
ANIMALISMS IN MODERN ENGLISH LINGUISTICS: STRUCTURE, FUNCTIONS, AND ARTISTIC REALIZATIONS

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Abstract:

The professional training system plays an important role in The article examines animalisms as a significant lexico-semantic and stylistic phenomenon in the English language. It analyzes theoretical approaches, classifications, functions, and examples of their realization in literary works. Special attention is given to the cognitive nature of zoomorphic metaphor and its role in artistic discourse.

Keywords

Animalisms, English language, metaphor, fiction, pragmatics, cultural studies, evaluativity.

Introduction

Animalisms represent lexico-semantic units based on the transfer of animal properties to humans or abstract phenomena. In modern English linguistics, they are studied within the frameworks of cognitive semantics, cultural studies, and stylistics, as they reflect ways of conceptualizing the human being and the world [2].

In linguistics, animalisms are considered as part of zoomorphic vocabulary, as a means of conceptualizing and categorizing human experience, and as an instrument for evaluating and characterizing personality, behavior, and social roles [6]. At the same time, they function as an important cognitive mechanism that enables the interpretation of surrounding reality through the prism of symbolic images associated with the animal world.

Because of their universality, animalisms reflect deep mental processes connected with human perception of natural phenomena, emotional states, and social interactions. Zoomorphic images from stable associations that become entrenched in collective consciousness and constitute a part of the culturally conditioned linguistic picture of the world.

Animalisms also perform several functions:

- **cognitive modeling**, allowing the transfer of characteristic features of animals to humans and thus explaining complex socio-psychological phenomena through simple and vivid schemas;
- **symbolization**, since animal imagery traditionally possesses a rich mythopoetic and cultural potential;
- **pragmatic marking**, expressed in evaluative statements, emotional coloring of speech, and specific communicative strategies.

Therefore, animalisms constitute a multilayered phenomenon in which linguistic, cognitive, and cultural aspects intersect, making them an important object of study within the modern anthropocentric paradigm.

In literary works, animalisms play a special role by enabling the author to shape characters, construct emotional perception, and build symbolic systems [5]. The use of zoomorphic images creates a multilayered narrative, as each animal is associated with a specific set of cultural, psychological, and archetypal meanings that are automatically activated in the reader's consciousness.

Through animalisms, the author can:

- strengthen expression by conveying emotions through vivid zoomorphic metaphors or comparisons;
- construct character traits by attributing to a person features of a “fox,” “wolf,” “eagle,” or “lamb,” thereby highlighting their social role, moral qualities, or behavioral strategy;
- create a symbolic space in which animals become signs of more complex ideas – strength, freedom, cunning, sacrifice, wisdom, instinct, or chaos;
- model cultural context by drawing upon traditional mythologemes and folkloric motifs embedded in collective memory.

Animalisms also help emphasize internal conflicts of characters and develop the plot through hidden semantic connections. In literary text, they often function as cognitive markers guiding interpretation, since the reader intuitively perceives animal imagery as a key to understanding the deeper attributes of a character or situation. Thus, animalisms serve not only as expressive means, but also as structural elements of the artistic world, contributing to the author's intention, plot dynamics, and emotional impact.

From the perspective of cognitive linguistics, animalisms function as mental representations structuring knowledge about the world. Each zoomorphic image operates as a concept that includes a core (prototype traits of the animal) and a periphery (culturally and historically conditioned associations). For example, the “fox” traditionally symbolizes cunning, the “wolf” aggressiveness or independence, and the “bear” strength and clumsiness. These features are formed in the linguistic consciousness of speakers on the basis of observation, ethnocultural stereotypes, folklore, and literary tradition [7].

The cognitive approach emphasizes that animalisms act as mechanisms of conceptual metaphor and metonymy: metaphor transfers animal characteristics to humans (e.g., “a fox” – a cunning person); metonymy actualizes animal behavior or function to denote human behavior. Such processes ensure compact cognitive processing of complex phenomena: human traits are simplified into recognizable models, which facilitates comprehension, interpretation, and communication.

According to Lakoff and Johnson, metaphors reflect conceptual structures of thinking. Expressions like “He is a fox,” “She is a cow,” and “They are sheep” demonstrate the conceptual metaphor “Human is Animal” [10]. Here, animalisms function as a means of simplified and figurative understanding of human qualities.

This transfer of animal features to humans is based on prototypization: speakers activate culturally entrenched traits of a particular animal, which are then used to interpret human behavior. This enables not only the rapid transmission of information but also the formation of emotionally evaluative characteristics, because each zoomorphic image carries a culturally significant “set” of meanings.

Animalisms are shaped by cultural associations and reflect systems of symbols, mythologemes, traditional beliefs, and evaluative norms characteristic of a particular culture. Each culture assigns symbolic status to animals, which becomes embedded in language and serves as a basis for interpreting human qualities.

A cultural approach highlights that the meanings of animalisms are not universal: the same animal may have diametrically opposite connotations in different languages. For example, the dog in Western culture is associated with loyalty and friendship, while in several Eastern traditions it is often perceived as an impure or low creature. The owl symbolizes wisdom in European culture but is considered a harbinger of misfortune in some Asian cultures [3]. The fox symbolizes cunning in English and Russian traditions but appears as a magical being in Japanese folklore, capable of both trickery and protection.

Such differences indicate that animalisms are products of cultural memory and collective experience. They are shaped by folklore, mythology, religious beliefs, economic activities, natural environment, and historical conditions. These factors determine the symbolic potential of animals and influence which human qualities are transferred via zoomorphic associations.

The cultural approach also views animalisms as elements of cultural identity. They reflect collective world perception and contribute to the formation of the national linguistic worldview. Through zoomorphic imagery, language encodes systems of values, social stereotypes, and behavioral norms [8].

Below are examples of cultural differences in the meanings of animalisms across languages and traditions.

Animal	English Culture	Russian Culture	Eastern / Asian Cultures	Commentary
Dog	loyalty, friendship	friend of man, sometimes negative expressions	impure in Islam and some Eastern cultures	One of the most contrasting symbols
Owl	wisdom	wisdom, night reason	omen of death (China, Japan)	Entirely myth-based
Fox	cunning, trickster	cunning, slyness	Kitsune-magical, ambivalent	Culturally shifting image
Pig	dirt, gluttony	uncleanliness	taboo in Muslim cultures	Negative but for different reasons
Cat	independence, grace	coziness, slyness	sacred in Egypt; protective in China	From sacred to domestic
Horse	nobility, strength	hard work, loyalty	sacred in Mongolia	Mostly positive
Wolf	loner, danger	ferocity, danger, strength	totem in Turkic cultures	Opposing evaluations
Cow	simplicity	calmness	sacred in India	Strong cultural contrast
Snake	betrayal	evil	wisdom, life force	Opposite connotations
Sheep	weakness, conformity	obedience	purity, sacrifice	Varies by cultural emphasis

These examples demonstrate that symbolic meanings of animals are shaped by cultural traditions, historical experience, and mythological perceptions. Even universal images may acquire different interpretations depending on cultural context, which directly influences the semantics and pragmatics of animalisms in a given language. This variability confirms the need for a cultural-linguistic approach to zoomorphic vocabulary, as it reveals the deep cultural mechanisms that shape associations and evaluative characteristics related to animals. These cultural divergences explain why the same animalisms develop opposite connotations in different languages and require careful intercultural analysis.

Animalisms perform evaluative, emotional, and stylistic functions, enabling the author to express attitudes toward characters or phenomena. Pragmatically, zoomorphic units serve as communicative instruments aimed at forming a particular impression on the addressee. Their use depends on the speaker's intention, communicative situation, context, and socio-cultural expectations [9].

Animalisms allow speakers to:

1. construct evaluations—positive or negative—enhancing expressiveness;
2. create emotional effects—irony, sarcasm, disdain, admiration;
3. model relationships—distance, status, degree of formality;
4. achieve pragmatic goals—persuade, ridicule, discredit, soften or intensify criticism.

Examples of pragmatic use:

1. Constructing evaluation

He is a lion in battle. (positive)

She behaves like a snake. (negative)

They worked like bees all day. (positive)

He eats like a pig. (negative)

2. Creating emotional effect

Oh, look who's acting like a scared rabbit again. – irony

You clever fox! – admiration

Stop following him like a sheep. – sarcasm

She's such a butterfly at parties. – playful metaphor

3. Modeling relationships

Teacher to student: Don't be a lazy cat.

Colleague to colleague: We need lions on this project, not turtles.

Parent to child: My little kitten, don't be afraid.

Politician about opponent: He is nothing but a wolf in sheep's clothing.

4. Achieving pragmatic purpose

Persuasion: Be as brave as a lion — you can do it.

Ridicule: What a chicken!

Discreditation: They behave like vultures waiting for someone to fail.

Softening criticism: You're a bit of a turtle today — take your time.

Intensifying criticism: Stop acting like a pig. Clean this mess!

Thus, within a pragmatic framework, animalisms are interpreted as effective tools of speech influence that ensure not only content transmission but also targeted management of the addressee's perception and evaluative interpretation.

The analysis shows that animalisms constitute a significant element of the lexical system in which cognitive, cultural, and pragmatic parameters intersect. The study reveals that these units are formed on the basis of stable mental models of the animal world rooted in the collective experience of speakers, and their functioning relies on cultural associations, symbolism, and value-based representations.

It is established that animalisms possess strong evaluative and expressive potential, enabling them to perform important pragmatic functions: conveying emotional reactions, enhancing stylistic expressiveness, and shaping attitudes toward described characters or events. Their use contributes to more precise and vivid characterization and to targeted influence on the reader's interpretation.

Thus, animalisms emerge as effective means of linguistic representation of cultural meanings and as a tool for forming the evaluative-emotional potential of text. The results confirm the need for further study of these units within cognitive, cultural, and pragmatic paradigms of modern linguistics.

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