



# ZOONYMIC UNITS PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN REPRESENTING NATIONAL-CULTURAL WORLDVIEWS

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## Abstract

Language serves as a reflection of the cultural values, beliefs, and experiences of a particular society. Among the various linguistic means that convey cultural information, zoonymic units occupy a significant place. Zoonyms, or animal names used in literal and figurative meanings, constitute an essential part of a nation's linguistic and cultural heritage. They embody historical experiences, social attitudes, moral values, and traditional knowledge about the natural world. This article examines the role of zoonymic units in representing national-cultural worldviews. Through linguistic and cultural analysis, the study explores how animal-related expressions, proverbs, idioms, and metaphors reflect the mentality and worldview of different speech communities. The findings indicate that zoonymic units function as important cultural markers that preserve collective knowledge and facilitate intercultural communication.

**Keywords:** Zoonymic units, national-cultural worldview, linguoculturology, phraseology, animal symbolism, cultural linguistics, language and culture, metaphor, idioms, national identity

## Introduction

Language and culture are inseparably connected, and linguistic units often reflect the worldview of a particular nation. Every language contains culturally significant elements that preserve historical memory, social values, and traditional beliefs. Among these elements, zoonymic units represent a unique category because they connect human experience with observations of the animal



world. Animals have played a vital role in human life throughout history. As a result, their names have become embedded in linguistic systems, acquiring symbolic and metaphorical meanings. In many cultures, specific animals are associated with particular characteristics such as courage, wisdom, cunning, loyalty, or laziness. These associations are reflected in idioms, proverbs, metaphors, and other phraseological units. The study of zoonymic units provides valuable insights into the relationship between language, culture, and cognition. By analyzing animal-related expressions, researchers can better understand how different nations perceive the world and construct cultural meanings.

### **Literature Review**

The relationship between language and culture has been extensively studied within linguistics, anthropology, and cultural studies. Scholars have emphasized that language functions not only as a communication system but also as a repository of cultural knowledge. The concept of linguistic worldview was developed by researchers such as Wilhelm von Humboldt, who argued that language shapes the way people perceive reality. Later scholars expanded this idea within the fields of cognitive linguistics and linguoculturology. Wierzbicka (1997) emphasizes that language reflects culturally specific ways of thinking and understanding the world. According to her research, lexical units often contain culturally significant meanings that cannot be fully translated into other languages. Maslova (2001) notes that animal names frequently function as cultural symbols and serve as sources of metaphorical meanings. These meanings vary across cultures depending on historical experience and social traditions. Krasnykh (2002) argues that phraseological units containing zoonyms provide valuable information about national mentality and cultural stereotypes. Such expressions reveal how speakers categorize human behavior through associations with animals. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) demonstrate that metaphorical thinking plays a central role in human cognition. Animal metaphors are among the most common conceptual mechanisms used to describe personal qualities, social relationships, and moral values. Recent studies in cultural linguistics have focused on cross-cultural comparisons of zoonymic expressions. Researchers have found that while some animal symbols are universal, others are culturally specific and reflect unique national traditions.



## Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research methodology based on linguocultural and semantic analysis.

The following methods were used: descriptive analysis of zoonymic units; semantic analysis of animal-related expressions; comparative linguistic analysis; cultural interpretation of symbolic meanings; contextual analysis of phraseological units and proverbs.

## Materials and Discussion

The term “zoonym” refers to the name of an animal. In linguistics, zoonymic units include lexical and phraseological expressions containing animal names. Examples include: “*As brave as a lion*”, “*As sly as a fox*”, “*Busy as a bee*”, “*A black sheep*”, “*Wolf in sheep's clothing*”.

Such expressions go beyond their literal meanings and convey cultural evaluations and social judgments. Animals often become symbols of particular character traits. These symbolic meanings emerge through centuries of cultural experience and collective observation.

For example:

- The lion symbolizes courage and nobility.
- The fox represents cunning and intelligence.
- The owl is associated with wisdom.
- The donkey often symbolizes stubbornness.
- The wolf may represent danger or aggression.

These symbolic associations are preserved in language and transmitted from generation to generation.

Although some animal symbols are shared across cultures, many zoonymic meanings are culture-specific.

In English culture:

- The bulldog symbolizes determination and national strength.
- The fox is associated with cleverness and adaptability.
- The black sheep refers to a disreputable family member.

In other cultures, the same animals may possess different symbolic meanings. For instance, the owl symbolizes wisdom in many Western societies but may be



associated with misfortune or death in certain Eastern traditions. This diversity demonstrates the close relationship between language and cultural worldview. Phraseological units represent one of the richest sources of cultural information. Examples from English include: “*Let the cat out of the bag*”, “*Kill two birds with one stone*”, “*A fish out of water*”, “*Hold your horses*”, “*Eagle-eyed*”. These expressions reflect cultural experiences and ways of conceptualizing human behavior through animal imagery. Phraseological zoonyms often express evaluations, emotions, and attitudes more effectively than literal language. From a cognitive perspective, animal metaphors simplify the understanding of abstract concepts by relating them to familiar characteristics of animals.

For example:

- “A workhorse” refers to a hardworking person.
- “A snake” refers to a deceitful individual.
- “A social butterfly” describes a sociable person.

Such expressions enable speakers to communicate complex ideas quickly and effectively.

National mentality is reflected in the selection and interpretation of animal symbols. Agricultural societies often assign positive meanings to domestic animals, while hunting cultures may emphasize characteristics of wild animals. The frequency and usage of particular zoonyms reveal cultural priorities, social norms, and collective experiences. Consequently, zoonymic units function as linguistic indicators of national identity. The cultural specificity of zoonymic units presents challenges in translation and intercultural communication. Direct translation may fail to convey intended meanings because symbolic associations differ across cultures. Translators must therefore consider both linguistic and cultural contexts. Understanding zoonymic symbolism enhances intercultural competence and promotes effective communication among speakers of different languages.

## Results

The study produced the following findings:

1. Zoonymic units constitute an important component of national-cultural worldviews.



2. Animal names function as carriers of cultural knowledge and historical experience.
3. Symbolic meanings associated with animals vary across cultures.
4. Phraseological expressions containing zoonyms reflect national values and social attitudes.
5. Zoonymic metaphors facilitate cognitive processing and communication.
6. Cultural differences in animal symbolism create challenges and opportunities in intercultural communication.

The results confirm that zoonymic units serve as valuable linguistic resources for understanding cultural identity and worldview.

### **Conclusion**

Zoonymic units play a crucial role in representing national-cultural worldviews by preserving cultural knowledge, reflecting social values, and shaping linguistic expression. Through metaphors, idioms, proverbs, and symbolic associations, animal names become powerful carriers of cultural meaning. The analysis demonstrates that zoonymic expressions reveal how different societies perceive the world, categorize human behavior, and construct cultural identities. While some animal symbols possess universal significance, many reflect unique national traditions and historical experiences.

The study highlights the importance of integrating linguistic and cultural perspectives in the analysis of zoonymic units. Future research may focus on comparative investigations of animal symbolism across different languages and cultures, contributing to a deeper understanding of intercultural communication and cultural cognition.

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