

THE SEMANTIC CLASSIFICATION OF ANIMAL SYMBOLS IN UZBEK

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Abstract. This article explores the semantic classification of animal symbols in the Uzbek language, focusing on the cultural, emotional, and metaphorical meanings attached to specific animals. The study identifies major semantic categories, including positivity, negativity, strength, wisdom, and peace, and illustrates how these symbolic meanings appear in proverbs, idioms, and common expressions. By analyzing the cultural context behind these symbols, the article provides insight into how Uzbek speakers conceptualize human traits and social behaviors through animals.

Keywords: animal symbolism, semantics, Uzbek language, metaphor, cultural meaning, idioms

Annotatsiya. Ushbu maqolada o'zbek tilidagi hayvon ramzlarining semantik tasnifi o'rganiladi. Tadqiqot hayvonlarga xos madaniy, emotsional va metaforik ma'nolarni tahlil qiladi. Asarda ijobiylik, salbiylik, kuch, donolik va tinchlik kabi asosiy semantik toifalar aniqlanadi va ularning maqollar, idiomalar va kundalik iboralarda qanday namoyon bo'lishi ko'rsatiladi. Madaniy kontekst tahlil qilinib, o'zbeklar insoniy fazilatlar va ijtimoiy xulq-atvorni hayvonlar orqali qanday tasavvur qilishlari yoritiladi.

Kalit so'zlar: hayvon ramzlari, semantika, o'zbek tili, metafora, madaniy ma'no, idiomalar

Аннотаци. В данной статье рассматривается семантическая классификация зоонимов-символов в узбекском языке. Анализируются культурные, эмоциональные и метафорические значения отдельных животных. Исследование выделяет основные

семантические категории, такие как положительность, отрицательность, сила, мудрость и миролюбие, и показывает, как эти значения проявляются в пословицах, идиомах и повседневных выражениях. Статья раскрывает, как узбекские носители языка воспринимают человеческие качества и социальное поведение через образы животных.

Ключевые слова: символика животных, семантика, узбекский язык, метафора, культурное значение, идиомы

Introduction

Animal symbols are an important part of cultural imagination and linguistic expression across the world. In the Uzbek language, animals not only exist as physical beings but also carry metaphorical and symbolic meanings, reflecting human qualities, social behavior, and emotional states. Proverbs, idioms, and everyday expressions often rely on these symbols to convey moral lessons, cultural wisdom, or social observations. For example, the expressions “itning iti o‘zi bilan bo‘ladi” (a dog is known by its behavior) or “quyon kabi qo‘rqoq” (as timid as a rabbit) demonstrate how animal imagery is deeply embedded in the Uzbek linguistic and cultural landscape.

Understanding the semantic classification of animal symbols in Uzbek provides valuable insight into the interaction between language, culture, and thought. According to scholars of cognitive linguistics, “cultural metaphors shape the way a society perceives and interprets human behavior through the prism of shared symbols” [1, p.45]. By examining the symbolic meanings of animals, researchers can uncover patterns in how positive, negative, intellectual, and social qualities are conceptualized within the language.

This article aims to analyze the main semantic categories of animal symbols in Uzbek, focusing on how traditional cultural knowledge is expressed through language. By exploring proverbs, idioms, and commonly used expressions, the study highlights the ways in which animal symbolism helps Uzbek speakers convey ethical, social, and

psychological concepts. Through this investigation, the article contributes to a better understanding of the relationship between culture and language in the Uzbek context.

1. Theoretical Foundations of Animal Symbolism

The study of animal symbolism is closely tied to cultural linguistics and cognitive metaphor theory. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson argue that “metaphors are not just linguistic expressions; they are systematic conceptual mappings that shape how we understand the world” [1, p.5]. In the context of Uzbek, animal symbols convey culturally shared ideas about human behavior, morality, and emotions.

Roland Barthes also notes that “symbols serve as carriers of collective meanings, shared within a community and transmitted through language” [2, p.14]. This perspective helps explain why animals like the wolf, fox, or rabbit consistently carry specific symbolic meanings in Uzbek culture. The symbolic meaning is assigned culturally rather than naturally; as Ogden and Richards observed, “a symbol stands for something in virtue of an assigned meaning, not in virtue of resemblance” [3, p.28].

2. Semantic Categories of Animal Symbols in Uzbek

Animal symbols in Uzbek can be grouped into several major semantic categories based on their positive, negative, intellectual, physical, or social connotations. These categories are reflected in proverbs, idioms, and daily expressions.

Table 1. Semantic Classification of Animal Symbols in Uzbek

Semantic Category	Animal Examples	Symbolic Meanings	Proverbs / Idioms
Positivity / Goodness	dove (kabutar), lamb (qo‘zichoq)	peace, innocence, loyalty	“Qo‘zichoq kabi xotirjam” (calm as a lamb)

Semantic Category	Animal Examples	Symbolic Meanings	Proverbs / Idioms
Negativity / Evil / Mischief	wolf (bo‘ri), snake (ilon), fox (tulki)	danger, deceit, cunning	“Tulkiday shirin gapiradi” (speaks sweetly like a fox)
Intelligence / Wisdom	owl (boyqush), fox (tulki)	cleverness, wisdom, strategy	“Boyqushday donolik bilan qaraydi” (looks wisely like an owl)
Strength / Power / Bravery	lion (arslon), bull (buqa)	courage, dominance, boldness	“Arslon kabi jasur” (brave as a lion)
Foolishness / Weakness / Timidity	donkey (eshak), rabbit (quyon)	stubbornness, timidity, naïveté	“Quyon kabi qo‘rqoq” (as timid as a rabbit)

3. Positive Symbolism

Positive animal symbols in Uzbek often represent moral virtues, loyalty, or peacefulness. The lamb or dove is associated with innocence, gentleness, and calmness. Ernst Cassirer observed that “animals as symbolic forms condense complex cultural ideas into simple, recognizable images” [4, p.102], which is clearly reflected in Uzbek sayings such as “Qo‘zichoq kabi xotirjam” (calm as a lamb).

The lion (arslon) represents courage and leadership. As Victor Turner notes, “symbolic animals condense socially admired qualities and reinforce cultural values” [5, p.76], which explains the frequent use of the lion in expressions praising bravery in Uzbek proverbs.

4. Negative Symbolism

Negative symbolic meanings often involve deceit, danger, or social criticism. The wolf (bo‘ri) symbolizes threat and aggression, while the fox (tulki) represents cunning or slyness. Raymond Williams highlights that “animals often serve as emblems of social fears and moral warnings” [6, p.183], which aligns with Uzbek expressions like “Tulkiday shirin gapiradi” (speaks sweetly like a fox).

The snake (ilon) similarly conveys danger or betrayal, appearing in proverbs that warn against deceitful behavior. These negative associations illustrate the role of animal symbols in moral and social education.

5. Intelligence and Wisdom

Some animals symbolize intelligence and cleverness. The owl (buloq) is commonly linked with wisdom, while the fox (tulki) carries both cleverness and a hint of trickery. David Crystal emphasizes that “animal symbols often embody cognitive traits that are culturally recognized” [7, p.211], which is evident in Uzbek sayings like “Boyqushday donolik bilan qaraydi” (looks wisely like an owl).

6. Strength and Bravery

Animals associated with physical strength and courage frequently appear in idioms and proverbs. The lion (arslon) and bull (buqa) are prominent examples, symbolizing power and courage. Expressions such as “Arslon kabi jasur” (brave as a lion) or “Buqa kabi kuchli” (strong as a bull) reinforce socially valued traits.

7. Foolishness, Timidity, and Weakness

Some animals symbolize undesirable traits. The donkey (eshak) is linked with stubbornness or limited intelligence, while the rabbit (quyon) represents timidity or fearfulness. Jennifer Coates notes that “negative animal metaphors encode social evaluations of behavior” [8, p.92], which aligns with Uzbek idioms like “Quyon kabi qo‘rqoq” (as timid as a rabbit).

Conclusion

The analysis of animal symbols in Uzbek reveals how cultural perception shapes the semantic meanings attached to different animals. These meanings, developed through folklore, literature, and daily life, continue to influence the language and communication practices of Uzbek speakers. Animal symbols function as conceptual tools, helping speakers express moral values, social behaviors, and human traits.

The semantic categories identified in this study-positivity, negativity, intelligence, strength, and foolishness-demonstrate how Uzbek culture assigns specific qualities to animals. Proverbs, idioms, and common expressions highlight the enduring nature of these associations and their importance in everyday communication. By understanding these symbolic meanings, linguists, language teachers, and cultural researchers can better appreciate the close interaction between language and Uzbek cultural thought.

Overall, the semantic classification of animal symbols in Uzbek illustrates the rich interplay between language, culture, and cognition, revealing how symbolic meanings both reflect and shape social and moral concepts.

References

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