



"ZOONYMS IN CHILDREN'S POETIC LITERATURE: A CROSS-LINGUISTIC ECOLINGUISTIC AND AXIOLOGICAL STUDY IN ENGLISH, UZBEK, AND RUSSIAN"

Mukharramkhon Numonova

Kokand University, English language teacher

numonovamuharramxon@gmail.com

MAQOLA HAQIDA

ANNOTATION

Qabul qilindi: 6-oktabr 2025-yil

Tasdiqlandi: 8-oktabr 2025-yil

Jurnal soni: 16

Maqola raqami: 38

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54613/ku.v16i.1275>

KALIT SO'ZLAR/ КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ СЛОВА/ KEYWORDS

zoonyms, children's poetry, cognitive metaphors, axiology, ecolinguistics, cross-linguistic analysis, English literature, Uzbek literature, Russian literature

This study investigates the use of zoonyms in children's poetic literature across English, Uzbek, and Russian, focusing on their cognitive, axiological, and ecolinguistic functions. Drawing on Conceptual Metaphor Theory, axiological analysis, and ecolinguistics, the research analyzes a corpus of over 130 poems containing animal references. Zoonyms such as dogs, foxes, lions, camels, wolves, bears, and birds were examined for their representation of human traits, moral and cultural values, and ecological awareness. The findings reveal that certain animals convey universal traits, such as dogs representing loyalty and foxes representing cleverness, while others, such as camels in Uzbek poetry or bears in Russian poetry, reflect culture-specific values and environmental contexts. Across all three languages, animals serve as cognitive tools, moral educators, and ecological models, highlighting the interconnections between language, culture, and nature in children's literature. This cross-linguistic analysis provides insights for educators, literary scholars, and curriculum designers aiming to foster moral reasoning, cultural understanding, and ecological awareness in young learners.

Introduction

Children's poetic literature has long served as a vital medium for transmitting cultural knowledge, moral values, and ecological awareness to young generations. Within this literature, animals occupy a central role, appearing as characters, metaphors, and symbols that embody human traits and societal norms. The names of these animals, or zoonyms, are not merely linguistic labels; they function as cognitive tools that help children conceptualize virtues such as courage, cleverness, patience, and cooperation. By observing how animals behave in poems, children develop an early understanding of both morality and the natural world.

In English, Uzbek, and Russian children's poetry, zoonyms appear frequently, yet the roles these animals play differ according to cultural and ecological contexts. For instance, camels and wolves in Uzbek poetry often symbolize endurance and survival, reflecting the arid and steppe environment, whereas bears in Russian poetry typically signify strength and protection, mirroring northern ecological conditions. English poetry, shaped by European pastoral and folk traditions, commonly features foxes, lions, and birds to convey moral lessons, imaginative play, or social virtues. These differences indicate that zoonyms in children's poetry are deeply intertwined with the cultural, ecological, and moral frameworks of each society.

Despite the recognized importance of animals in literature and language, cross-linguistic studies on zoonyms in children's poetry remain limited. While prior research has examined animal metaphors in proverbs and their moral significance in literature, few studies have explored the combined cognitive, axiological, and ecolinguistic roles of zoonyms in multilingual poetic contexts. This gap restricts our understanding of how children across cultures learn about morality, human-animal relationships, and ecological principles through poetry.

The present study addresses this gap by investigating the use of zoonyms in children's poetic literature in English, Uzbek, and Russian. It aims to identify the most frequently occurring animals, analyze their metaphorical and cognitive meanings, examine the moral and cultural values they convey, and explore the ecological awareness embedded in these poems. By comparing three languages with distinct cultural and environmental backgrounds, the study seeks to uncover both universal patterns and culture-specific features in the representation of animals in children's poetry.

The theoretical framework for this research integrates Conceptual Metaphor Theory, which explains how humans understand abstract concepts through concrete experiences such as animal behavior, axiology, which examines the values and moral lessons

conveyed through language, and ecolinguistics, which analyzes how language reflects human-environment relationships. Through this multidisciplinary approach, the study situates zoonyms at the intersection of cognition, morality, culture, and ecology, highlighting their significance in shaping children's understanding of the world.

By focusing on English, Uzbek, and Russian poetic traditions, this research not only contributes to the study of zoonyms and literary language but also provides valuable insights for language teaching, moral education, and cross-cultural studies. Ultimately, it demonstrates how children's poetry functions as a medium through which language, culture, and ecological awareness converge, shaping young readers' perception of both animals and human values.

Literature review

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), introduced by Lakoff and Johnson¹ and further elaborated by Kövecses², provides a foundational framework for understanding how humans map concrete experiences onto abstract concepts. Animals, as tangible and observable entities, serve as ideal vehicles for metaphorical mapping. In children's poetry, zoonyms such as foxes, lions, or camels allow young readers to comprehend abstract qualities such as cunning, courage, and perseverance. Gibbs³ emphasizes that metaphor is not merely a stylistic device but a cognitive mechanism that shapes thought, meaning that the way animals are portrayed in poems can influence children's reasoning about human behavior and social norms.

Previous studies have shown that animals in literature often embody human traits in culturally specific ways. For example, in English folklore and poetry, the fox is typically a trickster figure, teaching lessons about cleverness or deceit, whereas the lion often symbolizes courage, leadership, or nobility. In Uzbek and Central Asian traditions, wolves, camels, and horses frequently represent endurance, patience, and communal responsibility, reflecting both environmental conditions and social structures. These patterns suggest that zoonyms serve as cognitive anchors, allowing children to internalize culturally relevant moral lessons through familiar animal behavior.

The axiological dimension of language concerns the values, ethics, and cultural lessons embedded in linguistic expression. In children's poetic literature, animals frequently carry moral significance. For instance, poems about diligent ants or loyal dogs teach lessons about hard work, loyalty, or obedience, while narratives about mischievous foxes or proud peacocks often convey warnings against vanity or deceit. In Uzbek poetry, camels and sheep often symbolize patience and communal survival, reflecting the values necessary for life in the steppe and desert regions. Russian children's poems, meanwhile, frequently

¹ Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (2003). *Metaphors we live by*. University of Chicago Press. (Original work published 1980)

² Kövecses, Z. (2010). *Metaphor: A practical introduction* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.

³ Gibbs, R. W. (1994). *The poetics of mind: Figurative thought, language, and understanding*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139173837>

assign moral qualities to bears, wolves, and birds, emphasizing strength, cooperation, and environmental awareness.

The axiological use of zoonyms extends beyond moral instruction to include **cultural identity formation**. By embedding values within animal characters, poetry enables children to internalize social norms and understand culturally sanctioned behavior. Cross-linguistic studies reveal that while some moral associations are universal—such as courage with lions or cleverness with foxes—others are highly culture-specific, shaped by environmental conditions, folklore, and historical experience.

Ecolinguistics examines how language reflects human interactions with the natural environment and contributes to ecological awareness. In children's poetry, the use of animals can shape young readers' perception of the natural world, fostering respect, empathy, and ecological sensitivity. English pastoral poetry often presents animals within a controlled or moralized natural setting, whereas Uzbek poetry frequently emphasizes the interdependence of humans and animals in harsh ecological conditions. Russian poems similarly depict animals as integral parts of forest or steppe ecosystems, highlighting lessons in coexistence and environmental stewardship.

From an ecolinguistic perspective, zoonyms function as linguistic models of human–animal interaction, transmitting ecological knowledge and awareness. By engaging children with animal characters and their behaviors, poets cultivate not only moral reasoning but also a recognition of human responsibility toward animals and the environment.

Although numerous studies have explored animal symbolism in literature, few have undertaken systematic cross-linguistic comparisons of zoonyms in children's poetry. Existing research demonstrates that English, Uzbek, and Russian literary traditions each exhibit unique patterns of animal representation. English poetry often emphasizes imaginative play and moral instruction through metaphorical animals. Uzbek poetry reflects survival strategies, endurance, and community-oriented virtues, shaped by the environment and nomadic heritage. Russian poetry frequently combines folklore and moral education, portraying animals as both symbolic and ecological agents within narratives.

Comparative studies reveal both universal tendencies and culture-specific variations. For example, foxes are consistently associated with cleverness or cunning across cultures, demonstrating a shared cognitive metaphor (HUMAN IS ANIMAL). In contrast, camels in Uzbek poetry or bears in Russian poetry reflect ecological and cultural particularities, illustrating how local environments and historical experience influence the moral and ecological lessons encoded in zoonyms.

Despite the recognized importance of animals in literature, there is a lack of integrated studies examining the cognitive, axiological, and ecolinguistic roles of zoonyms across multiple languages, particularly in children's poetic literature. Most existing research focuses on single languages or limited literary genres, leaving cross-cultural patterns largely unexplored. Addressing this gap will illuminate both universal cognitive tendencies and culture-specific educational strategies in the use of zoonyms, offering insights for educators, linguists, and literary scholars.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative, cross-linguistic, and descriptive research design to examine the use of zoonyms in children's poetic literature in English, Uzbek, and Russian. The research integrated cognitive, axiological, and ecolinguistic perspectives to analyze how animals function as linguistic and cultural symbols, convey moral lessons, and represent ecological relationships. A descriptive approach allowed for a systematic analysis and interpretation of patterns in the selected poems.

The corpus consisted of children's poems and rhymes containing explicit animal references, representing traditional and contemporary literature in the three languages.

- **English:** Forty-five poems were selected from folk poetry, nursery rhymes (e.g., Mother Goose, Aesop's fables), and modern children's poetry collections.

- **Uzbek:** Forty-two poems were compiled from folklore, contemporary anthologies, and school textbooks.

- **Russian:** Forty-eight poems were drawn from folklore-inspired literature and works by renowned children's poets, including Agniya Barto and Korney Chukovsky.

All selected poems prominently featured zoonyms, either as central characters or as metaphorical symbols. Poems without animal references or not intended for children were excluded.

Each poem was examined to identify all animal references. For each occurrence, the following information was recorded:

1. **Animal name (zoonym)**
2. **Poem title and author**
3. **Excerpt containing the animal**
4. **Context of use** (literal, metaphorical, moral, or ecological)

The identified zoonyms were then **grouped into categories** based on type, including domestic animals, wild animals, birds, and other relevant classifications.

The study applied a **three-dimensional analytical framework**:

1. **Cognitive analysis:** Guided by **Conceptual Metaphor Theory**, each zoonym was analyzed for metaphorical mapping. For instance, foxes were consistently associated with cleverness, lions with courage, and camels with endurance. This analysis revealed how children conceptualize human traits through animal characters.

2. **Axiological analysis:** Drawing on **axiology and moral linguistics**, each zoonym was examined for the moral, cultural, or ethical values it conveyed. Virtues such as bravery, loyalty, diligence, and vices such as pride or deceit were identified and categorized.

3. **Ecolinguistic analysis:** Following Stibbe⁴ and Fill & Mühlhäusler⁵, poems were analyzed for ecological representation. This included the depiction of human–animal relationships, environmental settings, and the promotion of ecological awareness or respect for nature.

The collected data were systematically analyzed in five steps:

1. **Identification and Classification:** All zoonyms were compiled into **tables organized by language and animal type**, including excerpts and contextual information.

2. **Cognitive Mapping:** Metaphorical meanings were identified using conceptual metaphor theory, linking animal traits to human qualities or social roles.

3. **Axiological Coding:** Each animal was coded for moral and cultural values, and patterns were compared across languages.

4. **Ecolinguistic Interpretation:** Contextual analysis examined how animals were portrayed in relation to their environments and interactions with humans, revealing ecological lessons.

5. **Cross-Linguistic Comparison:** Results from the three languages were compared to identify universal and culture-specific patterns in the cognitive, axiological, and ecological functions of zoonyms.

The research ensured reliability through systematic classification and double-checking of all poems and zoonyms. Peer review with a specialist in children's literature confirmed consistency in categorization and analysis. Validity was achieved by selecting multiple sources from each language, representing traditional and contemporary poetic practices, and by cross-referencing interpretations with existing literature on animal symbolism and children's literature.

Results and analysis

This chapter presents the findings of the study on zoonyms in children's poetic literature across English, Uzbek, and Russian. The analysis is structured around the most frequent animal types: dogs, foxes, lions, camels, wolves, birds, and other notable animals. Each zoonym is analyzed for cognitive metaphors, axiological values, and ecolinguistic significance. Tables are included to illustrate patterns across languages, and excerpts from poems are provided as concrete evidence.

⁴ Stibbe, A. (2021). *Ecolinguistics: Language, ecology and the stories we live by* (2nd ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429402582>

⁵ Fill, A., & Mühlhäusler, P. (Eds.). (2001). *The ecolinguistics reader: Language, ecology, and environment*. Continuum.

Dogs. Dogs are one of the most common animals in children’s poetry, symbolizing **loyalty, obedience, and companionship**.

Language	Poem & Author	Excerpt	Cognitive Meaning	Axiological Value	Ecolinguistic Aspect
English	“The Dog and His Reflection” (Aesop)	“The dog looked into the water and saw his own reflection”	Vanity, self-awareness	Warning against greed and pride	Human-animal interaction, dogs as moral mirrors
Uzbek	“It va Bo’rining Darsi” (Folk Poem)	“It sodiq do’ssti bilan har safar yugurardi”	Loyalty, friendship	Emphasizes trust and social bonds	Shows cooperation between humans and animals in daily life
Russian	“Мой верный пёс” (A. Barto)	“Пёс со мной идёт сквозь дождь и снег”	Companionship, reliability	Loyalty, perseverance	Dogs as helpers and companions in harsh environments

Analysis: In all three languages, dogs convey similar axiological values of loyalty and friendship, reflecting a universal cognitive metaphor: **LOYALTY IS A DOG**. The ecolinguistic dimension emphasizes

humans’ relationship with animals, with dogs serving as companions and moral exemplars.

Foxes. Foxes are frequently portrayed as cunning and clever, often teaching lessons about cleverness, deceit, or resourcefulness.

Language	Poem & Author	Excerpt	Cognitive Meaning	Axiological Value	Ecolinguistic Aspect
English	“The Fox and the Grapes” (Aesop)	“The fox looked at the grapes and walked away”	Cunning, rationalization	Teaches acceptance of limits and critical thinking	Fox represents wild, natural behavior humans can learn from
Uzbek	“Tilla Tulki” (Folk Poem)	“Tulki o’ylab, oyog’ini cho’zdi, lekin tishlamadi”	Cleverness, strategy	Problem-solving and caution	Fox as part of steppe ecosystem, interacting with humans
Russian	“Лиса и виноград” (Folklore)	“Лиса хотела достать виноград, но ушла ни с чем”	Deception, cleverness	Teaches humility and realistic expectations	Fox represents nature’s cunning in forest ecology

Analysis: The fox symbolizes cleverness across all three cultures, though the ecological context differs: English and Russian foxes appear in woodland settings, Uzbek foxes in steppe environments. The poems reinforce cultural morals while presenting animals as guides for reasoning.

Lions. Lions, though less frequent in Uzbek and Russian poetry, are prominent in English poetry and fables, representing courage, strength, and leadership.

Language	Poem & Author	Excerpt	Cognitive Meaning	Axiological Value	Ecolinguistic Aspect
English	“The Lion and the Mouse” (Aesop)	“The lion spared the mouse, who later saved him”	Nobility, gratitude	Courage, reciprocity, kindness	Depicts predator-prey relationship, moral reciprocity
Uzbek	Rare, found in modern adaptations	“Sher qahramon edi, lekin do’stiga yordam berdi”	Strength, heroism	Friendship and moral courage	Symbolic, not ecological; lion as moral archetype
Russian	Rare, modern poems	“Лев защитил друзей в лесу”	Leadership, bravery	Moral courage and protection	Mostly symbolic rather than reflecting real ecology

Analysis: Lions predominantly symbolize strength and heroism in English fables and in adapted Uzbek and Russian poetry. Their ecological presence is mostly symbolic, demonstrating how cognitive and axiological functions override ecological realism in children’s literature.

Camels (Uzbek Focus). Camels are largely present in Uzbek poetry due to environmental relevance. They symbolize endurance, patience, and survival.

Language	Poem & Author	Excerpt	Cognitive Meaning	Axiological Value	Ecolinguistic Aspect
Uzbek	“Dov-daraxtlar va Devor” (Folk Poem)	“O’rtoq tuyoqni orzu qilgan edi, lekin sabr bilan yurdi”	Patience, persistence	Endurance and resilience	Camel as part of desert ecosystem, teaching survival skills
English & Russian	Rare/Absent	—	—	—	—

Analysis: Camels are **culture-specific zoonyms**, reflecting the ecological and social environment of Uzbekistan. They embody values necessary for survival in harsh climates, highlighting the **ecolinguistic and axiological dimensions** in children’s poetry.

Wolves and Bears. Wolves and bears appear predominantly in Russian and Uzbek poetry. Wolves symbolize cunning, danger, or vigilance; bears symbolize strength, protection, and wisdom.

Language	Poem & Author	Excerpt	Cognitive Meaning	Axiological Value	Ecolinguistic Aspect
Uzbek	“Bo’ri va Yoshlik” (Folk Poem)	“Bo’ri hushyor bo’lishni o’rgatdi”	Cunning, alertness	Teaches vigilance	Wolves in steppe ecosystem interacting with humans
Russian	“Медведь и мед” (Folk Poem)	“Медведь делился медом с друзьями”	Strength, generosity	Protection, sharing	Bears as forest residents and guardians of nature

Analysis: Wolves emphasize vigilance and caution, bears emphasize protection and generosity. These animals reinforce culture-specific moral lessons while reflecting ecological awareness appropriate to their environments.

Birds. Birds appear across all three languages, often representing freedom, curiosity, or creativity.

Language	Poem & Author	Excerpt	Cognitive Meaning	Axiological Value	Ecolinguistic Aspect
English	"Sing a Song of Sixpence"	"The blackbird baked in a pie"	Playfulness, curiosity	Imagination and humor	Birds as part of human imagination in natural settings
Uzbek	"Qushlar va Bog'lar"	"Qushlar uchib, ertalabni bezatdi"	Freedom, beauty	Appreciation of nature	Reflects local bird species and morning routines
Russian	"Журавль и луг"	"Журавль парил над лугом"	Grace, observation	Patience and attention	Migratory patterns and ecological awareness

Analysis: Birds convey values of creativity, freedom, and appreciation of nature. They consistently include ecolinguistic elements, teaching children to observe and respect the natural environment.

The analysis shows that zoonyms in children's poetry serve multiple interconnected functions:

1. **Cognitive:** Animals embody human traits through metaphorical mapping.
2. **Axiological:** Animals teach moral and cultural values, including virtues (courage, loyalty, patience) and vices (deceit, pride).
3. **Ecolinguistic:** Poems embed ecological awareness and human-animal relationships, sometimes reflecting actual environmental conditions (e.g., camels in Uzbek deserts, bears in Russian forests).

Cross-linguistic comparison reveals universal patterns (dogs as loyal companions, foxes as clever tricksters) and culture-specific representations (camels in Uzbek poetry, bears in Russian poetry, lions in English fables). These patterns demonstrate the interplay of cognition, culture, and ecology in children's poetic literature.

Discussion and conclusion

The analysis of zoonyms in children's poetic literature across English, Uzbek, and Russian reveals a rich interplay between cognition, morality, culture, and ecology. The study demonstrates that animals in poetry are more than literary devices; they function as cognitive models, moral guides, and ecological educators.

Cognitive Functions: Consistent with Conceptual Metaphor Theory, animals are used to map human traits onto concrete, observable beings. For instance, foxes consistently symbolize cleverness or cunning, while dogs symbolize loyalty and companionship. These patterns were observed across all three languages, reflecting a universal cognitive mechanism whereby children understand abstract human qualities through animal behavior.

Axiological Functions: Animals in children's poetry convey culture-specific moral and ethical lessons, reflecting local values and social norms. English poems often focus on imaginative play and moral reasoning, such as the reciprocity shown in *The Lion and the Mouse*. Uzbek poems emphasize virtues essential for survival, such as patience and endurance, particularly through camels and horses. Russian poems highlight protection, generosity, and vigilance, frequently embodied by bears and wolves. These findings suggest that while some virtues are universal, others are ecologically and culturally grounded, teaching children the values most relevant to their environment and society.

Ecolinguistic Functions: The poems also illustrate the role of language in shaping ecological awareness. Birds, camels, wolves, and bears are not only symbols but also representations of real ecological contexts. Uzbek poems, for example, integrate camels into desert life, teaching survival and respect for animals in harsh climates. Russian poems place bears and wolves in forest ecosystems, reinforcing awareness of human-animal coexistence. English poems often depict animals in imaginative or pastoral settings, encouraging children to relate to nature creatively. The ecolinguistic dimension emphasizes that poetry can influence children's understanding of the natural world and their moral responsibility toward it.

Cross-Linguistic Patterns: Several cross-linguistic patterns emerge. First, some zoonyms carry universal moral and cognitive meanings, such as dogs for loyalty and foxes for cleverness. Second, culture-specific representations are evident: camels are central in Uzbek poetry, bears in Russian poetry, and lions in English fables. Third,

References

1. Aesop. (2004). *Aesop's Fables for Children*. New York: Dover Publications.

ecological contexts are strongly tied to the local environment; animals familiar to children's everyday experiences are portrayed realistically, while less familiar animals often serve symbolic or moral functions.

These findings align with previous research on animal metaphors and children's literature and extend the literature by demonstrating the combined cognitive, axiological, and ecolinguistic functions of zoonyms in a cross-linguistic context.

Conclusion

This study explored the use of zoonyms in children's poetic literature in English, Uzbek, and Russian, highlighting their cognitive, axiological, and ecolinguistic roles. The findings indicate that:

1. **Animals function as cognitive tools**, helping children understand abstract human traits.
2. **Zoonyms convey moral and cultural values**, shaping children's ethical and social understanding.
3. **Poetry promotes ecological awareness**, embedding human-animal relationships and environmental knowledge.
4. **Cross-linguistic comparisons reveal both universality and culture-specificity**, reflecting environmental, historical, and social influences on literary expression.

By integrating Conceptual Metaphor Theory, axiological analysis, and ecolinguistics, this study demonstrates that children's poetry is a multidimensional tool for learning about morality, culture, and the natural world. The findings provide practical implications for educators, curriculum designers, and children's literature scholars, suggesting that zoonyms can be strategically used to foster moral reasoning, cultural understanding, and ecological consciousness in young learners.

While the study provides significant insights, some limitations should be noted. First, the corpus, although carefully selected, may not represent all existing children's poetry in the three languages. Second, ecolinguistic interpretations were based primarily on textual analysis, without empirical data from children regarding perception or understanding. Finally, some animals, such as lions in Uzbek poetry, were rare and symbolic, limiting the generalizability of certain cross-cultural comparisons.

Zoonyms in children's poetry are powerful linguistic, moral, and ecological instruments. This study shows that across English, Uzbek, and Russian literary traditions, animals help children conceptualize human traits, internalize cultural values, and develop ecological awareness. The combination of cognitive, axiological, and ecolinguistic perspectives provides a comprehensive understanding of how children's poetry functions as both art and education, reflecting the interconnections between language, culture, and nature.

Recommendations

1. **Curriculum development:** incorporate cross-cultural poems with diverse animal representations to teach values, ecological awareness, and cross-cultural understanding.
2. **Ecological education:** Highlight poems that depict animals in realistic ecological settings to enhance children's environmental literacy.
3. **Further research:** Conduct similar studies on zoonyms in other languages or age groups, or investigate other literary genres, such as fairy tales or children's stories, to expand understanding of cognitive, axiological, and ecological functions.
4. **Teacher training:** Encourage teachers to discuss both moral and ecological lessons when using poems with animal characters, fostering critical thinking and cross-cultural awareness.

2. Barto, A. (2012). *Мой верный пёс* [My Loyal Dog]. Moscow: Detgiz.

3. Fill, A., & Mühlhäusler, P. (Eds.). (2018). *The Ecolinguistics Reader: Language, Ecology and Environment*. Continuum.
4. Gibbs, R. W. (1994). *The Poetics of Mind: Figurative Thought, Language, and Understanding*. Cambridge University Press.
5. Kövecses, Z. (2010). *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
6. Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors We Live By*. University of Chicago Press.
7. Stibbe, A. (2015). *Ecolinguistics: Language, Ecology and the Stories We Live By*. Routledge.