency to understand abstract qualities through concrete imagery — a process explained by Conceptual Metaphor Theory [6].

CONCLUSION

The study demonstrates that zoonyms play an important role in expressing human characteristics and reflect the close relationship between language and culture. The analysis of data shows that animal names serve as metaphors to describe moral, emotional, and behavioral traits. Zoonyms enrich language by adding imagery, emotional depth and cultural color.

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