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# ZOONYMIC PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS IN UZBEK AND ENGLISH: LINGUOCULTURAL FEATURES OF IDIOMS WITH THE COMPONENTS DOG, HORSE, SHEEP, AND WOLF

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**Abstract:** This article investigates the linguocultural features of phraseological units containing the zoonymic components dog, horse, sheep, and wolf in English and Uzbek. The study treats zoonymic phraseological units as fixed or relatively stable expressions in which an animal name contributes to a figurative meaning, evaluation, or culturally recognizable image. Using a qualitative contrastive approach, the article analyses selected examples from English and Uzbek phraseological and explanatory dictionaries and discusses their semantic structure, evaluative connotations, cultural associations, and translation possibilities. The analysis indicates that animal imagery can be shared across languages while its evaluative force and conventional use remain language-specific. The horse is frequently associated with work, movement, status, or endurance; the sheep may evoke gentleness, conformity, or vulnerability; the wolf commonly signals danger, predation, or social threat; and dog-related expressions display particularly diverse, sometimes contradictory evaluations. These patterns are tendencies rather than universal rules, and individual expressions must be interpreted in context. The article argues that a linguocultural analysis should distinguish literal animal knowledge, conventional idiomatic meaning, and the cultural inferences activated by an expression. The findings may contribute to contrastive phraseology, translation studies, and the teaching of English and Uzbek idioms.

**Keywords:** zoonym; zoonymic phraseological unit; phraseology; linguoculturology; English; Uzbek; dog; horse; sheep; wolf; cultural connotation.

**Аннотация:** В статье исследуются лингвокультурологические особенности фразеологических единиц с зоонимическими компонентами dog, horse, sheep и wolf в английском и узбекском языках. На основе качественного сопоставительного анализа рассматриваются образное значение, оценочная коннотация, культурные ассоциации и способы перевода выбранных выражений. Анализ показывает, что образы животных могут быть общими для двух языков, однако их оценочная окраска и употребление в устойчивых выражениях нередко различаются. Подчеркивается необходимость учитывать контекст, словарное значение и культурные ассоциации при интерпретации и переводе зоонимических фразеологизмов.

**Ключевые слова:** зооним; зоонимическая фразеологическая единица; фразеология; лингвокультурология; английский язык; узбекский язык; собака; лошадь; овца; волк.

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**Annotatsiya:** Ushbu maqolada ingliz va o‘zbek tillaridagi dog, horse, sheep va wolf zoonim komponentlari qatnashgan frazeologik birliklarning lingvokulturologik xususiyatlari o‘rganiladi. Sifatga asoslangan qiyosiy tahlil orqali tanlangan birliklarning ko‘chma ma’nosi, baholovchi konnotatsiyasi, madaniy assotsiatsiyalari va tarjima imkoniyatlari yoritiladi. Tahlil hayvon obrazlari ikki tilda o‘xshash tushunchalarni ifodalashi mumkinligini, biroq ularning frazeologik qo‘llanishi va baholovchi ma’nosi har doim ham bir xil bo‘lmasligini ko‘rsatadi. Zoonim komponentli iboralarni talqin qilishda kontekst, lug‘aviy ma’no va milliy-madaniy assotsiatsiyalarni birgalikda hisobga olish zarurligi asoslanadi.

**Kalit so‘zlar**: zoonim; zoonim komponentli frazeologik birlik; frazeologiya; lingvokulturologiya; ingliz tili; o‘zbek tili; it; ot; qo‘y; bo‘ri.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Phraseological units are an important part of a language’s expressive resources. Their meanings are often not fully predictable from the literal meanings of their individual components, and their use depends on shared linguistic conventions and contextual knowledge. Expressions containing animal names are particularly revealing because animals are encountered through everyday experience, economic activity, folklore, literature, and symbolic systems. When an animal name becomes part of an idiom, it can evoke a human characteristic, a social relationship, an emotional response, or a culturally familiar scenario.

The term zoonym refers here to a lexical item naming an animal. A zoonymic phraseological unit (ZPU) is understood as a conventionalized expression containing such a name and functioning as a unit with a figurative or culturally established meaning. The present study focuses on four components: dog/it, horse/ot, sheep/qo‘y, and wolf/bo‘ri. These animals are suitable for comparison because they are familiar in both linguistic communities, yet their roles in domestic life, pastoral practices, folklore, and idiomatic expression are not identical.

The aim of the article is to identify and compare semantic and linguocultural patterns in selected English and Uzbek zoonymic phraseological units.

The study addresses three questions:

(1) What human qualities and social situations are associated with the four animal components?

(2) Which similarities and differences appear in the evaluative meanings of English and Uzbek expressions?

(3) What do these similarities and differences imply for translation and language teaching?

The research does not assume that every expression containing an animal name has a single, timeless cultural interpretation. Idioms vary by register, region, historical period, and context. Consequently, cultural interpretations are treated as hypotheses supported by conventional usage and dictionary evidence, not as fixed descriptions of all English-speaking or Uzbek-speaking people.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Phraseology examines relatively stable word combinations whose form, meaning, or pragmatic function is conventionalized. In English-language scholarship, idioms have been discussed in

relation to semantic opacity, figurative interpretation, and the role of shared knowledge. Fernando (1996) describes idioms as an important part of language use, while Moon (1998) demonstrates that fixed expressions vary in structure and function and are not limited to fully opaque idioms. These approaches support the need to examine both the conventional meaning of an expression and its use in context.

Cognitive approaches explain many figurative expressions through conceptual metaphor and metonymy. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that metaphor is not merely a decorative feature of language but a way of organizing conceptual experience. Kövecses (2010) further shows that metaphorical patterns may have widely shared motivations while their linguistic realization and cultural elaboration vary. Applied to zoonymic phraseology, this means that a perceived animal trait can motivate an idiom, but the idiom's conventional meaning is shaped by the language community and its history.

Linguoculturology provides a framework for relating linguistic forms to culturally relevant knowledge, values, and interpretive conventions. However, the presence of a particular animal image does not by itself prove that a whole nation possesses a specific characteristic. Cultural claims require cautious wording and evidence from actual language use. In comparative phraseology, an equivalent should therefore be evaluated not only by its dictionary translation but also by meaning, register, emotional force, and pragmatic function.

Research on English and Uzbek zoonymic phraseology has examined structural classification, semantic similarities, national-cultural specificity, and translation. Studies such as Ibotova (2024), Nishonova (n.d.), and Muzaffarova (n.d.) illustrate the continuing scholarly interest in animal-based idioms in these languages. The present article narrows the field to four animal components and foregrounds the relationship between figurative meaning, evaluation, and translation. It also distinguishes a full phraseological equivalent from a functional analogue or a descriptive translation, since apparent lexical similarity does not guarantee equivalent cultural meaning.

## 3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study uses a qualitative, descriptive, and contrastive design. The material consists of selected English and Uzbek idioms and phraseological expressions involving dog/it, horse/ot, sheep/qo‘y, and wolf/bo‘ri. English examples were checked against established idiom and proverb reference works, including the Oxford Dictionary of English Idioms (Ayto, 2010) and the Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs (Speake, 2015). For Uzbek phraseology, the analysis draws on established Uzbek phraseological lexicography, particularly Rahmatullayev's explanatory phraseological dictionary (1978), together with published comparative studies. Before submission, the author should verify the exact form, spelling, meaning, and bibliographic details of every Uzbek example against the editions actually consulted.

The expressions were selected purposively rather than randomly. The inclusion criteria were: (a) the expression contains one of the four target animal names; (b) it has a conventional figurative, evaluative, or proverbial meaning; and (c) its meaning can be described sufficiently to permit comparison. Ordinary literal collocations were excluded unless they formed part of a conventional expression. The analysis proceeded in four stages: identification of the zoonymic component; description of the idiomatic meaning; classification of evaluative or pragmatic connotations; and comparison of possible equivalents in the other language.

The principal analytical categories were semantic domain (for example, character, behaviour, work, danger, or social relations), evaluation (positive, negative, ambivalent, or context-dependent), cultural motivation, degree of cross-linguistic equivalence, and translation strategy. The terms 'equivalent' and 'analogue' are used carefully: a full equivalent preserves central meaning and pragmatic force, whereas a functional analogue conveys a similar communicative effect through a different image. A descriptive translation explains the meaning when no natural idiomatic counterpart is available.

This is a qualitative study and does not claim statistical representativeness. The examples illustrate recurring semantic tendencies; they do not establish the frequency of each idiom in contemporary corpora. A larger follow-up study could use balanced English and Uzbek corpora, specify search and exclusion procedures, and report normalized frequencies and concordance contexts.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1. DOG / IT: LOYALTY, SOCIAL POSITION, AND NEGATIVE EVALUATION

The English zoonym dog participates in a wide range of idioms. In 'a dog's life', it evokes hardship or an unpleasant existence; 'in the doghouse' means being in disfavour, often after offending someone; and 'work like a dog' describes strenuous work. In 'every dog has its day', the animal image supports a proverb about the possibility that everyone will eventually have an opportunity or moment of success. These examples show that dog-related phraseology cannot be reduced to one symbolic value: the component can evoke hardship, disapproval, effort, or eventual good fortune.

Uzbek also has expressions involving it, including 'itdek ishlamoq' ('to work like a dog') in colloquial use, where the comparison emphasizes hard or exhausting work. The expression 'it hurar, karvon o'tar' ('the dogs bark, the caravan moves on') is a proverb in which barking dogs represent criticism or obstruction that does not stop a purposeful journey. Its cultural imagery is linked to the caravan and travel motif familiar in Central Asian historical experience. A direct word-for-word translation may preserve the image but may not fully convey the proverb's conventional pragmatic force to an English reader.

The comparison reveals both overlap and divergence. In both languages, dog imagery may be used in negative or socially critical contexts, but the conventional meanings of individual idioms are not interchangeable. 'Every dog has its day' does not correspond automatically to every Uzbek proverb about fortune, and 'it hurar, karvon o'tar' requires a functional rather than literal translation in many contexts. The pragmatic purpose—encouraging persistence despite criticism—may be more important than retaining the exact animal image.

### 4.2. HORSE / OT: WORK, MOVEMENT, STATUS, AND ENDURANCE

The horse has long been associated with transport, labour, mobility, warfare, and social status in many societies. English idioms such as 'hold your horses' (wait or slow down), 'dark horse' (a little-known competitor whose abilities are not yet fully recognized), and 'workhorse' (a reliable person or thing that performs substantial work) illustrate different extensions of the horse image. The meanings are conventionalized and cannot always be predicted from the animal's literal characteristics.

In Uzbek, ot-related expressions and proverbs often draw on the horse's practical and symbolic importance in pastoral life, travel, and social history. The proverb 'Otning yaxshisi qozig'idan ma'lum, odamning yaxshisi so'zidan ma'lum' links a horse's quality with a person's quality as revealed through speech; wording may vary across collections and oral usage, so the exact form should be checked in the source edition cited by the author. Such expressions connect animal evaluation with human judgement and social conduct.

A major translation issue is that the same animal component may activate different conventional meanings. 'Hold your horses' is not naturally translated by a literal Uzbek phrase about holding horses in every context; a functional rendering such as 'shoshilmang' or 'biroz kuting' may be more appropriate. Conversely, an Uzbek proverb containing ot may require an explanatory translation when its image and cultural background carry significance. The horse component thus demonstrates how shared real-world experience can motivate idioms without producing identical phraseological systems.

### 4.3. SHEEP / QO'Y: GENTLENESS, CONFORMITY, AND VULNERABILITY

In English, 'a black sheep' refers to a member of a family or group regarded as different or disreputable. The metaphor depends on contrast between an unusual individual and the expected group. 'Like sheep' can describe people who follow others without independent judgement, while 'separate the sheep from the goats' distinguishes two groups or categories. The meanings are not identical: one is familial and evaluative, another concerns conformity, and another expresses classification.

In Uzbek, 'qo'y og'zidan cho'p olmagan' literally describes someone from whom even a small piece of straw could not be taken from a sheep's mouth; idiomatically, it refers to a very gentle, harmless, or apparently innocent person. The expression makes use of the sheep as a model of docility. This is a useful example of a cultural image becoming conventionalized through an everyday observation of animal behaviour.

The English 'black sheep' and Uzbek 'qo'y og'zidan cho'p olmagan' both contain a sheep component, but their meanings differ considerably. Translating one with the other would create a semantic error. 'Black sheep' may be rendered as 'oiladagi yoki jamoa orasidagi boshqalardan ajralib turadigan, ko'pincha salbiy baholanadigan kishi', depending on context. The Uzbek idiom may be translated as 'a very gentle/harmless person' or, where appropriate, 'someone who would not hurt a fly'. The latter is a functional analogue, not a literal equivalent.

### 4.4. WOLF / BO'RI: DANGER, PREDATION, AND SURVIVAL

The wolf often represents danger, predatory behaviour, or an external threat in European folk narratives and English phraseology. 'A wolf in sheep's clothing' describes a person who conceals harmful intentions under a harmless appearance. 'Keep the wolf from the door' means to prevent extreme poverty or hunger. 'Cry wolf' refers to raising a false alarm, especially repeatedly. The three expressions use the same animal but construct different scenarios: deception, material insecurity, and the loss of credibility.

In Uzbek, bo'ri can evoke danger, strength, hunger, or predatory behaviour, but interpretations depend on the particular proverb or expression. A phrase such as 'bo'rining og'zi yesa ham qon, yemasa ham qon' (literally, 'the wolf's mouth is bloody whether it eats or does not eat') is used in

some contexts to suggest that a person with a bad reputation may be blamed regardless of what they do. Since proverb wording and interpretation can vary regionally, this example should be verified against a reliable Uzbek paremiological source before formal publication.

The English ‘a wolf in sheep’s clothing’ has a strong conceptual parallel in many languages because the contrast between a dangerous animal and a vulnerable one supports the idea of concealed threat. However, the existence of a similar metaphor does not automatically establish a fixed Uzbek equivalent with the same wording, frequency, or register. Where no established counterpart is confirmed, the safest translation is explanatory: ‘o‘zini beozor ko‘rsatib, aslida zarar yetkazmoqchi bo‘lgan kishi’. The wolf group therefore illustrates the difference between shared metaphorical motivation and language-specific phraseological conventionalization.

### 4.5. COMPARATIVE OVERVIEW

| Zoonym | Typical semantic fields | English examples | Uzbek example / tendency |
|---|---|---|---|
| Dog / it | Hardship, disapproval, effort, persistence | a dog’s life; in the doghouse; every dog has its day | itdek ishlamoq; it hurar, karvon o‘tar |
| Horse / ot | Waiting, competition, labour, quality | hold your horses; dark horse; workhorse | ot haqidagi maqol va iboralarda sifat, so‘z, mehnat va tajriba |
| Sheep / qo‘y | Gentleness, conformity, group identity | black sheep; like sheep | qo‘y og‘zidan cho‘p olmagan |
| Wolf / bo‘ri | Threat, deception, hunger, blame | wolf in sheep’s clothing; keep the wolf from the door; cry wolf | bo‘ri obrazida xavf, ochlik yoki salbiy baho |

*Table 1. Illustrative semantic fields of selected zoonymic phraseological units. The table is qualitative and is not a frequency ranking.*

## 5. DISCUSSION

The results suggest three broad observations. First, animal-based idioms are motivated by embodied and socially familiar experience. People observe animals’ behaviour, their relation to human work, and their roles in domestic or pastoral life; these observations become resources for figurative language. Yet the relationship between animal behaviour and idiomatic meaning is not purely natural. It is filtered through convention, narrative, historical experience, and repeated usage.

Second, evaluative meanings are flexible. Dog imagery can be negative in ‘a dog’s life’ but can support a hopeful message in ‘every dog has its day’. The sheep may represent vulnerability or conformity in one expression and harmlessness in another. The wolf is associated with danger in several idioms, but ‘keep the wolf from the door’ primarily concerns economic hardship. Therefore,

it is methodologically unsound to assign a single positive or negative value to an animal name independently of the phraseological unit in which it occurs.

Third, cross-linguistic equivalence is multidimensional. A translator should consider denotative meaning, figurative image, evaluative force, register, and communicative purpose. Four strategies are especially useful: (1) use a full idiomatic equivalent when meaning and pragmatic force align; (2) use a functional analogue when the target language has a different idiom with a similar effect; (3) retain the source image with a brief explanation when cultural imagery is relevant; and (4) use a concise descriptive translation when no natural idiomatic counterpart exists. A literal translation is appropriate mainly when the image itself is important and the reader can infer its meaning.

The analysis also has implications for teaching English and Uzbek. Learners can compare idioms in thematic sets, identify the animal image and the intended human meaning, classify the expression's connotation, and create short contextual dialogues. Teachers should avoid presenting idioms as isolated word-for-word equivalents. A learner who knows the dictionary meaning of dog, horse, sheep, or wolf may still misunderstand the phraseological meaning. Contextual examples, dictionary consultation, corpus concordances, and contrastive discussion help develop both lexical competence and intercultural awareness.

The study has limitations. The selected examples are illustrative and do not constitute a balanced corpus. Some Uzbek expressions have variants in spelling and wording, and their interpretation may differ by region or context. In addition, the cultural explanation of a phrase should not be inferred solely from a plausible historical story. Future research should document each item's source, variant forms, register, frequency, and contemporary usage through dictionaries, corpora, and interviews with language users. Quantitative analysis could then test whether the semantic tendencies identified here are representative.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This article has compared selected English and Uzbek zoonymic phraseological units containing dog/it, horse/ot, sheep/qo‘y, and wolf/bo‘ri. The analysis demonstrates that animal names provide a productive source of figurative meaning, but their phraseological interpretations are shaped by conventional usage and cultural context. Dog-related expressions show semantic diversity; horse-related units frequently draw on work, movement, and evaluation; sheep imagery may express gentleness, conformity, or group difference; and wolf expressions often evoke threat, deception, or material insecurity.

The comparison also confirms that a shared animal component does not guarantee a shared idiomatic meaning. ‘Black sheep’ and ‘qo‘y og‘zidan cho‘p olmagan’, for example, are not equivalents despite their common sheep image. Accurate interpretation and translation therefore require attention to the whole expression, its pragmatic function, and its cultural associations. The contribution of the article is a focused qualitative framework for analysing four zoonymic components and for distinguishing semantic similarity from full phraseological equivalence. Further corpus-based research is needed to quantify usage and verify regional and contextual variation.

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