

A Comparative Study of Animal Symbolism in Kurmanji Kurdish and English Proverbs

Sembolîzma Heywanan di Gotinên Pêşyan yê Kurdîya Kurmancî û Îngilîzî de: Lêkolîneke Hevberkirinê

Kurmanci Kürtçesi ve İngiliz Atasözlerinde Hayvan Sembolizminin Karşılaştırmalı İncelemesi

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Abstract

This research compares how animals are used as symbols in Kurmanji Kurdish and English proverbs. The goal is to see how these two different cultures use animal figures to talk about human behaviour and social rules. To understand these meanings, the study uses a framework called Cultural Linguistics, which looks at how language reflects a community's shared history and environment. The researcher analysed 40 proverbs in total, 20 from the Kurmanji Kurdish tradition and 20 from the English tradition. The study focuses on five specific animals: the fox, dog, bird, lion, and donkey. By looking at themes like cleverness, loyalty, and foolishness, the study identifies important cultural patterns. The results show that both cultures use these animals as metaphors to give advice and share life lessons. For instance, in both languages, the fox is usually seen as clever and the lion is seen as strong. However, there are also big differences. Kurdish proverbs often emphasize the importance of the community and how a person's wisdom depends on their situation. A unique finding in Kurdish proverbs is that the lion represents strength for both men and women equally. In contrast, English proverbs focus more on an individual's fixed character, personal choices, and habits. Ultimately, this study shows that proverbs are a powerful way to pass down a culture's identity. By focusing on the Kurmanji Kurdish dialect, this research fills a gap in our knowledge and helps us understand how different societies see the world through animal symbols.

Keywords: Animal symbolism, Kurmanji Kurdish proverbs, English proverbs, Comparative linguistics, Cultural values.

Highlights

What are the similarities and differences in the symbolic representations of animals such as the *fox*, *dog*, *bird*, *lion*, and *donkey* in Kurmanji Kurdish and English proverbs?

The goal is to explore how these animals are symbolically portrayed in each culture.

Kurdish proverbs frequently emphasize contextual wisdom and community roles.

whereas English proverbs tend to focus more on individual traits and moral lessons.

Kurte

Ev lêkolîn, xebatê li hevberkirina sembolîzma heywanan ya di gotinên pêşyan yê Kurdîya Kurmancî û Ingilîziyê da dike, da ku diyar bike ka çawa ev herdu çandên cuda reftarên mirovî û nerîtên civakî bi rêya figûrên heywanan bi kar tîne. Herwisa ew vedikole dike ka çawa ziman rengvedana dîrok û jîngeha civakê dike. Lêkolîn şirovekirina babetî ya çendanî (qualitatîf) ya 40 gotinên pêşyan ji herdu zimanan dike. Xebat bi taybet cextê li sembola her yek ji van heywanan – rovî, se (seg), teyr (balinde), şêr û ker (guhdirêj) û şirovekirina babetê wesifkirina her heywanekî dike. Bo mîna, zîrekî, wefadarî, bêaqilî, herwisa şewazên sembolîk ên berfirehtir diyar dike. Encama xebatê nîşan didin ku herdu ziman heywanan wek metafor bi kar rînin da ku nîrxên civakî, şîretan, hişyarî û çavdêrîkirina xwezaya mirovan vebêjin. Bo mînak, rovî, bi awayekî gerdûnî bi zîrekîyê û fêlbazîyê ve girêdayî ye û şêr di herdu çandan da bi hêz û wêrekî tê sembolîzekirin. Lê belê, gotinên pêşyan ên her çandekê pêtir giringiyê bi hinek nîrx û bihayan didin. Gotinên pêşyan ên Kurdî pir caran cextê li pendiyariya kontekstî û rolên civakî dikin, di heman demê de gotinên ingilîzî zêdetir li ser taybetmendiyên takekesî û waneyên rewîştî (exlaqî) baldar in. Di dawiyê de, lêkolîn bal dikişîne ser wê ku gotinên pêşyan wek amûrekî dewlemend bo veguhastina nasnameya çandî û têgihîştina jîngehperweriyê xizmetê dikin, herwisa wekhevîya navçandî û cudahiyan zimanî yê bêhempa aşkera dikin.

Peyvên Sereke: Sembolîzma Heywanan, Gotinên Pêşyan yê Kurdiya Kurmancî, Gotinên Pêşyan yê Ingilîzî, Zimannasiya Hevberkirinê, Nîrxên Kulturî

Xalên Sereke

Çi wekhevî û cudahî di navbera sembolîzma heywanên mîna, rovî, se (seg), balinde, şêr, û ker (guhdirêj) hene di navbera gotinên pêşyan ên Kurdîya Kurmancî û Ingilîzî.

Armanç ji vê lêkolînê ew e da bê destnîşankirin ka ev heywan bi rêya sembolîzma di her çandekê de çawa tîne dîtin

Gotinên pêşyan yê Kurmancî cextê li pendiyariya kontekstê û rolên civakî dikin

Gotinên pêşyan yê Ingilîzî de bêtir cextê li saloxetên takekesên û waneyên rewîştî dikin.

Öz

Bu araştırma, hayvanların Kürt ve İngiliz atasözlerinde nasıl birer sembol olarak kullanıldığını karşılaştırmaktadır. Amaç bu iki farklı kültürün hayvan figürlerini insan davranışı ve toplumsal kuralları anlatmak için nasıl kullandığını ortaya koymaktır. Çalışma bu amaçla dilin bir toplumun ortak tarihini ve çevresini nasıl yansıttığını inceleyen Kültürel Dilbilim çerçevesini kullanır. Araştırmada 20'si Kurmanci Kürt geleneğinden, 20'si İngiliz geleneğinden olmak üzere toplamda 40 atasözü analiz edilmiştir. Çalışma, tilki, köpek, kuş, aslan ve eşek olmak üzere beş belirli hayvana odaklanmaktadır. Zekâ, sadakat ve budalalık gibi temalar incelenerek önemli kültürel kalıplar tanımlanmıştır. Sonuçlar, her iki kültürün de bu hayvanları metafor olarak kullanarak öğütler verdiğini ve hayat dersleri paylaştığını gösterir. Örneğin her iki dilde de tilki genellikle zeki, aslan ise güçlü olarak görülür. Bununla birlikte büyük farklılıklar da vardır. Kürt atasözleri sıklıkla toplumun önemini ve bir kişinin bilgeliğinin durumuna bağlı olduğunu vurgular. Kürt atasözlerinde aslanın hem erkekler hem kadınlar için güç sembolü olması dikkat çekicidir. İngiliz atasözleri ise daha çok bireyin sabit karakteri, kişisel tercihleri ve alışkanlıkları üzerine odaklanır. Sonuç olarak bu çalışma atasözlerinin bir kültürün kimliğini aktarmada güçlü bir araç olduğunu gösterir. Kurmanci lehçesine odaklanarak bu araştırma bilgi boşluğunu doldurur ve farklı toplumların hayvan sembolleri aracılığıyla dünyayı nasıl gördüğünü anlamamıza yardımcı olur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Hayvan Sembolizmi, Kurmanci Kürtçesi Atasözleri, İngilizce Atasözleri, Karşılaştırmalı Dilbilim, Kültürel Değerler.

Öne Çıkanlar

Tilki, köpek, kuş, aslan ve eşek gibi hayvanların Kürtçe (Kurmançî) ve İngilizce atasözlerindeki sembolik temsillerinin benzerlikleri ve farklılıkları nelerdir?

Araştırmanın amacı, bu hayvanların her iki kültürde sembolik olarak nasıl tasvir edildiğini incelemektir.

Kürt atasözleri sıklıkla bağlama dayalı bilgelik ve toplumsal roller üzerinde dururken,

İngiliz atasözleri ise genellikle bireysel özellikler ve ahlaki dersler üzerine odaklanmaktadır.

Introduction

Proverbs are short sayings that reflect a culture's values, shared wisdom, and social norms (Mieder, 2004). While their concise form makes them easily recognizable, scholars have struggled to establish a universal definition. Grzybek (1994, p. 227) notes that "there is no generally accepted definition which covers all specifics of the proverbial genre." Similarly, Mieder (2004, p. 4) describes proverbs as culturally rooted, metaphorical expressions that convey traditional wisdom in a fixed, memorable form, passed down through generations. On the other hand, Amedi (2019, p. 23) defines a proverb as a concise yet semantically dense utterance. He notes that such phrases are often characterized by poetic devices like rhyme and meter. Despite their antiquity, these expressions remain prevalent in everyday language and encompass a wide spectrum of human experience. Other researchers, such as Muntean (1969), Furayhah (1974), and Vianu (1971), have also proposed varying interpretations, underscoring the complexity of defining this genre.

A key feature of proverbs is their use of animal symbols to represent human traits and behaviours. Previous studies in ethnozoology and cultural linguistics have shown that these symbols reflect not only common biological observations but also deep cultural understandings. However, comparative analyses of animal symbolism across languages, such as Kurmanji Kurdish and English, remain limited, creating a research gap this study aims to fill.

This research focuses on proverbs from two linguistic traditions, 20 Kurdish proverbs and 20 English proverbs, that feature commonly referenced animals (e.g., fox, dog, bird, lion, and donkey). The goal is to explore how these animals are symbolically portrayed in each culture. By doing so, the research highlights cultural similarities and differences, enhancing our understanding of how proverbs function as a medium for transmitting values, social ideas, and environmental perceptions. Such insights contribute to the broader field of cultural representation in folkloric and linguistic studies.

The central objective of this study is to compare the symbolic meanings of select animals in the two traditions and languages. Specifically, it asks: *What are the similarities and differences in the symbolic representations of animals such as the fox, dog, bird, lion, and donkey in Kurmanji Kurdish and English proverbs?*

To address this question, the research employs a qualitative thematic analysis of 40 proverbs (20 from each language). Each proverb is examined and coded for themes of animal symbolism. While the primary mode of analysis is qualitative, focusing on culturally nuanced interpretations, descriptive counts (e.g., frequencies of themes such as "cunning," "loyalty," or "foolishness") support the identification of symbolic patterns. The modest sample size is designed to enable thematic saturation while maintaining analytical depth within the scope of a focused comparative article.

1. Origin of Proverbs

Tracing the exact origins of individual proverbs proves challenging as most emerged from ancient oral traditions, with many dating to classical antiquity or medieval times (Hrisztova, Gotthardt & Varga, 2015). The anonymous nature of proverb creation stems from their folkloric transmission and early oral circulation, though linguistic analysis allows approximate dating of their emergence (Hrisztova, Gotthardt & Varga, 2015).

European proverbs derive from four primary sources:

Classical Antiquity: Many originate from Greek and Roman writers like Hesiod, Aristotle, and Plato. The Latin translation of Greek proverbs facilitated their spread across Europe, creating shared variants like "Big fish eat little fish" (Mieder, 1993) and "Where there's smoke, there's fire"

(Mieder, 2014).

Religious texts: Biblical proverbs such as “As you sow, so shall you reap” (Galatians 6:7) appear in nearly identical form across many languages (Mieder, 2014). In Kurdish, we convey the same idea with the proverb:

“Tu çî biçînî , dê wê helînî.”

Literally: “Whatever you sow, that you will harvest.” This proverb, like the one in Galatians, uses farming to make a clear point: your actions lead to matching results. If you do good things, good things are likely to come back to you. If you do bad things, you’ll likely face the consequences. It’s a reminder that we’re responsible for what we do, and those choices shape what happens next.

Medieval Latin: As the scholarly lingua franca, medieval Latin generated new proverbs later translated into vernaculars, including “Strike while the iron is hot” and “All that glitters is not gold” (Mieder, 2014).

Modern American English: Since the mid-20th century, proverbs from U.S. popular culture like “A picture is worth a thousand words” have spread globally (Mieder, 2014), while traditional sayings undergo modern adaptations (Mieder, 2008).

Kurdish proverbs (Gotinên Mezinan, Gotinên Pêşîyan or Pendên pêşîyan) are deeply rooted in collective memory and oral tradition, reflecting Kurdish cultural identity, lived experience, and social values (Kurdshop, 2023; Kurdaily, 2023). Like their European counterparts, they emerged anonymously through communal use and transmission before being formally recorded in proverb collections from Kurdish regions (Kurddaily, 2023; Kurdshop, 2023).

In Kurdish literature, many scholars and writers have collected Kurdish proverbs over the centuries, including Misrobe Mashosta (1711), Yagizarav (1878), Serkis Arkoni (1838), Fon Lkok (1901), Hogomakas (1926), E Noel (1920), and Ismail Haqî Shawayis (1933). Proverbs, carrying cultural themes, have played a significant role in enriching Kurdish society. Ibrahim (1984) notes that the first collection of Kurdish proverbs in Iraq was by Ismail Haqî Shawayis, who compiled 612 proverbs in Baghdad. Proverbs hold great value among Kurds, frequently used in daily conversations. Sajadi (1391) emphasizes how deeply Kurds are committed to their language’s proverbs, stating that whether urban or rural, literate or illiterate, a Kurd naturally incorporates proverbs into their speech. Moreover, Kurdish proverbs are a vital part of folklore and serve as a rich source for understanding Kurdish perspectives on life and society (Muhedeen & Ahmed, 2023).

Notably, several book collections compile these traditional sayings from regions where the Kurmanji dialect of Kurdish is predominantly spoken such as Mala Mahmud Dirshawi’s *Miştaxa Çiya ji Gutinên Pêşîya* (A Mountain of Proverbs, 2002) and Rekash Amedi’s *Gotinên Mezinan* (Proverbs, 2005). These works contain a rich abundance of Kurdish (Kurmanji) proverbs, particularly those featuring animals. A more comprehensive and central source for this study will be Rekash Amedi’s later work *Ferhenga Gotinên Mezina* (The Dictionary of Proverbs, 2019). Most of the proverbs for our analysis will be taken from the later dictionary, as it is an extensive collection of over 8,000 proverbs from various regions, including those who speak the Kurmanji and other Kurmanji dialects of Kurdish. Both collections provide a substantial number of proverbs related to animals, offering insights into folkloric symbolism and social metaphors. Drawing examples primarily from this source, supplemented by the others, will enrich our study and enhance our thematic analysis.

2. Symbolism: Concept and Function

Symbolism is a literary and cultural technique in which objects, animals, and/or acts are employed to stand for abstract ideas and/or human characteristics in a more meaningful way than their literal interpretations (Cuddon, 2013). Symbolism can essentially be considered a technique for embedding complex human beliefs and emotions about life into language. Specifically, one can find that symbols and representations involving animals have often had a meaning that relates to human activity, behaviour or human society as well as human spirituality (Leach, 1972).

In proverbs, symbolism plays a central role, allowing speakers to communicate advice, warnings, or cultural norms indirectly, through metaphorical language. Animal symbolism within proverbs often reflects the shared experiences and environment of a society. For instance, certain animals may symbolize wisdom, bravery, cunning, or foolishness based on cultural perceptions (Zhao, 2014). Kurdish and English proverbs, like many others, frequently employ animal figures to convey human traits or life lessons, making the study of such symbolism a valuable tool for understanding cultural values and attitudes (Ali & Adulla, 2019; Muhedeen & Ahmed, 2023).

Therefore, analysing animal symbolism in Kurmanji Kurdish and English proverbs not only highlights linguistic creativity but also reveals deeper insights into the socio-cultural and moral structures of both communities.

2.1 Symbolism: A Theoretical Framework

This paper is based on a theoretical framework that provides insight into the cultural experiences that have informed animal symbolism in various communities. The framework is called Cultural Linguistics (Sharifian, 2017). Cultural Linguistics can be positioned as a specialized sub-field within the broader discipline of sociolinguistics, as it explores the deep-seated relationship between language, culture, and social identity (Kasap, 2021). The purpose of this paper is to systematically investigate the functioning of animal symbolism in Kurmanji Kurdish and English proverbs. By taking this method, the purpose of this research is to shed light on the culturally distinctive worldviews and conceptualizations that are embodied in proverbial language.

Cultural conceptualizations are schemas, categories, and metaphors that are shared by members of a speech community and are drawn from their collective history, environment, and social experiences, according to Sharifian's Cultural Linguistics approach. A cultural schema is a collective cognitive framework. In English culture, the <fox> schema typically evokes an instant link with <cunning> or <deception,> enabling the speaker to express a multifaceted personality attribute using a singular animal reference. This approach suggests that cultural conceptualizations are created through the process of cultural linguistics. Because they are stores of traditional wisdom, proverbs are especially abundant in the conceptualizations that are being discussed here. As a result of these distinct environmental and societal circumstances, an animal may represent diverse traits, even qualities that are in opposition to one another, in different civilizations.

According to Sharifian's argument, "language encodes and embodies cultural conceptualizations," this is why the examination of proverbs is such a strong instrument for revealing the cultural priorities and worldviews of a group. Within the scope of this article, proverbs will be examined through the prism of Cultural Linguistics in order to determine the cultural metaphors and conceptualizations that they reflect. Through this technique, a more in-depth comprehension of the ways in which animal symbolism functions within Kurmanji Kurdish and English proverbs as cultural constructs will be made possible, hence illuminating the various moral and social systems that are present in each culture.

3. Methodology

3.1 Corpus Selection

In this study, the researcher will use forty (40) different proverbs, with twenty (20) in the Kurmanji Kurdish language and twenty (20) in the English language, all of which include the five frequently used animal references: fox, dog, bird, lion, and donkey. These animal references have been chosen for their frequent use in the two proverb traditions and their potential for rich interpretation, and the selected proverbs were purposively selected to illustrate a variety of themes and symbolic representations within the two traditions.

Kurdish proverbs were primarily sourced from Rehash Amedi's *Ferhenga Gotinên Mezina* (The Dictionary of Proverbs, 2019), a reputable collection of over 8,000 proverbs from different parts of Kurdistan. Additional Kurdish proverbs were collected from Mala Mahmud Dirshawi's *Mîstaxa Çiya ji Gutinên Pêşîya* (1989). English proverbs were sourced from reputable works such as Simpson and Speake's *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs* (1998), Speake's *The Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs* (2015), and Mieder's *Proverbs: A Handbook* (2004). The criteria for selecting proverbs were that each proverb had to include one of the five chosen animals and had to be commonly used and/or documented in the respective cultures. For Kurdish proverbs, the dialect had to be specifically Kurmanji. The proverbs were selected to illustrate various symbolic themes rather than to exhaust all possible examples, which would have resulted in an overwhelming number of proverbs.

3.2 Analytical Framework

The study employs a qualitative thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) supplemented by descriptive frequency counts. The analysis proceeded in three stages:

1. Initial coding: The proverb was examined to identify its literal meaning and its symbolic meaning with respect to human qualities or social circumstances. Codes were developed from the data itself (i.e., "cunning," "loyalty," "foolishness," etc.).

2. Theme development: The codes were assembled into broader themes (i.e., "cunning and deception," "community loyalty," "empty threats," etc.). The themes were refined by comparing them within and across animal groups.

3. Comparative synthesis: The themes from the Kurdish and English proverbs were compared to identify similarities and differences between cultures. The analysis was conducted in accordance with the Cultural Linguistics framework (Sharifian, 2017).

4. Discussion

This section examines 40 proverbs (20 in Kurmanji Kurdish and 20 in English) that include five animals: fox, dog, bird, lion, and donkey. The analysis consists of three stages: (1) coding each proverb for symbolic significance, (2) categorizing codes into overarching themes, and (3) contrasting themes between the two cultures through the framework of Cultural Linguistics (Sharifian, 2017). Cultural Linguistics elucidates that animal symbols lack universality. Conversely, they embody cultural conceptualizations, cognitive frameworks that communities create via collective history, environment, and social experience.

4.1 Kurmanji Kurdish proverbs:

Animal	Kurdish Proverb	Meaning in English	Code	Theme	Cultural Conceptualization
1. Rîvî (Fox)	Rîvî negehişte tîrî, got yê tîrşe.	The fox couldn't reach the grapes, so it said they were sour.	Self-justification	Deception & Self-Deception	Cultural schema: When you cannot get something, save face by devaluing it.
	Rîvî gelek yê zana bû, îna kefte telhê.	The fox was so wise, yet it fell into a trap.	Overconfidence	Wisdom & Its Limits	Cultural schema: Even clever people make mistakes; wisdom is not absolute.
	Rîvî li ber derê kuna xwe şêr e.	The fox is a lion only at the door of its own den.	False bravery	Deception & Self-Deception	Cultural metaphor: HOME IS POWER. Courage depends on familiar territory.
	Rîviyê gerok, çêtir e ji şêrê xewok.	A traveling fox is better than a sleeping lion.	Proactivity	Wisdom & Its Limits	Cultural schema: Movement and effort matter more than raw strength.
2. Se (Dog)	Se guşitê seyi naxot.	A dog does not eat the flesh of another dog.	Solidarity	Community Loyalty	Cultural schema: COMMUNITY SOLIDARITY - members should not harm each other.
	Seyê bi xortî biçîte nêçîrê, nêçîrê nake.	A young dog forced to hunt will catch nothing.	Resistance	Community Loyalty	Cultural schema: Willing participation matters more than force.
	Seyê xirab gofî xudanê baş bike.	Spare the bad dog for its good owner.	Tolerance	Community Loyalty	Cultural schema: COMMUNITY BONDS - accept flaws for the sake of relationships.
	Se di rewît karwan bi rêya xwe di çit.	The dog barks; the caravan passes on.	Empty threat	Empty Threats	Cultural schema: Ignore pointless noise; stay focused on your path.
3. Teyr/Balinde (Bird)	Teyr bi perekî nafîrît.	A bird cannot fly with one wing.	Dependence	Cooperation & Support	Cultural metaphor: COOPERATION IS FLIGHT - individuals need support.
	Teyrê nêçîrê dimê wî yê xarê.	The hunting bird is known by its crooked beak.	Capability	Identity & Potential	Cultural schema: True ability shows in physical signs.
	Teyr teyre, heta hêlîna xo çê neket çîçka naket.	A bird is just a bird until it builds its nest and hatches chicks.	Provision	Cooperation & Support	Cultural schema: PROVISION DEFINES WORTH - contribution matters.
	Teyrê li reva xwe vebî yê xarî ye.	The bird that cooperates with the enemy gets eaten.	Treachery	Cooperation & Support	Cultural schema: COMMUNITY BETRAYAL - disloyalty brings destruction.

4. Şêr (Lion)	Şêr her şêre çî jîne çî mêre.	A lion is a lion, female or male.	Equality	True Strength	Cultural schema: GENDER EQUALITY IN STRENGTH - power is not male-only.
	Şêr be, gurgê kure nebe.	Be a lion, don't be a blind wolf.	Noble strength	True Strength	Cultural category: Lions (noble) vs. wolves (blind/cruel) - different types of strength.
	Şêr nakevine davên rîviya.	A lion does not get caught in a fox's traps.	Superior wisdom	True Strength	Cultural schema: True strength includes wisdom, not just power.
	Şul şêre eger miruvî kir dê bîte rêvî.	Work is a lion; tame it and it becomes a fox.	Challenge	Strength & Challenge	Cultural metaphor: WORK IS A WILD ANIMAL - it can be mastered.
5. Ker/ Guhdîrêj (Donkey)	Kerê hinda kirî, yê li hefsarî digêrît.	They lost the donkey but search for the rein.	Misplaced focus	Foolishness	Cultural schema: Missing the important thing while focusing on small details.
	Kerê pîrbêje, gurga xwar.	A talkative donkey gets eaten by the wolf.	Talkativeness	Foolishness	Cultural schema: SPEECH BRINGS DANGER - silence is safer.
	Kerî li def kerî grêden, dê tir û fisa ji êk girin.	Put two donkeys together, they imitate each other.	Imitation	Foolishness	Cultural schema: FOOLISH IMITATION - lack of originality.
	Ker hind barinaket xeman.	A donkey has no cares.	Carelessness	Foolishness	Cultural schema: Ignorance means freedom from worry.

4. 2 English Proverbs

Animal	English Proverb	Meaning	Code	Theme	Cultural Conceptualization
1. Fox	The fox may lose its fur, but not its cunning.	True nature doesn't change.	Inborn nature	Cunning & Deception	Cultural schema: FIXED NATURE - character is permanent.
	When the fox preaches, beware your geese.	Beware of selfish advice.	Trickery	Cunning & Deception	Cultural schema: DISTRUST DECEPTION - those with bad motives hide them.
	The sleeping fox catches no poultry.	Stay active to succeed.	Diligence	Cunning & Deception	Cultural schema: INDIVIDUAL EFFORT - success requires action.
	The fox condemns the trap, not himself.	People blame circumstances.	Self-deception	Cunning & Deception	Cultural schema: AVOIDING RESPONSIBILITY - blaming external factors.

2. Dog	A dog is man's best friend.	Loyalty is valued.	Loyalty	Loyalty & Association	Cultural schema: DOG AS COMPANION - individual relationship with humans.
	You can't teach an old dog new tricks.	Habits are hard to change.	Resistance to change	Loyalty & Association	Cultural schema: FIXED HABITS - difficulty of personal change.
	Barking dogs seldom bite.	Loud threats are empty.	Empty threat	Loyalty & Association	Cultural schema: EMPTY THREATS - noise without action.
	He who lies with dogs, rises with fleas.	Bad company brings bad results.	Bad association	Loyalty & Association	Cultural schema: INDIVIDUAL CHOICE - you become like your companions.
3. Bird	Birds of a feather flock together.	Similar people associate.	Similarity	Social Nature	Cultural schema: SOCIAL GROUPING - people sort themselves by type.
	The early bird catches the worm.	Act promptly to succeed.	Diligence	Social Nature	Cultural schema: INDIVIDUAL OPPORTUNITY - success goes to the proactive.
	Fine feathers make fine birds.	Appearance affects judgment.	Appearance	Social Nature	Cultural schema: APPEARANCE MATTERS - how you look shapes perception.
	A bird never flew on one wing.	Cooperation is needed.	Dependence	Social Nature	Cultural metaphor: COOPERATION IS NECESSARY - individuals need balance.
4. Lion	A lion cares not for sheep's opinions.	The strong ignore the weak.	Confidence	Strength & Pride	Cultural schema: HIERARCHY - the strong are above the weak.
	Even a lion defends against flies.	The mighty face small problems.	Endurance	Strength & Pride	Cultural schema: UNIVERSAL STRUGGLE - everyone has annoyances.
	Better one day as a lion than a hundred as a sheep.	Courage over safety.	Boldness	Strength & Pride	Cultural schema: INDIVIDUAL GLORY - brief greatness beats long mediocrity.
	The roaring lion kills no prey.	Boasting achieves nothing.	Empty threat	Strength & Pride	Cultural schema: ACTION OVER WORDS - doing matters more than saying.
5. Donkey/ Ass	The ass brays loudest when he has least to say.	Fools talk most.	Talkativeness	Foolishness & Utility	Cultural schema: FOOLISH SPEECH - empty words reveal stupidity.
	The donkey may carry gold, but is still a donkey.	Possessions don't change nature.	False status	Foolishness & Utility	Cultural schema: FIXED NATURE - things don't change who you are.
	Better a donkey that carries me than a horse that throws me.	Reliable is better than showy.	Practicality	Foolishness & Utility	Cultural schema: INDIVIDUAL CHOICE - choose what works for you.
	If one ass goes to the well, all follow.	People blindly imitate.	Imitation	Foolishness & Utility	Cultural schema: BLIND IMITATION - lack of independent thinking.

4.3 Comparative Synthesis: Cultural Conceptualizations

The preceding section provided comprehensive charts for both Kurdish and English proverbs, enumerating each animal, the proverb text, its interpretation, code, theme, and cultural conceptualizations in accordance with Sharifian's (2017) Cultural Linguistics framework. This section now shows how the two traditions are both similar and different by directly comparing how they conceptualize culture. The analysis reveals how the same animals carry both shared meanings and culture-specific values, reflecting each community's unique worldview, social priorities, and lived experiences.

Fox

The fox shows how the two cultures view cunning and deception in both similar and different ways. The fox is linked to intelligence in both cultures, but the cultural ideas associated with this intelligence differ. Kurmanji Kurdish proverbs suggest that wisdom is context-dependent and can fail. This reflects a cultural idea that wisdom relies on the situation and that even intelligent individuals can make mistakes. The Kurdish tradition uses the cultural metaphor HOME IS POWER to show that strength and bravery are linked to familiar places. Kurdish foxes lie to themselves to save face. English proverbs, on the other hand, suggest that cunning is a stable trait that does not change. The English perspective reflects the belief that character is PERMANENT. English foxes use lies to mislead others. Both cultures view the fox as intelligent, but Kurmanji Kurdish proverbs emphasize the limits and context of intelligence, while English proverbs present cunning as a constant trait.

Dog

The dog in Kurmanji Kurdish proverbs primarily represents community ties and support. The cultural paradigm of COMMUNITY SOLIDARITY conveys the principle that community members should refrain from harming one another. People in this culture value maintaining relationships within the group; therefore, they tolerate a bad dog for the sake of its decent owner. The dog is seen as a member of the community, and its role is understood through social ties. English proverbs, on the other hand, focus more on personal habits and choices. They highlight a cultural schema of INDIVIDUAL CHOICE, where the choices people make about their associations have consequences. In English, dogs also represent behaviours that do not change. Both cultures value loyalty, but Kurmanji Kurdish proverbs emphasize tolerance, while English proverbs warn against bad company and the difficulty of changing oneself.

Bird

Kurmanji Kurdish proverbs use birds to express cultural ideas about cooperation, provision, and sustaining society. The Kurdish tradition employs the cultural metaphor COOPERATION IS FLIGHT to convey that people need support to succeed. Providing for family and community gives life value. Kurdish proverbs also warn against betrayal and emphasize the importance of communal loyalty. English birds, on the other hand, focus on individual opportunity and social grouping. English proverbs highlight a cultural schema of INDIVIDUAL OPPORTUNITY, suggesting that those who act quickly for themselves will succeed. They also use a cultural metaphor where "social grouping is flocking," meaning that people naturally associate with those who are similar to them. These proverbs suggest that appearance influences how individuals are perceived. Both cultures use birds to discuss social life, but Kurmanji Kurdish proverbs emphasize cooperation and provision, while English proverbs focus on personal opportunity and perception.

Lion

The lion represents strength and nobility in both cultures, but the cultural ideas associated with this strength differ significantly. A distinctive feature of the Kurmanji Kurdish tradition is the cultural concept of GENDER EQUALITY IN STRENGTH, where gender does not limit power or nobility. Kurdish proverbs also distinguish between lions (noble) and wolves (blind and cruel), implying that true strength includes knowledge. English proverbs present a contrasting cultural view of HIERARCHY, where the strong dominate the weak. The English tradition often favours short-lived glory over long-term safety. Both cultures revere the lion's strength, but Kurmanji Kurdish proverbs emphasize the balance between strength and wisdom, while English proverbs stress hierarchy and distinction between the strong and the weak.

Donkey

In both cultures, the donkey symbolizes stupidity and foolishness, but each culture emphasizes a different aspect of this trait. In Kurmanji Kurdish proverbs, the donkey reflects the idea that SPEECH BRINGS DANGER, meaning that excessive talk can be harmful. These proverbs also convey that imitation is undesirable and that carelessness is a negative trait. English proverbs likewise associate donkeys with a cultural schema of FOOLISH SPEECH, where empty words signal ignorance. They also emphasize BLIND IMITATION, where individuals follow others without critical thought. However, English proverbs additionally present a practical view of the donkey's usefulness, prioritizing reliability over appearance. This suggests that practical function is valued more than superficial qualities. Both cultures portray the donkey as foolish, but Kurmanji Kurdish proverbs emphasize the dangers of speech and imitation, while English proverbs balance foolishness with usefulness.

Kurdish proverbs show how people in the community think about culture. Dogs show how people in a group can get along and be tolerant of each other. Birds must take care of others, and betrayal destroys the community. Lions are strong, and their strength can be compared to that of other animals. Donkeys say that talking can be dangerous and copying others is stupid. These sayings always stress the importance of relationships, context, and the group's survival.

English proverbs, on the other hand, show how people think about culture in a way that focuses on the individual. Dogs show how people act and what happens when they choose their friends. Birds must respond quickly to take advantage of the chances that come their way, and they instinctively group together with other birds of the same type. There is a clear hierarchy among lions, with the strong standing over the weak. Donkeys are dumb, but they can still be helpful to the person who picks them. These sayings always stress human character, a stable nature, and personal responsibility.

Sharifian (2017) says that cultural ideas are passed down from one generation to the next and help people in a community comprehend the world. Proverbs are an important approach to pass on these common ways of thinking. These proverbs don't just use animal symbols for no reason. They show how each community's environment, social institutions, and moral frameworks shape their lives. This comparison indicates that Kurdish and English speakers have some basic categories for animals in common, but the cultural schemas that go along with these animals are different in ways that show deeper cultural values and priorities

This research provides a comparative analysis of the symbolism of animals in Kurmanji Kurdish and English proverbs, thus differentiating itself from existing research on Arabic dialects, as seen in Ben Salamh and Maalej's (2018) cultural linguistics research on proverbs of Saudi and Tunisian Arabic dialects. The research by Ben Salamh and Maalej may be seen to provide valuable insights into the impact of sub-cultural and environmental elements on the symbolism of animals across the

Arabic linguistic family of dialects; however, this research has sought to specifically examine the use of symbols of five different animals, the fox, dog, bird, lion, and donkey, in Kurmanji Kurdish and English proverbs, thus filling a gap in existing comparative paremiology of the Kurdish dialect.

While Saady's (2021) research on animal metaphors in English and Kurdish cultures provides valuable insights into cultural similarities and differences and the challenges of translation between the two cultures, it fails to specifically examine proverbs or the Kurmanji dialect of the Kurdish people. The research has sought to specifically examine proverbs and thus narrow its focus to the use of symbols of five different animals, the fox, dog, bird, lion, and donkey, in Kurmanji Kurdish and English proverbs with a view to providing a deeper insight into the use of proverbs as a means of cultural identification, a factor that may not be as evident in metaphor research.

Building upon Alharbi's (2024) comparative analysis of illocutionary force in Arabic and English proverbs, this study adopts a more focused, symbol-based approach. While Alharbi examines translational and pragmatic aspects across twenty proverbs, the present analysis narrows its scope to investigate the symbolic representation of a limited range of animals within their respective cultures. Through descriptive thematic counts, it details how a single animal can embody distinct cultural values, for instance, the fox representing situational wisdom in Kurdish proverbs versus inherent cunning in English ones. This offers a deeper, culturally-grounded understanding of symbolic meaning, thereby contributing to the field of cultural linguistics.

Furthermore, this research has a stronger thematic and cultural analysis, unlike Al-Janabi's (2020) pragmatylistic analysis of domestic animals within English and Iraqi rural proverbs, where the analysis was more focused on stylistic forms. Although this research, like Al-Janabi's, recognizes the importance of animals within shared human experiences, this analysis has placed greater importance on the unique cultural representations within Kurmanji Kurdish, a dialect that has rarely been represented within proverb-based research. Additionally, unlike Hamaghareb's (2024) region-specific analysis of animal symbolism in Kirkuk and Garmian Kurdish proverbs, which focuses on local personality archetypes, this study adopts a cross-linguistic framework, juxtaposing Kurdish with English to highlight transnational similarities and culturally specific divergences.

A primary limitation of this study is the sample size; forty proverbs, distributed as only four per animal per language, is a relatively small number from which to draw definitive conclusions about an entire culture's worldview. The findings should therefore be seen as indicative rather than exhaustive. This restricted focus on five animals may not capture the full symbolic spectrum present in either tradition. Future research could expand the corpus to include more animals and a larger number of proverbs, as well as incorporate regional Kurdish variants beyond Kurmanji. Nonetheless, by systematically comparing animal symbolism in two understudied linguistic contexts, this research offers a foundational contribution to the fields of paremiology, cultural linguistics, and Kurdish studies, underscoring how proverbs serve as mirrors of cultural priority and perceptual nuance.

Conclusion

This study compares how animals are used as symbols in Kurmanji Kurdish and English proverbs. It looks at forty proverbs that include five animals: fox, dog, bird, lion, and donkey. The results suggest that both cultures use animals to express ideas about human behaviour and life. However, the meanings are not always the same, and this reflects different cultural views. The findings indicate that animal symbols are not universal. For example, both cultures use the fox to represent cleverness and treachery. In Kurdish proverbs, this cleverness can fail or change depending on the situation. In English proverbs, it is usually seen as a fixed trait. This supports the idea of Farzad Sharifian that

language reflects cultural ways of thinking. The dog in Kurdish proverbs shows the importance of community and relationships. People may accept a bad dog because of its good owner, which shows tolerance and social connection. In English proverbs, the dog is more related to personal choice and influence. Birds in Kurdish culture represent cooperation and shared effort, while in English they often show individual success, such as “the early bird gets the worm”. The lion also shows differences. In Kurdish, both male and female lions are seen as equally strong, suggesting equality. In English, the lion represents power over others. The donkey, in both cultures, is linked to foolishness, but Kurdish proverbs warn against copying others, while English ones also highlight usefulness. Overall, the study suggests that proverbs carry cultural knowledge. Kurdish proverbs focus more on community, while English ones focus more on the individual. However, the study is limited because it only analyses forty proverbs. Future research can include more animals, a larger number of proverbs, and different Kurdish dialects. Researchers can also study other symbols such as fruits, colours, body parts, and natural elements, as well as examine how modern life influences traditional proverbs.

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