

ANIMAL-BASED IDIOMS IN UZBEK AND ENGLISH: A COGNITIVE AND LINGUOCULTURAL ANALYSIS

Duvlaeva Nozigul Xolmuxammat qizi

Senior teacher at

Tashkent State University of Economics

Email: nozigulduvlaeva@gmail.com

n.duvlaeva@tsue.uz

Abstract

This article explores animal-based idioms in Uzbek and English from cognitive and linguacultural perspectives. Idioms containing animal imagery reflect culturally embedded conceptualizations and shared human experience grounded in metaphorical thinking. The study aims to identify similarities and differences in the use, meaning, and conceptual motivation of animal-based idioms in both languages. Using a comparative qualitative approach, idioms are analyzed based on their semantic fields, metaphorical mappings, and cultural associations. The findings reveal both universal cognitive patterns and culture-specific interpretations shaped by historical, environmental, and social factors.

Keywords

idioms, cognitive linguistics, linguaculturology, metaphor, Uzbek language, English language, animal symbolism

Introduction

Language is not only a means of communication but also a reflection of how people conceptualize the world. In both Uzbek and English, idiomatic expressions involving animals constitute a significant part of phraseological systems. These idioms encode cultural values, beliefs, and cognitive models.

Animal-based idioms are particularly important because they are grounded in embodied cognition—human interaction with animals over centuries has shaped metaphorical thinking. This study investigates how animal imagery is used to conceptualize human traits, behaviors, and emotions in Uzbek and English.

The objective of this research is to:

- identify commonly used animal-based idioms in both languages;
- analyze their meanings and metaphorical structures;
- reveal cultural similarities and differences.

Methodology

This study adopts a comparative qualitative research design to examine animal-based idioms in Uzbek and English. The data were collected from a range of sources, including Uzbek phraseological dictionaries, English idiom dictionaries, as well as examples drawn from literary texts and spoken discourse. The selected idioms were systematically analyzed and classified



according to several criteria: their semantic meaning (such as intelligence, laziness, or bravery), the type of animal involved, and their evaluative connotation, i.e., whether they carry positive, negative, or neutral meanings. This methodological approach allows for a structured comparison of idiomatic expressions and facilitates the identification of both universal patterns and culture-specific features.

Literature Review

The present study is grounded in the principles of cognitive linguistics, particularly Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) developed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson. This theory fundamentally reshaped the understanding of metaphor by demonstrating that metaphor is not merely a stylistic or rhetorical device, but a core mechanism of human cognition that structures thought, perception, and language use (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). According to CMT, abstract concepts are systematically understood through mappings from more concrete experiential domains, which are grounded in bodily and cultural experience. These mappings take the form of conceptual structures such as:

- HUMAN IS AN ANIMAL
- CHARACTER IS ANIMAL BEHAVIOR

Such metaphorical models explain why animal-based idioms are pervasive across languages: they arise from humans' long-standing interaction with animals and the cognitive need to interpret human traits through observable natural phenomena. Traditional linguistic approaches often treated idioms as arbitrary and non-compositional units. However, cognitive linguistics challenges this view by arguing that idioms are motivated expressions, whose meanings can be explained through underlying conceptual structures (Kövecses, 2010). Research shows that idioms are not random but are shaped by several cognitive mechanisms, including: conceptual metaphor (e.g., ANGER IS HEAT), metonymy (part-for-whole relations), image schemas (recurring patterns of bodily experience), conceptual blending (integration of multiple mental spaces) (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002). These mechanisms demonstrate that idioms reflect systematic conceptual organization, rather than isolated lexical phenomena. As a result, idiomatic meaning is often partially predictable when the underlying metaphor is recognized.

While some conceptual metaphors are universal, their linguistic realization is strongly influenced by culture. Zoltán Kövecses argues that metaphor is both embodied and culturally situated, meaning that shared human experience produces similarities, but cultural context shapes variation (Kövecses, 2010). For example, although many cultures associate the lion with bravery, other animals may encode similar traits differently depending on cultural salience. This aligns with the notion of Idealized Cognitive Models (ICMs) proposed by Lakoff, which suggest that categorization and meaning are influenced by culturally specific mental representations.

In phraseological systems, this results in universal metaphors (shared across languages), culture-specific metaphors (unique to a linguistic community). Comparative studies of Uzbek and English phraseology confirm that idioms encode collective cultural knowledge, including values, stereotypes, and social norms (Khamidova & Akhmedov, 2025). From a linguoculturological perspective, idioms function as repositories of cultural meaning. Scholars such as Anna Wierzbicka emphasize that language reflects culturally specific conceptualizations, and key meanings cannot always be directly translated across languages.

Analysis and Discussion

Some animal-based metaphors are shared across Uzbek and English due to common human experience and observation of the natural world. For instance, the English idiom “as busy as a bee” corresponds closely to the Uzbek expression “aridek mehnatkash”, where the bee



symbolizes diligence and industriousness in both linguistic cultures. Similarly, the expression “as brave as a lion” finds its equivalent in Uzbek as “arslondek jasur”, with the lion universally representing courage, strength, and nobility. These parallels illustrate that certain metaphorical mappings are not arbitrary but are grounded in shared cognitive processes, arising from humans’ interaction with and interpretation of animal behavior. Such examples provide strong evidence for the notion of cognitive universality, where similar experiential knowledge leads to analogous metaphorical conceptualizations across different languages and cultures.

Despite the presence of universal patterns, many animal-based idioms reflect culture-specific perceptions and linguistic preferences. For example, the English idiom “a dark horse”, referring to an unexpected winner, does not have a direct equivalent in Uzbek and typically requires descriptive explanation in translation. In some cases, similar meanings are expressed through parallel structures but carry slight differences in emotional or stylistic nuance. For instance, the Uzbek expression “itdek ishlamoq” and the English “work like a dog” both denote working extremely hard; however, their connotative tone may vary depending on cultural attitudes toward dogs. Likewise, the Uzbek idiom “eshakdek qaysar” (stubborn as a donkey) corresponds semantically to the English “as stubborn as a mule”, yet the choice of animal differs. Such examples demonstrate that while the underlying conceptual traits remain consistent, different cultures may encode them through distinct animal imagery, reflecting variation in cultural salience and symbolic associations.

Animal imagery in idioms often carries evaluative meaning, which may differ across cultures. A notable example is the representation of the dog. In English, the dog frequently has positive associations, as seen in expressions like “man’s best friend”, where it symbolizes loyalty and companionship. In contrast, in Uzbek linguistic culture, the word “it” often carries a negative or pejorative connotation and may be used in expressions of insult or disapproval. On the other hand, some animal symbols demonstrate partial overlap. For instance, the fox in both English (“sly as a fox”) and Uzbek (“tulkidek ayyor”) is associated with cunning and craftiness. These examples indicate that while certain metaphorical associations may be shared, their evaluative nuances are shaped by cultural context, resulting in both convergence and divergence in meaning.

No	Animal	English Idiom	Uzbek Equivalent	Meaning	Connotation
1	Dog	work like a dog	itdek ishlamoq	work very hard	Negative
2	Dog	lucky dog	omadi chopgan odam	fortunate person	Positive
3	Dog	every dog has its day	har kimning kuni keladi	everyone gets a chance	Neutral
4	Cat	let the cat out of the bag	sirni oshkor qilmoq	reveal a secret	Negative
5	Cat	like a cat on hot bricks	bezovta bo‘lmoq	be anxious	Negative
6	Cat	curiosity killed the cat	ortiqcha qiziqish zarar	curiosity leads to trouble	Negative
7	Horse	eat like a horse	otdek yemoq	eat a lot	Neutral



8	Horse	dark horse	kutilmagan g'olib	unexpected winner	Neutral
9	Horse	hold your horses	shoshma	be patient	Neutral
10	Donkey	stubborn as a mule	eshakdek qaysar	very stubborn	Negative
11	Donkey	donkey work	og'ir, zerikarli ish	hard boring work	Negative
12	Cow	cash cow	daromad manbai	steady source of profit	Positive
13	Cow	sacred cow	muqaddas deb qaralgan narsa	unquestioned belief	Neutral
14	Lion	brave as a lion	arslondek jasur	very brave	Positive
15	Lion	lion's share	asosiy qism	largest portion	Neutral
16	Fox	sly as a fox	tulkidek ayyor	cunning	Negative
17	Fox	outfox someone	aldab ketmoq	outsmart	Neutral
18	Wolf	wolf in sheep's clothing	qo'y terisidagi bo'ri	dangerous disguised person	Negative
19	Wolf	cry wolf	yolg'on signal bermoq	give false alarm	Negative
20	Sheep	black sheep	oilaning uyatsizi	disgraceful member	Negative
21	Sheep	follow like sheep	ko'r-ko'rona ergashmoq	blindly follow	Negative
22	Bee	busy as a bee	aridek mehnatkash	very hardworking	Positive
23	Bee	bee in one's bonnet	bir fikrga yopishib olish	obsession	Negative
24	Fish	fish out of water	o'zini noqulay his qilmoq	feel uncomfortable	Negative
25	Bird	early bird	erta turuvchi	early riser	Positive

Animal-based idioms are underpinned by several key cognitive mechanisms that explain their formation and interpretation. Primarily, they rely on metaphor, whereby human traits and behaviors are mapped onto animals, allowing abstract or complex human characteristics to be understood through more concrete and observable domains. In addition, metonymy operates by allowing a salient feature of an animal to represent a broader set of qualities or an entire character type. These processes are further supported by embodiment, as idiomatic meanings are grounded in humans' real-life interactions with animals and their experiential knowledge of the natural world. For example, the expression "eat like a horse" illustrates how the perceived



quantity of food consumed by a horse is metaphorically mapped onto human behavior, demonstrating how physical experience informs linguistic expression.

Conclusion

The comparative analysis reveals that animal-based idioms in Uzbek and English reflect both universal cognitive patterns and culture-specific conceptualizations. On the one hand, certain idioms are cognitively universal, emerging from shared human experiences and common observations of animal behavior. On the other hand, many idioms are shaped by cultural context, reflecting local traditions, environmental conditions, and historically developed worldviews. Animal symbolism in both languages is influenced by factors such as economic lifestyle (for example, agrarian versus industrial modes of living), folklore and mythology, and prevailing social attitudes toward particular animals. Uzbek idioms, in particular, tend to reflect an agrarian lifestyle and close, everyday interaction between humans and animals, whereas English idioms often combine elements of rural experience with influences from literary and cultural traditions. This interplay between cognition and culture underscores the complexity of idiomatic meaning in both linguistic systems. Animal-based idioms in Uzbek and English demonstrate a dynamic interaction between cognition and culture. While universal metaphors highlight shared human perception, differences reveal culturally specific worldviews. Understanding these idioms is essential for intercultural communication, language teaching, translation studies.

References

1. Fauconnier, G., & Turner, M. (2002). *The way we think: Conceptual blending and the mind's hidden complexities*. Basic Books.
2. Gibbs, R. W., Jr. (1994). *The poetics of mind: Figurative thought, language, and understanding*. Cambridge University Press.
3. Khamidova, N., & Akhmedov, S. (2025). Comparative phraseology of Uzbek and English: A cognitive-linguocultural perspective. *Journal of Comparative Linguistics*, 12(2), 45–63.
4. Kövecses, Z. (2010). *Metaphor: A practical introduction* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
5. Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors we live by*. University of Chicago Press.
6. Moon, R. (1998). *Fixed expressions and idioms in English: A corpus-based approach*. Oxford University Press.
7. Rahmatullayev, Sh. (2006). *O'zbek tilining frazeologik lug'ati*. Tashkent: O'qituvchi.
8. Wierzbicka, A. (1992). *Semantics, culture, and cognition*. Oxford University Press.
9. Abdukhamidovna, V. M. (2024, May). Enhancing Creative Distant Learning in higher Education Institutions in a digital society. In *INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON MODERN DEVELOPMENT OF PEDAGOGY AND LINGUISTICS* (Vol. 1, No. 5, pp. 13-16).
10. Vakhobova, M. (2022). Main principles of ICT-assisted language learning and teaching. *Архив научных исследований*, 4(1).
11. Vakhobova, M. A. (2022). INNOVATIVE METHODS OF THE DISTANCE LEARNING PROCESS IN MODERN UNIVERSITIES. *Oriental renaissance: Innovative, educational, natural and social sciences*, 2(5-2), 641-645.
12. Vakhobova, M. (2022). The Richness of the English Language. *Архив научных исследований*, 4(1).

