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Individual essay contest

**«Unity in Diversity: Russia & The English-Speaking World»**

Research essay

**«Animals in British and Russian proverbs and sayings»**



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## Introduction

- The necessity and importance of using a variety of proverbs and sayings in speech
- Animal proverbs and sayings as a way to better understand and feel the culture of the nation

## Main part

- Meaning and function of proverbs and sayings with animal images in the English and Russian languages
- Linguistic and cultural analysis of proverbs with domestic animals in English and Russian
- Linguistic and cultural analysis of proverbs with wild animals in English and Russian
- Frequency and peculiarities of using images of certain animals in idiomatic expressions of the studied cultures

## Conclusion

- Images of animals as a means of uniting cultures of different countries and their influence on the international perception of each other

The vocabulary of any world language contains a lot of stable speech structures. The overwhelming majority of idiomatic expressions are part of folk culture, so they are connected with the interests and everyday concerns of ordinary people. However, the ability to express oneself is far from just being able to speak. Speech should be vivid and figurative, so it is necessary to possess at least a small number of original expressive means in an active vocabulary, such as phraseological units, catch phrases, proverbs and sayings.

English has the status of a language of international communication, therefore a good command of it is essential in the modern world. Being one of the oldest language formations with a long history of development and a rich vocabulary, it is distinguished by an extraordinary diversity of lexical units. The animal world has always played an important role in the life of both the English people and the Russian. The British are known all over the world as "pet-lovers". There is no wonder that a lot of phraseological units of the English language are associated with animals. The proverbs related to animals can be a key to understanding the national character of the English people, their culture and history, while their comparison with Russian equivalents will help to learn our mother tongue better.

For better understanding of the subject of the essay, it is necessary to refer to the dictionary. From the definition of the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary<sup>1</sup>, the word *proverb* is *a well-known phrase or sentence that gives advice or says something that is generally true*. As for the Russian definition, in the dictionary of Sergey Ivanovich Ozhegov<sup>2</sup>, the word 'proverb' has the following interpretation: *«Пословица — это краткое народное изречение с назидательным смыслом;*

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<sup>1</sup> The **Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (OALD)** was the first **advanced learner's dictionary** of English. It was first published in 1948. It is the largest English-language **dictionary** from **Oxford** University Press aimed at a non-native audience. Edited by **Albert Sydney Hornby**.

<sup>2</sup> **Sergey Ivanovich Ozhegov** (22 September 1900 – 15 December 1964) was a Soviet linguist, lexicographer, Doctor of Philology, professor and the author of the "**Dictionary of the Russian language**".

*народный афоризм*». The word ‘saying’ has a meaning close to the word ‘proverb’ both in English and in Russian definitions. Having studied the definitions of this linguistic phenomena in both countries, it can be concluded that both English and Russian proverbs and sayings are a huge linguistic wealth of the people, created over many centuries. Proverbs and sayings do not argue, do not prove – they simply contain an assessment of life.

The cultures of Russia and England are amazingly diverse, each has deep roots and striking features. Therefore, it is fascinating to compare the two languages in terms of proverbs. By doing this, people can find both strong ties between the two languages, and the unique national coloring of each. Proverbs in Russian and English are devoted to various aspects of life, such as health and wealth, hard work and laziness, good and evil, love and friendship, animals, family, homeland, etc. Both peoples have similar attitudes to all these concepts, but there are also differences, for example, in the images of animals. This can be explained by the fact that each nationality loves different animals, or certain animals are more or less common in a particular area.

Proverbs with images of animals have a fairly wide connotation functionality. They can reflect physical aspects (“*Strong as a horse.*” – «*Здоров как бык.*»), appearance (“*A wolf in sheep's clothing.*” – «*Волк в овечьей шкуре.*»), mental properties (“*When the fox preaches, take care of your geese.*” – «*Берегись крокодила, когда он слезы проливает.*»), intelligence or its absence (“*All asses wag their ears.*” – «*Обычай бычий, а ум телячий.*»).

Each animal in proverbs and sayings carries its own specific image, and these images can both differ and have a similar meaning in the national perception of different countries. Both in English and in Russian, a significant place is

occupied by proverbs in which domestic animals are mentioned, which is quite natural, because of the commonality of the historical development of all mankind.

In general, in English and Russian, the vast majority of proverbs and sayings with the "domestic animal" component are first associated with images of such animals as a dog, a cat and a horse. This is due to the fact that these animals were one of the first to be tamed and were constantly near humans. Thus, the image of a *dog* is the leading one in terms of frequency in idiomatic expressions. Although the images of this pet in English and Russian proverbs and sayings are similar, they do not completely coincide. The main distinctive features of this pet – the hidden danger and the ability to bark, to guard – are vividly reflected in the English and Russian languages (“*Why keep a dog and bark yourself?*” – «*Не всякая собака кусает, которая лает.*»). Other characteristics associated with the dog are mostly not identical. So, in Russian sayings, a dog is associated with venality («*Собака на сене - сама не ест и другим не даёт.*»). In English proverbs, this image is usually associated with positive character traits (“*A good dog deserves a good bone.*”).

The image of a *cat* in idioms of both languages is opposed to the images of *mice* (“*When the cat is away the mice will play.*” – «*Всякая мышь боится кошки.*»). Other characteristics associated with the cat do not coincide in English and Russian proverbs and sayings. For example, in the Russian language, the cat is associated with laziness («*Не всё коту Масленица.*»). In English expressions, this animal is usually associated with such character traits as cleanliness (“*A cat in gloves catches no mice.*”) and vitality (“*A cat has nine lives.*”).

*Horses* in phraseology symbolize hard work, strength and endurance in both languages. This is due to the fact that both peoples used the horse in agriculture and as a means of transport. (“*Don't spur a willing horse.*” – «*На послушного коня кнута не надо.*»). Differences in the equine image interpretation are often

explained by the peculiarities of their maintenance and use. It is worth noting that in English the horse is more often portrayed as wayward: *“Don't ride the high horse.”*

There are few proverbs and sayings with the image of a *sheep*. As a rule, in both languages, the sheep is associated with depravity, laziness and a sense of gregariousness: *“One black sheep spoils the whole flock.”* - «Одна паршивая овца все стадо портит».

Images of wild animals such as a wolf, a hare, a bear, a fox are less frequently used in phraseological units. All of them are also connected with the experience and wisdom received for many centuries. However, they are more spread in the Russian language being connected with the inhabitants of forests, a typical type of vegetation eco-systems in our country («Волков бояться - в лес не ходить.», «Волка зубы кормят, зайца ноги носят, лису хвост бережет.»). Therefore, not all animals are used in idioms equally often.

Due to the fact that Russian preference is given to forest animals, it can be concluded that hunting in the forest means a lot for a Russian person. As a result, the opposition *"hare - wolf"* appears in Russian proverbs, but is practically absent in English ones. As for the differences, in Russian the *wolf* has negative traits, such as anger, ruthlessness, unscrupulousness («Волка пожалей - искушает ещё злей.»). In English, the image of the wolf is connected with a hidden threat (*“A wolf in sheep's clothing.”*).

The theme of hunting can also be noticed in the image of a *fox*, which in both languages mostly coincides and reflects qualities such as cunning and dexterity. (*“Even foxes are outwitted and caught.”* – «Лукава лисица, да в капкан попадает.»), *“Fox is not caught twice in the same place.”* – «Старую лису дважды не проведешь».)

Not all animal images have similar connotation in proverbs. So, if the wolf, the pig, and the bear are mentioned among the "negative leaders" while the horse and the chicken are among the "positive" ones in both languages, the negative images of the donkey and the fish are more typical of English proverbs, whereas dogs and sheep are negatively described mostly in Russian idioms. At the same time, the cow and the dog have more positive associations in English proverbs, with Russian proverbs praising the bull and the fish.

Analyzing proverbs in terms of reflecting the national character, we may state that the people of England are more pragmatic, while the Russians make them more imaginative, sometimes complicating the interpretation of proverbs.

Despite the facts that English and Russian languages belong to different language groups, they did not have close contacts and went their own way of historical development, many folk sayings fully or partially correspond, and some even coincide in meaning. Still the national mentality, peculiarities of everyday life, customs, different histories, principles of morality and psychology are manifested in proverbs.

The study of proverbs in the linguistic and cultural aspects helps to clarify, and in some cases to establish additional semantic shades of proverbs with nationally cultural semantics. The comparison of proverbs of different peoples shows how much these peoples have in common, which, in turn, contributes to their better understanding and rapprochement.



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