

ANALYZING ANIMAL CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS IN JAPANESE
KOTOWAZA: A COGNITIVE-LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: *This analytical article critically examines Al Hakimi (2024), who investigates animal conceptual metaphors in Japanese kotowaza (proverbs) through the lens of cognitive linguistics. The study's integration of semantic, cultural, and cognitive dimensions provides significant insight into Japanese moral values and worldview. However, the research also presents limitations in scope and analytical depth. This article evaluates Al Hakimi's methodology, theoretical framework, findings, and implications, while situating them within broader scholarship on metaphor and proverb studies.*

Language serves not only as a communicative medium but as a mirror of a society's cognition and culture. Proverbs—concise linguistic artifacts—encode complex cultural wisdom in metaphorical form. In Japanese culture, *kotowaza* often represent moral teachings, social expectations, and behavioral norms.

Al Hakimi (2024) explores how animals in *kotowaza* function as conceptual metaphors that embody human traits and values, drawing from *Doraemon no Kotowaza Jiten* (1991). Using a qualitative descriptive and cognitive-linguistic framework, the author interprets how animal imagery (e.g., fish, horse, cat, monkey, bird) conveys the Japanese perception of morality, humility, and social conduct.



While Al Hakimi's study enriches cognitive approaches to Japanese paremiology, it also opens space for critical reflection on the selection of data, conceptual rigor, and analytical depth.

Al Hakimi's framework is grounded in the conceptual metaphor theory proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (2003), which argues that abstract human experiences are structured through metaphorical mappings between a *source domain* (e.g., animal behavior) and a *target domain* (e.g., human morality). This foundation is appropriate for examining *kotowaza*, since proverbs inherently depend on figurative analogies.

However, while the paper briefly references cognitive linguistics and semantics (Chaer, 2013; Sutedi, 2003), it does not fully engage with deeper cognitive processes such as *embodiment*, *prototype theory*, or *conceptual blending* (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002). Integrating these theories would have provided a more nuanced understanding of how Japanese speakers cognitively structure moral reasoning through animal imagery.

Moreover, the framework would have benefited from an intercultural comparative lens, as seen in Ehineni (2017) and Ramlan (2021), who examined animal metaphors in Yoruba and Malay proverbs respectively. These studies emphasize how local ecology and cultural norms shape metaphorical meaning—a dimension Al Hakimi only briefly acknowledges.

The study's data source—*Doraemon no Kotowaza Jiten*—is innovative, combining pop culture and traditional wisdom to explore how proverbs function in modern discourse. This allows for an engaging link between traditional cognitive metaphors and contemporary Japanese literacy.

Nevertheless, methodological limitations emerge in sample size and diversity. The analysis focuses on 15 *kotowaza*, which is too limited to represent the vast corpus of Japanese proverbs. The reliance on a single source may also narrow cultural interpretation. For instance, *Doraemon*'s humor and children's tone could skew proverb meanings toward didactic simplicity, neglecting regional or historical variations discussed by Yohani (2016) and Mafrukha et al. (2021).



Furthermore, while Al Hakimi systematically explains the *source* and *target domains*, the discussion remains descriptive rather than interpretive. The paper identifies metaphors such as *FISH IS SINCERENESS* and *HORSE IS STRENGTH*, yet rarely explores why these mappings exist or how they interact with Japanese ethical concepts like *giri* (duty) or *wa* (harmony).

Al Hakimi's analysis yields several insightful observations. For example, the proverb *Saru mo ki kara ochiru* ("Even monkeys fall from trees") conceptualizes *MONKEYS ARE PEOPLE*, emphasizing humility and fallibility. Similarly, *Uogokoro areba mizugokoro* ("If you have a fish's heart, you have a water's heart") maps *FISH* → *SINCERENESS*, signifying mutual empathy. These interpretations align with Japanese collectivist values and the *high-context communication* style described by Hall (1976) and cited in the paper.

The categorization of animal metaphors—*horse*, *fish*, *bird*, *cat*, and *monkey*—reveals how Japanese cognition anthropomorphizes animals to symbolize virtues (e.g., perseverance, sincerity) and flaws (e.g., stubbornness, incompetence). This dual representation underscores Lakoff and Johnson's (2003) notion that metaphors not only reflect but also shape moral cognition.

However, the findings section could have been strengthened by exploring *cultural contradictions* within Japanese thought. For instance, the ambivalence toward cats—as both lazy and pitiable—could have been compared to Shinto symbolism, where cats (e.g., *maneki-neko*) are positive omens. This gap suggests that the analysis privileges surface semantics over cultural semiotics.

Similarly, while the author claims that fish metaphors reflect sincerity and harmony, alternative interpretations—such as Buddhist detachment or Taoist flow—could have expanded the metaphoric network beyond moral dualism.

Compared to Mafrukha et al. (2021), who examined the socio-cultural values embedded in animal *kotowaza*, Al Hakimi's study remains narrower but more cognitively detailed. Whereas Mafrukha et al. integrate socio-cultural themes like diligence and attentiveness, Al Hakimi focuses more on metaphorical mapping than on moral interpretation.



In contrast, Yohani (2016, 2017) approaches *kotowaza* through synecdoche and metonymy, offering micro-linguistic precision that Al Hakimi's broader framework lacks. Thus, while Al Hakimi contributes to the cognitive dimension of paremiology, the study's interdisciplinary engagement could be deeper, linking linguistics more closely with anthropology and philosophy.

Conclusion

Al Hakimi (2024) offers a valuable contribution to cognitive linguistics by illustrating how Japanese *kotowaza* employ animal imagery to conceptualize human morality and emotion. The study successfully demonstrates that metaphor serves as a bridge between language, thought, and culture.

Nevertheless, the research's narrow dataset and descriptive emphasis limit its analytical power. Future studies should expand the corpus beyond *Doraemon no Kotowaza Jiten*, incorporate regional proverb collections, and adopt comparative perspectives with other Asian cultures. Including methods such as corpus linguistics or ethnographic interviews could also deepen cognitive and cultural interpretation.

In essence, Al Hakimi's work highlights that animal metaphors in Japanese proverbs are not mere linguistic ornamentation but cognitive models of ethical reflection. Through these metaphors, Japanese culture reveals its intricate balance between humility, discipline, and harmony with nature—an enduring worldview encoded in the language itself.

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