



PROVERBS WITH ZOONYM COMPONENTS: A MIRROR OF LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

Proverbs containing zoonym components—animal names—are an integral part of folk wisdom and oral tradition. They reflect the values, worldview, and social experience of a community through symbolic representations. This article explores the semantic, stylistic, and cultural characteristics of such proverbs, analyzing how animal metaphors encode human behavior, judgment, and ethical principles. It also examines the role of zoonym-based proverbs in linguistic and ethnocultural studies, considering cross-cultural variation and historical symbolism of animals in language.

Proverbs are a powerful reflection of a nation's intellectual and ethical heritage. Among the diverse components found in proverbs, zoonym elements—words referring to animals—are particularly frequent and symbolically rich. They serve not only to describe natural phenomena but also to represent human qualities, behaviors, and social relationships. Such proverbs provide insight into how language reflects cultural values and collective psychology. This article explores proverbs that contain zoonym components, investigating their semantic structure, cultural meanings, stylistic functions, and their role in expressing moral and social judgments in traditional societies. Zoonym proverbs are proverbs that include animal names (zoonyms) as symbolic or literal elements. These types of proverbs are widespread across many cultures and serve to convey values, warnings, social commentary, or humor using imagery related to animals. Since animals have long been part of human life—whether in agriculture, myth, or observation—they become natural metaphors for human behavior.

Animal names in proverbs fulfill several functions:

Metaphorical: using animals to symbolize human traits

-Evaluative: reflecting social judgments (positive or negative)

- Cultural: expressing beliefs and values embedded in traditional views of animals

- Didactic: offering moral lessons or warnings through allegorical imagery

For example: 'A wolf will act like a wolf' implies the unchangeable nature of one's character [1], while 'The donkey isn't embarrassed, but its owner is' expresses indirect criticism through animal imagery [2]. Wild Animals

The rabbit running from the wolf settles for the snake.'

'Who plays with a bear may lose a hand.' — These express danger, fear, and risk assessment[3]. Domestic Animals "There are many whips for the donkey." The cow is milked, the ox takes credit.' — These focus on labor, fairness, and social roles[4].

Birds and Small Creatures "God gave the crow a tail but no voice."

'A mouse walks guided by its ear.' — Symbolizing cunning, smallness, and subtlety [5]. Zoonym-based proverbs reflect cultural stereotypes about animals:

- Wolf=danger or aggression
- Donkey=simplicity or foolishness
- Crow=unattractiveness or noise
- Cat=slyness or seduction

Moreover, zoonym proverbs are culturally coded, often carrying meanings that are not directly translatable or universally understood. A fox in one culture may represent wisdom; in another, deceit. These variations demonstrate how proverbs are not only linguistic but also ethnolinguistic phenomena that mirror societal values and ecological relationships. In agrarian societies, domestic animals like donkeys, cows, and chickens dominate proverbial expressions, reflecting their economic centrality and moral connotations. In contrast, societies with a tradition of hunting or nomadism may highlight wolves, lions, or eagles, symbolizing strength, survival, or leadership. From a linguistic standpoint, zoonym proverbs are marked by conciseness, rhythm, and metaphorical density. They often employ parallelism, alliteration, and contrastive structure to enhance memorability and orality. Their pedagogical role also cannot be overstated—through simple yet vivid imagery, they transmit values across generations. Thus, the study of zoonym components in proverbs provides a multidimensional understanding of language as a vessel of culture, thought, and tradition. In some cultures, however, the same animals are perceived differently. In Eastern traditions, for instance, the dragon symbolizes power and wisdom, while in Western contexts it may symbolize chaos. These variations highlight the ethnolinguistic value of zoonym proverbs and their relevance in comparative cultural studies [6]. Proverbs with zoonym components often exhibit:

- Rhythm and parallel structure
- Irony or sarcasm
- Use of vivid metaphor and simile
- Alliteration and assonance for oral memorability.

These stylistic traits enhance the rhetorical power of proverbs and facilitate their transmission across generations. Their poetic structure contributes not only to aesthetics but also to pedagogical effectiveness [7]. Many zoonym proverbs share thematic similarities across languages and cultures. For example, wolves are feared predators in Turkic, Slavic, and European traditions. However, context may change meanings. In African proverbs, the lion often symbolizes strength and leadership, while in East Asian culture the tiger may represent both majesty and danger. Studying these cross-cultural parallels reveals how shared human experience is reflected differently in linguistic form [8].

As a Conclusion Zoonym-based proverbs are linguistically compact and culturally rich expressions of human observation. They serve as vehicles for moral, social, and emotional commentary through symbolic animal imagery. Studying such proverbs offers valuable insights into traditional cognition, collective values, and linguistic creativity within a cultural context. Their stylistic and semantic diversity continues to inspire research in linguistics,

folklore, and cultural anthropology. Through animal imagery, communities express judgments, warnings, and ideals in a way that is both memorable and meaningful. These proverbs go beyond literal interpretation, functioning as metaphorical frameworks that bridge language and culture. Whether portraying wisdom through the fox, strength through the lion, or stubbornness through the donkey, zoonym-based proverbs condense complex human behaviors into accessible and vivid expressions. Their stylistic features—such as rhythm, irony, and metaphor—enhance their oral transmission and pedagogical function. Moreover, their cross-cultural presence makes them valuable for comparative linguistic, anthropological, and cognitive studies. Understanding and analyzing these proverbs not only sheds light on linguistic creativity but also offers a deeper appreciation for the symbolic systems that shape human communication across time and geography.

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