

Reflection of Images of Domestic Animals in Folklore of Different Peoples

Evcil Hayvan İmgelerinin Farklı Halkların Folklorundaki Yansımaları

Отражение образов Домашних Животных в Фольклоре Разных Народов

Assel ALDAZHAROVA

Academician E.A. Buketov Karaganda
University, Karaganda, Kazakhstan

(Sorumlu Yazar-Corresponding
Author)



Sorumlu Yazar/Corresponding Author:

Assel ALDAZHAROVA

E-mail: assel_aldazharova@mail.ru

Geliş Tarihi/Received 19.07.2024

Revizyon Talebi / Revision 10.09.2024

Request

Son Revizyon / Last 08.01.2025

Revision

Kabul Tarihi/Accepted 10.03.2025

Yayın Tarihi/

Publication Date 21.08.2025

Cite this article

Aldazharova, A. (2025). Reflection of images of domestic animals in folklore of different peoples

Russian Insights: Literature, Culture and Linguistic, 2, 100-106.

Цитировать эту статью

Aldazharova, A. (2025). Отражение образов домашних животных в фольклоре разных народов *Russian Insights: Literature, Culture and Linguistic*, 2, 100-106.



Content of this journal is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0 International License.

Abstract

The process of mastering any language is associated with familiarity with the culture of these people. Folklore as a part of culture is well known to native speakers, is a fabric of cultural ideas and traditions, and is inextricably linked with the history of domestic animals. These creatures, formerly wild companions, were strongly settled into human communities, shaping and being influenced by our narratives. The author examines the images of domestic animals of different peoples that are found in folklore texts. Attention is drawn to the fact that each nation has its attitude toward a particular animal, which is most often reflected in proverbs and sayings. This investigation explores the metaphorical functions of common farmyard companions such as cows, dogs, and cats in folktales throughout the world. The loyal dog, a defender and companion, may transform into a frightening guardian spirit. Finally, folklore provides insight into the unique bond between humans and the tamed world, illustrating how these creatures have not only served us but also captivated our imaginations throughout millennia.

Keywords: Culture, folklore, animals, symbol, people, worship.

Öz

Herhangi bir dili öğrenme süreci, o dili konuşan halkın kültürüyle tanışmayı da beraberinde getirir. Kültürün bir parçası olan folklor, ana dili konuşan kişiler tarafından iyi bilinir; kültürel fikirlerin ve geleneklerin dokusunu oluşturur ve evcil hayvanların tarihiyle ayrılmaz bir biçimde bağlantılıdır. Bir zamanlar vahşi olan bu canlılar, insan topluluklarına güçlü biçimde yerleşmiş hem anlatılarımızı şekillendirmiş hem de onlardan etkilenmiştir. Yazar, farklı halkların folklor metinlerinde yer alan evcil hayvan imgelerini incelemektedir. Her milletin belirli bir hayvana karşı özel bir tutumu olduğu ve bunun çoğunlukla atasözleri ve deyimlerde yansıma bulunduğu vurgulanmaktadır. Bu çalışma, dünyanın dört bir yanındaki halk masallarında inek, köpek ve kedi gibi yaygın evcil hayvanların metaforik işlevlerini araştırmaktadır. Sadık köpek, bir koruyucu ve yoldaş olmasının yanı sıra zamanla korkutucu bir ruhani varlığa da dönüşebilir. Sonuç olarak, folklor, insanlar ile evcilleştirilmiş doğa arasındaki benzersiz bağı gözler önüne serer; bu canlıların yalnızca bize hizmet etmekle kalmayıp binlerce yıldır hayal gücümüzü de büyülediğini ortaya koyar.

Anahtar kelimeler: Kültür, folklor, hayvanlar, sembol, halk, tapınma

Аннотация

Процесс овладения любым языком связан с ознакомлением с культурой народа, на котором этот язык говорит. Фольклор как часть культуры хорошо известен носителям языка, представляет собой ткань культурных представлений и традиций, и неразрывно связан с историей домашних животных. Эти существа, некогда дикие спутники, прочно вошли в человеческое общество, формируя и одновременно подвергаясь влиянию наших повествований. Автор рассматривает образы домашних животных у разных народов, встречающиеся в фольклорных текстах. Отмечается, что у каждого народа существует своё отношение к тому или иному животному, что чаще всего отражается в пословицах и поговорках. В исследовании анализируются метафорические функции таких обычных домашних животных, как коровы, собаки и кошки, в фольклоре разных народов мира. Верная собака, защитник и спутник, может превращаться в устрашающего духа-хранителя. В итоге фольклор даёт представление об уникальной связи между человеком и одомашненным миром, показывая, что эти существа не только служили нам, но и на протяжении тысячелетий пленяли наше воображение.

Ключевые слова: Культура, фольклор, животные, символ, народ, поклонение.

Introduction

Modern linguistics prioritizes the study of language in its intimate connection with the human experience – encompassing consciousness, thought, and both spiritual and practical activities. Proverbs and sayings play a crucial role in safeguarding the intellectual and spiritual heritage of an ethnic group. Notably, they provide exceptionally clear and figurative reflections of those aspects of human existence and consciousness related to self-awareness, the fundamental principles of human life, the perception of societal norms, and the comprehension of traditions and value categories critical to both individuals and societies. These themes often encompass weighty concepts such as life, death, destiny, health, happiness, and love.

Horse motif in proverbs

Analysis of Horse-Related Proverbs

The widespread reverence for the horse across numerous cultures highlights its significant place within their spiritual traditions. This notion is further substantiated by the prevalence of paronyms (words with similar sounds and origins) that incorporate the "horse" lexeme. For instance, the English proverb "It is a good horse that never stumbles" finds its Russian equivalent in "Конь на четырех ногах, и тот спотыкается" (A horse on four legs, and he stumbles). This proverb, along with others like "На всякого мудреца довольно простоты" (There is enough simplicity for every wise man) or its variant "A horse stumbles that has four legs," underlines the universality of human fallibility.

Further examples demonstrate the utilization of zoonyms (animal names) within proverbs across cultures. The proverb "Do not spur a willing horse," signifying refraining from urging someone already motivated, finds its parallel in the Russian proverb "На послушного коня и кнута не надо" (There is no need for an obedient horse and a whip). Similarly, "Don't swap horses in the middle of the stream," emphasizing the importance of commitment during challenging situations, aligns with the Russian proverb "Лошадей на переправе не меняют" (Horses are not changed at the crossing). Finally, the ubiquitous proverb "Don't look a gift horse in the mouth," cautioning against criticizing something received for free, finds parallels in the Russian "Даренному коню в зубы не смотрят" (Don't look a gift horse in the teeth), the Spanish "A caballo regalado, no le mires el dentado," and the German "Einem geschenkten Gaul schaut man nicht ins Maul." This proverb's historical origins likely stem from the practice of evaluating a horse's age by examining its teeth; thus, "to look a horse in the mouth" signified assessing its value (Sibgayeva ve Mugtasimova, 2023).

Horse as a symbol of power and status

Proverbs, with their concise and evocative nature, offer valuable insights into the cultural values and beliefs of a society. This exploration delves into the symbolism associated with various animals in proverbs across different cultures, highlighting the significance these creatures hold beyond their practical roles. The horse emerges as a prominent figure in numerous proverbs, often embodying strength, power, and social status. The Turkish phrase "Ata binersen Allahı unutma, attan inersen atı unutma" (Sitting on a horse, do not forget about God, and when you get off, do not forget the horse) exemplifies this association (Omer, 2015). It emphasizes the importance of both humility and gratitude, reminding individuals to acknowledge the support that facilitates their success.

For Turkmen people, the horse transcends its utilitarian function to become an esteemed member of the family. The Akhal-Teke breed, believed to be descended from celestial steeds, further underscores the reverence accorded to these animals in Turkmen culture. The presence of a winged horse in their folk epic reinforces the mythical and symbolic stature of the horse.

Similarly, the Arabian proverb highlighting the Bedouin people's regard for horses positions the Arabian horse breed as a cherished possession, ranking third only after God and honored guests (For any Bedouin, the father is in the first place in life, the guest who came to the house is on the second, and his Arab horse is on the third).

The Cow: Provider, Sustenance, and Diligence

In contrast to the image of power and prestige associated with the horse, proverbs from Kalmyk and Oirat cultures portray the cow as a symbol of sustenance and diligence. Phrases like "Even if you don't have a cow, cook the dishes, even if you don't have a horse, cook the rope" and "They learn to be smart in their youth, they feed the cow in winter" emphasize the cow's role as a provider for the family and the importance of responsible care for these animals.

Yakut folklore also reflects a positive association with the cow, with proverbs like "A Yakut is a singer, as he sits on a bull" highlighting the cultural significance of cattle.

The Duality of the Sheep: Meekness and Vulnerability

English proverbs present a more nuanced portrayal of the cow, associating it with old age and compliance ("The old cow thinks she was never a calf") and potential negative qualities like stubbornness ("If you agree to carry a calf, they will make you carry the cow"). However, the primary focus in English proverbs appears to be on sheep.

Sheep are predominantly depicted as symbols of timidity, meekness, and vulnerability. Proverbs like "A scabbed sheep mars the whole flock" and "Lone sheep is in danger of the wolf" highlight the dangers of disunity and the potential for exploitation faced by the weak. Additionally, the association of sheep with laziness and blind obedience is evident in phrases like "A lazy sheep thinks it's woolheavy" and "If one sheep leaps over the ditch, all the rest will follow."

The Pig: A Cross-Cultural Symbol of Ignorance and its limited presence in positive light

While the horse and cow carry positive connotations in many cultures, the pig often evokes negative associations. This analysis examines proverbs and sayings related to pigs across various cultures, highlighting the shared symbolism of the pig as a representation of ignorance, immorality, and undesirable behavior (Omer, 2016).

The Kalmyk language offers few proverbs featuring the pig, with most comparisons using the animal in a negative light (e.g., When there is no dog, and the pig barks). Similarly, the Oirats of China utilize the pig to depict negative human characteristics (He eats like a pig, crawls like a snake).

English and Russian proverbs exhibit a striking similarity in their portrayal of the pig. Expressions like "Never buy a pig in a poke" (English) and "Купить ко́та в мешке" (Buy a cat in a bag) (Russian) highlight a common theme of caution and avoiding hidden flaws. Additionally, proverbs like "Cast pearls before swine" (English) and "Посадишь сви́ню за стол, она и ноги на стол" (Put a pig at the table, she puts her feet on the table) (Russian) depict the pig as lacking manners and behaving inappropriately.

While the Turkish language doesn't attribute negative traits like treachery or stubbornness directly to the pig, proverbs portray it as an ignorant and unintelligent creature. Phrases like "Domuz ne bilir cevherin kıymetini" (similar to the Russian "Разбираться как сви́ня в апельсинах" - to understand like a pig understands in oranges) highlight this perception. Additionally, proverbs like "Domuzun burnunu kulağını kesmişler yine domuz yine domuz" (similar to the Russian "Сви́нье нос и уши отрезали, а она всё сви́ня" - the pig's nose and ears were cut off, and she is all pig) emphasize the perceived immutability of these negative qualities.

The shared English and Russian expressions "When pigs fly" and "Когда рак на горе свистнет" (When cancer on the mountain whistles) demonstrate the utilization of the pig's image to express the impossibility of an event.

This study delves into the multifaceted symbolism of the pig within phraseological units (established expressions with

figurative meaning) across German and Russian languages. It builds upon the research of Burenkova (2008) who highlights the presence of both positive and negative connotations associated with the pig image.

Burenkova (2008) emphasizes the historical significance of pig breeding in Germany, positioning the pig as a symbol of good fortune and prosperity. This positive sentiment is reflected in informal German expressions like "er hat Schwein (ugs.)" (he's very lucky) and "das nenne ich Schwein (ugs.)" (That's luck!).

However, the analysis also reveals a significant number of German phraseological units with the "pig" component that carry negative connotations. These expressions, often informal or vulgar, depict a person as unfortunate ("armes Schwein" - poor wretch), excessively sweaty ("schwitzen wie ein Schwein" - sweat like a pig), or even bleeding profusely ("bluten wie ein Schwein" - bleed like a pig).

Burenkova's (2008) comparative analysis between German and Russian phraseology reveals a fascinating convergence. Both languages utilize the pig image to represent individuals who are physically or morally unclean. Expressions like "wie das Schwein aus dem Stall fortlaufen (ugs.)" (to leave like a pig leaving a mess) and the Russian "Свинья везде грязь найдет" (A pig will find dirt everywhere) exemplify this shared symbolism.

Furthermore, the pig image extends beyond physical cleanliness to encompass moral and social transgressions. German expressions like "wo haben wir zusammen Schweine gehütet?" (what did we graze pigs together?) and Russian "Посадишь свинью за стол, она и ноги на стол" (Put a pig at the table, she puts her feet on the table)" depict individuals who are dishonest, lack manners, and violate societal norms.

The analysis also highlights a unique aspect of German phraseology. Germans utilize the image of a pig's swift escape from danger in the expression "im Schweingalopp" (at a pig's gallop) to signify a state of great haste (Burenkova, 2008).

Canine Companions: A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Symbolism

Dog Proverbs Across Cultures

This analysis explores the contrasting symbolic representations of the dog across English, German, and Turkish cultures. While the dog is often associated with loyalty and positive traits in English, German and Turkish cultures utilize the canine image to depict more negative qualities and situations.

English proverbs and sayings predominantly portray the dog in a positive light, emphasizing its loyalty and the value of hard work. Proverbs like "A good dog deserves a good bone" and "A dog that trots about finds a bone" highlight the rewards of perseverance (similar to the Russian "По заслугам и честь" - On merit and honor). Additionally, expressions like "An old dog barks not in vain" and "An old raven does not croak for nothing" (similar to the Russian "Старый ворон даром не каркает") suggest that the pronouncements of experienced individuals should be heeded. The proverb "A living dog is better than a dead lion" aligns with the Russian "Лучше синица в руках, чем журавль в небе" (A bird in the hand is better than a crane in the sky), emphasizing the value of what is attainable over the unattainable. Finally, "Every dog is a lion at home" resonates with the Russian "Дома и стены помогают" (Houses and walls help), suggesting a sense of increased confidence and security within one's familiar surroundings.

German phraseology presents a more complex image of the dog. While Germans are known for their love of dogs, the animal's symbolic representation in proverbs and sayings often leans towards the negative. Expressions like "kein bunter Hund schaut dich an (ugs.)" (nobody needs you) and "[ganz] auf dem Hund sein (ugs.)" (to be extremely poor) depict social marginalization and hardship. Additionally, the dog is associated with laziness ("den Hund hinken lassen") and even

aggression ("vor die Hunde werfen"). However, the German language also acknowledges the dog's industrious nature through expressions like "wie ein Hund gehetzt sein (ugs.)" (to be extremely busy). Interestingly, the observation of canine behavior leads to the proverb "leben wie Hund und Katze (ugs.)" (to live like a cat and dog), reflecting the difficulty of peaceful coexistence between individuals with significant differences. The idiom "Da liegt der Hund begraben!" (That's where the dog is buried!) signifies the discovery of a crucial issue, mirroring the Russian "так вот где собака зарыта!" (so that's where the dog is buried!).

In stark contrast to the other cultures examined, Turkish culture utilizes the dog image primarily as a derogatory term. The lexeme "dog" is employed as an insult to demean individuals perceived as sycophants or those exhibiting inappropriate behavior. Even stronger negativity is conveyed through expressions like "a lousy dog" and "a scoundrel," highlighting the severity of the insult.

This analysis delves into the diverse symbolic representations of the dog in proverbs from Turkish, Russian, and English cultures. While some cultures acknowledge the dog's positive qualities, others emphasize its negative traits.

Turkish proverbs present a predominantly negative view of the dog. Expressions like "Köpeğin duası kabul olsaydı gökten kemik yağardı" (the dog's prayers were heard, then bones would fall from the sky) highlight the perceived futility of the dog's actions, similar to the Russian "Если бы да кабы..." (If yes if...). Additionally, proverbs like "Köpeğin iyisi leş başında, insanın iyisi iş başında" (A good dog near carrion, a good man near work) suggest that a dog's value lies solely in its ability to guard rather than its companionship. Even the dog's barking is seen as inconsequential in "Köpek havlamakla hava bulanmaz" (The weather will not deteriorate from the dog's barking), mirroring the Russian "Собака лает – ветер носит" (The dog barks – the wind carries). However, the proverb "It iti çsırmaz" (Dog does not bite dog) acknowledges a sense of loyalty and camaraderie among dogs, similar to the Russian "Собака собаку знает (или: не ест)" (Dog knows dog (or: does not eat)).

Russian proverbs offer a more nuanced perspective on the dog. While some proverbs share the negative connotations found in Turkish proverbs, like "Собака лает – ветер носит" (The dog barks – the wind carries), others acknowledge the dog's loyalty and unspoken understanding ("Собака собаку знает"). Proverbs like "От сумы и тюрьмы не зарекайся" (Don't swear from the bag and prison) resonate with the Turkish "deme" (Don't say...) proverbs, emphasizing the potential for unexpected misfortune.

The Cat's Complexities in English and Russian Proverbs

English proverbs primarily depict the cat in relation to its hunting skills ("A cat in gloves catches no mice"). This focus on practicality aligns with the Russian "Без труда не вытащишь и рыбку из пруда" (You can't easily pull a fish out of the pond). However, the cat's image also carries associations with mischief and secrecy in English proverbs like "When the cat's away, the mice will play" and "Cats hide their claws," similar to the Russian "Гладка шерстка, да острые коготки" (Smooth fur, and sharp claws).

Despite the popularity of cats in England, some English proverbs portray them with a hint of superstition, like "A cat has nine lives." This element is absent in Russian proverbs, which focus on the cat's mischievous and observant nature ("Кошка спит, а мышей видит" - A cat sleeps, but sees mice).

This exploration demonstrates how proverbs utilize animal imagery to convey cultural values and beliefs. Turkish proverbs highlight the utilitarian view of dogs, while Russian proverbs acknowledge both the dog's limitations and its potential loyalty. English proverbs depict the cat as a practical hunter but also associate it with secrecy and superstition. By

examining these proverbs, we gain a deeper understanding of the ways different cultures perceive and interact with animals.

The Misunderstood Majesty: The Camel in Turkish Proverbs

This analysis explores the intriguing portrayal of the camel in Turkish proverbs, contrasting it with the animal's typical figurative meaning in the Turkish language.

While the Turkish dictionary paints the camel as "tall; bulky, clumsy," and "ungainly," its symbolic representation in proverbs reveals a more nuanced perspective. Proverbs like "Deveyi yandan uçuran bir tutam ottur" (A bunch of grass can plunge a camel into the abyss) utilize the camel's image to highlight the potential for even minor issues to escalate into significant problems. This aligns with the Russian "Мала причина, да грех велик" (The reason is small, but the sin is great). The proverb "Deve büyüktür, amma başını bir eşek çeker" (A big camel, yes, an ass leads him) employs the camel's size to represent power, while the donkey symbolizes weakness. However, the proverb emphasizes that even the mighty can be surprisingly easily controlled. This resonates with the Russian "И верблюда на оброти водят" (And they take the camel to the ceremony), suggesting that even the seemingly powerful can be manipulated.

"Deve ölürse derisi eşeğe yük kalır" (If a camel dies, its skin will be a burden to the donkey) explores the impermanence of value. A once valuable object, like a camel's hide, can become a burden in different circumstances. This concept is mirrored in the Russian "Заставь дурака Богу молиться, он и лоб расшибёт" (Make a fool pray to God, he will bruise his forehead), where something positive can turn negative in the wrong hands.

The proverb "Deve var bir akçeye deve var bin akçeye" (There is a camel for one coin, there is a camel for a thousand coins) emphasizes the importance of looking beyond superficial similarities. Just because two things appear similar doesn't guarantee they hold equal value. This aligns with the Russian proverb "Не все то золото, что блестит" (Not all that glitters is gold).

"Deve Kabe'ye gitmekle hacı olmaz" (Having gone to the Qibla, the camel will not become a haji) highlights the camel's limitations. Simply being present in a holy place doesn't guarantee spiritual transformation. This aligns with the Russian "Лягушке волком не быть, сколько воды не пить" (A frog cannot be a wolf, how much water not to drink), emphasizing the importance of inherent qualities over external factors.

Despite these portrayals of limitations and naivety, some proverbs acknowledge the camel's utility. The very presence of the camel in numerous proverbs suggests its importance in Turkish life.

Conclusion

This analysis demonstrates how proverbs act as repositories of cultural values, assigning symbolic meanings to various animals. The horse signifies power and status, the cow embodies sustenance and diligence, while the sheep represents a complex figure associated with both meekness and vulnerability. By exploring these symbolic representations, we gain a deeper understanding of the underlying beliefs and social structures within different cultures. German and Russian phraseology demonstrates the multifaceted symbolism of the pig. While the animal is associated with good luck and prosperity in German, both languages predominantly utilize the pig image to represent individuals who are unclean, immoral, or lacking in social graces. By examining these phraseological units, we gain deeper insights into the cultural values and perceptions embedded within language. Exploration also reveals the multifaceted symbolism associated with the dog across various cultures. While English proverbs celebrate the dog's loyalty and industriousness, German expressions depict the dog as a symbol of both hardship and diligence. Turkish culture presents the most extreme contrast,

utilizing the dog image almost exclusively as a derogatory term. Moreover, Turkish proverbs showcase the camel's perceived size, strength, and potential for both value and burden. By examining these contrasting representations, we gain insights into the cultural significance of the camel in Turkish society and the broader phenomenon of how animal imagery reflects cultural values and worldviews.

Hakem Değerlendirmesi: Dış bağımsız.

Çıkar Çatışması: Yazar, çıkar çatışması olmadığını beyan etmiştir.

Finansal Destek: Yazar, bu çalışma için finansal destek almadığını beyan etmiştir.

Peer-review: Externally peer-reviewed.

Conflict of Interest: The author has no conflicts of interest to declare.

Financial Disclosure: The author declared that this study has received no financial support.

Referenes

Burenkova, S. V. (2008). Zoomorphic images of German and Russian phraseology. *Bulletin of the Chelyabinsk State University*, (30), 29–40. <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/zoomorfnye-obrazy-nemetskoy-i-russkoy-frazeologii>

Omer, B. (2015). Images of pets in Russian phraseology (against the background of the Turkish language). *Bulletin of the Bryansk State University*, (3), 212–215. <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/obrazy-domashnih-zhivotnyh-v-russkoy-frazeologii-na-fone-turetskogo-yazyka>

Omer, B. (2016). *Zoomorphic images in Russian proverbs and sayings: Linguocultural and lexicographic aspects* [Abstract of the dissertation of the Candidate of Philology, Smolensk State University Publishing House]. http://irbis.gnpbu.ru/Aref_2016/Бичер.pdf

Sibgayeva, F., & Mugtasimova, G. (2023). Linguistic verbalization of related emotions in phraseological units of the Tatar language. *Philology and Culture*, (4), 79–86. <https://filkult.elpub.ru/jour/article/view/440>