

THE WOLF, THE FOX, AND THE HORSE: A CROSS-CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF ANIMAL SYMBOLISM IN ENGLISH, RUSSIAN, AND UZBEK PHRASEOLOGY

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Abstract. This article investigates the symbolic meanings of three animals - the wolf, the fox, and the horse - across the phraseological heritage of English, Russian, and Uzbek. These three languages, belonging to the Germanic, Slavic, and Turkic language families respectively, have developed distinct but partially overlapping systems of animal symbolism that reflect their different cultural histories, geographical environments, and value systems. Through a comparative analysis of proverbs and idioms from all three languages, the article demonstrates that while certain core symbolic associations are shared across the three traditions - reflecting universal human observation of animal behavior - significant divergences exist that encode cultural differences of considerable depth. The wolf emerges as the most culturally differentiated of the three animals studied, carrying meanings ranging from deception in English to complex survival in Russian to pastoral

danger in Uzbek. The findings contribute to the broader field of contrastive cultural linguistics and have implications for translation practice and intercultural communication.

Key words: animal symbolism, wolf, fox, horse, proverbs, idioms, English, Russian, Uzbek, contrastive linguistics, cultural identity, phraseology.

Introduction.

Among the many animals that populate the proverb and idiom stocks of the world's languages, three stand out for their cross-cultural prevalence and their capacity to reveal cultural differences: the wolf, the fox, and the horse. These three animals appear in the fixed expressions of virtually every culture that has had sustained contact with them, and the symbolic meanings they carry tell us a great deal about the values, fears, and historical experiences of the cultures that have immortalized them in language.

The wolf is one of the most universally symbolized animals in human culture. As a large predator that has shared territory with human communities across most of the northern hemisphere, the wolf has been simultaneously feared, respected, and in some cultures admired throughout human history. The fox, smaller and less physically threatening, has been consistently noted for its cleverness and its ability to outwit larger and stronger creatures - making it a natural symbol for the power of intelligence over brute force. The horse, uniquely among animals, has occupied a position that ranges from working tool to noble companion across different cultures, reflecting the very different relationships that pastoral, agricultural, and trading societies have developed with this versatile animal.

The present article examines the symbolic meanings of these three animals in the phraseological heritage of English, Russian, and Uzbek - three languages from entirely different linguistic families that have developed their animal symbolism under very different cultural conditions. The comparison is designed to illuminate both the universal aspects of animal symbolism (those that arise from the objective properties of the animals

themselves) and the culturally specific aspects (those that reflect the particular historical relationships between each culture and the animals in question).

Literature Review and Methodology.

The theoretical framework for this study draws on three main bodies of scholarship. The first is the tradition of paremiology, the scholarly study of proverbs, whose leading contemporary representative is Wolfgang Mieder. Mieder's comprehensive work has established both the definition of the proverb as a genre and the methods appropriate for its cross-cultural comparison (Mieder, 2004).

The second body of relevant scholarship is cognitive linguistics, particularly the theory of conceptual metaphor developed by Lakoff and Johnson. This theory provides a framework for understanding why certain animal symbols are cross-cultural: because they are grounded in systematic conceptual mappings between the observable properties of animals and the abstract domains of human character and social life (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). The fox is associated with cunning across many cultures because the fox's actual hunting behavior involves stealth and strategy - properties that map naturally onto the human concept of cleverness.

The third body of relevant scholarship concerns Russian and Uzbek phraseology specifically. For Russian phraseology, the foundational work of Viktor Vinogradov and the extensive collections of Vladimir Dal remain essential reference points. For Uzbek phraseology, the work of Sh. Rahmatullayev and more recent scholarship on Turkic paremiology provides the relevant scholarly context. The present study draws on standard dictionaries and collections of proverbs and idioms in all three languages, supplemented by reference to scholarly discussions of animal imagery in each tradition.

Discussion.

The wolf (English: wolf; Russian: volk; Uzbek: bo'ri) presents the most striking cross-cultural divergence of the three animals studied. In English, the wolf is primarily a symbol of deception and hidden danger. The expression "a wolf in sheep's clothing," derived from

the Gospel of Matthew, describes someone who disguises harmful intentions behind a benign appearance - and this has become the dominant cultural meaning of the wolf in English. "To cry wolf" warns against false alarms that erode trust. The English wolf is above all a deceiver - dangerous not because of its open predatory force but because of its ability to disguise that force.

In Russian, the wolf carries a far more complex and ambivalent set of meanings. On one hand, it is dangerous: "Volkov boyat'sya - v les ne khodit" (If you fear wolves, don't go into the forest) acknowledges the genuine threat that wolves represent. But the Russian wolf is also admirable in a way that the English wolf is not: "Volka nogi kormyat" (The wolf is fed by its legs) celebrates the wolf's persistent, active approach to survival as a model for human behavior. "S volkami zhit' - po-vol'chi vyt'" (If you live with wolves, you must howl like a wolf) reflects a pragmatic acceptance of one's social environment that is quite different from the moral condemnation encoded in the English wolf imagery. In Russian culture, shaped by centuries of coexistence with wolves in the vast Russian forests and steppes, the wolf has become a symbol not just of danger but of a certain harsh, honest vitality.

In Uzbek, the wolf tends to appear in contexts that emphasize the inescapability of natural hierarchies and dangers, reflecting the perspective of a pastoral society whose livestock were genuinely vulnerable to wolf predation. "Tog' bo'risiz bo'lmas, to'qay arslonsiz bo'lmas" (There is no mountain without a wolf, no forest without a lion) expresses a philosophical acceptance of danger as an inescapable part of the natural order - a stance that combines elements of both the English wariness and the Russian fatalism, but in a distinctly pastoral context.

The fox (English: fox; Russian: lisa; Uzbek: tulki) shows a higher degree of cross-cultural consistency than the wolf, but with revealing tonal differences. In all three languages, the fox is the primary symbol of cunning and the ability to achieve goals through intelligence rather than force. "An old fox" in English, "staraya lisa" in Russian,

and "qari tulki" in Uzbek all describe the same type of crafty, experienced person who cannot easily be deceived or manipulated.

However, the moral evaluation attached to foxiness differs subtly across the three traditions. In English, the clever person who achieves their goals through indirect means occupies a morally ambiguous position - admired for their cleverness but distrusted for their indirection. In Russian folk tradition, the fox (Lisitsa) appears as an archetypal trickster who exploits the stupidity of stronger animals - a figure that is primarily comic and entertaining rather than morally threatening. In Uzbek, the fox proverbs tend to emphasize the immutability of the fox's cunning nature: "tulki ming yil yashasa ham ayyorligini qo'ymaydi" (even if a fox lives a thousand years, it will not give up its cunning) foregrounds a moral lesson about the fixity of character that resonates with Islamic teachings about human nature and the importance of recognizing true character behind outward appearances.

The horse (English: horse; Russian: loshad'/kon'; Uzbek: ot) shows the most dramatic cross-cultural divergence of the three animals studied, and the most direct reflection of the different historical relationships between each culture and this particular animal. In English, the horse is a practical working animal whose most valued qualities are reliability, endurance, and common sense. "Horse sense" describes down-to-earth practical wisdom; "straight from the horse's mouth" invokes the horse's reliability as a source of honest information; "don't look a gift horse in the mouth" reflects the horse's value as a working animal. The English horse is firmly in the domain of practical utility.

In Russian, the horse similarly appears primarily in contexts of labor and endurance: "pakhat' kak loshad'" (to plow like a horse) describes extreme hard work. However, Russian also has a deeper literary and mythological horse tradition - the horse of Russian folk tales and epic poetry is often a magical helper and companion - that gives the horse a more complex symbolic resonance in Russian culture than in English.

In Uzbek, the horse occupies a position of unique cultural honor that has no direct equivalent in either English or Russian. "Ot - yigitning qanoti" (The horse is the young

man's wings) elevates the horse to a symbol of freedom, speed, and noble aspiration - the wings metaphor expressing a relationship between rider and horse that is almost spiritual in its intensity. "Ot - yigitning yo'ldoshi" (The horse is the young man's companion) emphasizes the partnership dimension of this relationship. These expressions reflect the central role of the horse in Turkic nomadic civilization, in which the horse was not merely a working animal but the foundation of an entire way of life - the means of mobility, of hunting, of warfare, and of the pastoral management that sustained nomadic communities across the vast Central Asian steppe.

Results.

The comparative analysis of wolf, fox, and horse symbolism across English, Russian, and Uzbek yields several significant findings that contribute to our understanding of how animal imagery encodes cultural identity in language.

The wolf emerges as the most culturally differentiated of the three animals. The English wolf is primarily a deceiver; the Russian wolf is a complex figure of dangerous but admirable vitality; the Uzbek wolf is a symbol of inescapable natural danger from a pastoral perspective. These differences directly reflect the different historical relationships between each culture and the wolf - England, where wolves were hunted to extinction centuries ago and whose cultural wolf comes primarily from biblical and literary sources; Russia, where wolves remained a genuine presence in the landscape and where the cultural attitude developed through direct coexistence; and Central Asia, where the wolf was primarily experienced as a threat to the pastoral economy.

The fox shows greater cross-cultural consistency, reflecting the universal human observation of fox behavior, but with tonal differences that reveal different cultural priorities. The English fox is clever and morally ambiguous; the Russian fox is primarily comic; the Uzbek fox is an emblem of fixed character with moral implications.

The horse shows the most dramatic cross-cultural divergence, directly reflecting the different roles that the horse has played in the economies and cultures of the three societies.

The utilitarian English horse, the laboring Russian horse, and the noble Uzbek horse encode three very different cultural relationships with the same animal.

Conclusion.

This study of wolf, fox, and horse symbolism across English, Russian, and Uzbek phraseology has demonstrated that animal imagery in fixed expressions constitutes a uniquely productive domain for cross-cultural linguistic analysis. The three animals examined show a consistent pattern: certain core symbolic associations are cross-cultural, arising from universal human observation of animal behavior, while the specific emotional register, moral evaluation, and cultural weight attached to these symbols differs in ways that directly reflect the cultural histories of the three speech communities.

The most significant finding is the dramatic divergence in horse symbolism - from the utilitarian English horse to the noble Uzbek horse - which demonstrates most clearly how the historical relationship between a culture and an animal shapes the symbolic meaning that the animal carries in that culture's language. The wolf divergence - from English deceiver to Russian survival symbol to Uzbek pastoral danger - similarly reflects three very different modes of cultural contact with the same species.

These findings have direct implications for cross-cultural communication, translation practice, and language pedagogy. A translator working between English and Uzbek who encounters a horse metaphor cannot simply translate the words - they must understand that the cultural associations of the horse in the two languages are fundamentally different, and find an expression in the target language that carries equivalent cultural weight. Similarly, a language teacher who introduces animal idioms without explaining their cultural context is teaching only half the lesson. The full meaning of an animal idiom is inseparable from the cultural history that gave it life.

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