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Time for Equal Opportunities”**

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**ОСОБЕННОСТИ ИСПОЛЬЗОВАНИЯ НАЗВАНИЙ ЖИВОТНЫХ В
РУССКИХ И АНГЛИЙСКИХ ПОСЛОВИЦАХ И ПОГОВОРКАХ**



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Individual essay contest

**“Unity in Diversity: Russia and the English-Speaking World.
Time for Equal Opportunities”**

Research work (essay)

ANIMALS IN BRITISH AND RUSSIAN PROVERBS AND SAYINGS



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Theses

1. Definition of the terms “proverb” and “saying”;
2. A brief history of paroemias and the origin of zoonyms;
3. Animals in proverbs and sayings: meaning and classification.

“A proverb is the wit of one and the wisdom of many”

Lord John Russell

Definition of the terms «proverb» and «saying»

To begin with, let's define what a “proverb” and a “saying” are. S. I. Ozhegov defines these terms as follows: “a proverb is a short folk saying with edifying content, a folk aphorism” (Ozhegov 2006, p. 568), “a saying is a short persistent expression, mainly figurative, not composing, unlike a proverb, a complete statement” (Ozhegov 2006, p. 530). The Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary gives the following definition: “proverb is a well-known phrase or sentence that gives advice or says something that is generally true” (OALD 2005, p. 1215), “saying is a well-known phrase or statement that expresses something about life that most people believe is wise and true” (OALD 2005, p. 1351).

Thus, these are well-known and commonly used statements, summarizing the centuries-old life experience of people in an accessible short form, which “reflect the culture and values of society” (Peters 2007, p. 235). In modern linguistics, both a proverb and a saying are often denoted by the same term “paroemia”.

A brief history of paroemias and the origin of zoonyms

Paroemias are an essential part of the speech of people around the world. According to W. Mieder, they “have their origin in classical times, the Bible, and the Middle Ages ... (proverbs) have been collected and studied since the beginning of written records” (Mieder 2010, p. 35). This is confirmed by many studies: the oldest collections of proverbs date back to around 2600-2550 B.C. and are part of a larger corpus usually labelled as “wisdom literature” (Milică

2012), “the first Russian paroemias are found in ancient Russian literature of the XII century, the growth of the number of English colloquial metaphors can be traced to the XIV-XV centuries” (Denisova, Lipatova and Gorbunova 2019, pp. 130-131).

There are a huge number of proverbs and sayings in any language, covering all spheres of human life. In all their multitude, a group of paroemias with a component-zoonym can be distinguished – proverbs in which animals are used. Their existence in general and wide distribution in particular are associated with long-term human interaction with animals. This interaction led to the fact that people began to understand the habits of animals, their behavior and ways of adapting to life and began to use the formed ideas about the characteristics of some animals in order to figuratively describe human relationships and character, to designate social occurrences (Cui Zhenling 2012).

Animals in proverbs and sayings: meaning and classification

Similar paroemias are found in all languages, and mostly they use a complex of the same animals. Interestingly, at the same time, the meanings of proverbs, even with the similarity of content, may differ in meaning. Z. A. Gordeeva connects it with the fact that “the zoonym reflects differences in national and cultural representations, psychological, mental and social features inherent in a certain linguistic community and culture as a whole” (Gordeeva 2013, p. 71).

Therefore, paroemias that contain zoonyms can be divided into several categories: identical in content and meaning for different languages, similar ones that are the same in meaning but differ in content, and precedent, «unique» paroemias that have no direct analogues in other languages. Let's look at each group in more detail. The method of translating paroemias depends on the category: literal translation is used for the first group, translation with

substitution for the second one and literary (free) translation for the last (Abo Al-Timen 2015).

The first category includes proverbs and sayings with a shared origin: sayings from the Bible and ancient Greek and Latin texts e.g., *“метать бисер перед свиньями”/“don’t cast your pearls before swine”*, *“легче верблюду пройти сквозь игольное ушко, чем богатому войти в Царство Небесное”/“it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God”*, *“собака на сене”/“a dog in the manger”*, *“троянский конь”/“trojan horse”*, *“лучше синица в руках, чем журавль в небе”/“a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush”*, etc.

This category includes other well-known proverbs: *“дареному коню в зубы не смотрят”/“don’t look a gift horse in the mouth”*, *“лев мышей не давит”/“lions don’t hunt mice”*, *“с волками жить – по-волчьи выть”/“who keeps company with the wolf will learn to howl”*, etc. In these examples, the animals denote abstract concepts making them metaphorical statements.

Of particular interest are proverbs and sayings containing characteristics of animals: *“хитрый как лиса”/“as sly as a fox”*, *“трещать как сорока”/“to chatter like a magpie”*, *“слепой как крот”/“as blind as a mole”*, *“тихий как мышь”/“as quiet as a mouse”*, *“гордый как павлин”/“as proud as a peacock”*, etc. These sayings are the same in both Russian and English, because the same traits are attributed to these animals, the so-called “cultural universals” (Cherdantseva 2012, p. 14). With the help of such a comparison, one can transfer these characteristics to another person and describe them in an accessible and simple way.

The second category is analog paroemias, the same in meaning, but different in content. This is the largest group of proverbs and sayings, because, as N. A. Kozko noted, “phraseological units with zoonyms are markers of the national image of the world formed in the consciousness of a certain ethnic

community” (Kozko 2008, p. 83). Its formation is influenced by a number of external and internal factors: climate, relations with other ethnic groups, territorial position, level of economic integration, etc.

This can be seen in the proverbs with the animal component. They reflect the animals that are most familiar to the people who created the proverb. Thus, in Russian and English proverbs and sayings, the most commonly used zoonyms are “cat” and “dog” (Boktaeva 2016; Tlekhatuk 2014). Researchers explain this by their wide spread and early domestication (Asimopoulos 2018; Asimopoulos 2019). However, the zoonym “horse”, for example, is more frequently used in Russian paroemias than in English ones (Kulkova, Galimullina 2015).

Let's consider examples of such paroemias in more detail. Their versions in different languages can be similar either stylistically: “*go to bed with the lamb and rise with the lark*”/“*ложись с курами, а вставай с петухами*”, “*ворон ворону глаз не выклюет*”/“*hawk will not pick out hawks’ eyes*”, “*убить двух зайцев одним ударом*”/“*to kill two birds with one stone*”, “*каждый кулик свое болото хвалит*”/“*every bird likes its own nest*”, “*кот в мешке*”/“*pig in a poke*”, “*не дели шкуру неубитого медведя*”/“*catch the bear before you sell its skin*” or only in meaning: “*белая ворона*”/“*black sheep*”, “*a cat in gloves catches no mice*”/“*без труда не выловишь и рыбку из пруда*”.

Zoonyms in this category describe a person to a lesser extent and particular situations to a greater extent, in which they act both as actors (ворон/hawk, кулик/bird) and as objects (зайцев/birds, медведя/bear). Interestingly, in variations of some paroemias, depending on the language, zoonyms can act as both: for example, in the Russian proverb “*как волка не корми, а он все в лес смотрит*”, the zoonym “волк” is an object, and in its English version “*the leopard cannot change its spots*” zoonym “leopard” is an

actor. At the same time, the change of the type of action from passive to active doesn't affect the meaning of the proverb.

The last group of paroemias are precedent-based ones, that have no direct analogues. Such proverbs and sayings are mostly catch phrases from the works of “national authors” – people whose work is associated with a certain nation and its history. For Russia, such are, for example, Alexandr Pushkin and Ivan Krylov, for Great Britain – William Shakespeare and Charles Dickens.

Examples of such paroemias in the Russian language are “*премудрый нескарь*” from the fairytale of the same name by M. E. Saltykov-Shchedrin, “*попрыгунья-стрекоза*” from the fable “Стрекоза и Муравей” by I. A. Krylov. In English, examples of non-equivalent proverbs are “*very like a whale*” from W. Shakespeare’s “Hamlet” and “*mad as a March hare*”, which became world famous due to L. Carroll’s book “Alice in Wonderland”.

There are disputes about belonging to this category of some proverbs. For example, the expression “*the elephant in the room*” is almost identical to the Russian “*слона-то я и не приметил*”, but the meaning of these phrases, which may look similar, have a significant difference: the English proverb implies something obvious that is deliberately ignored, while the Russian one means something obvious that is not noticed by chance.

As this example shows, the described group of paroemias is the most accurate representation of national identity and mentality, therefore, zoonyms even in similar proverbs need to be analyzed in the context of the country, environment and time in which it appeared.

Thus, animals in Russian and English proverbs and sayings have several meanings at once: they are used to characterize a person – their physical qualities, appearance and character, they are short edifying lessons and bearers of centuries-old experience. Understanding foreign proverbs allows you to better understand not only the language, but also its native speakers.

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