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Phraseological Expressions of Positive Human Qualities

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Abstract

Background: Within the bodies of knowledge of the Kyrgyz and English languages, phraseology has been studied along with its peculiarities, and special attention has been paid to their idioms and set phrases as bearers of a certain culture or thought. However, previous research has largely overlooked a comparative analysis of different cultures, particularly in the use of kennings and animal-based expressions to denote positive human qualities. **Knowledge Gaps:** Unlike existing studies, this research uniquely examines how sociocultural and historical factors influence the semantic evolution and contextual applications of animal-based idioms in both languages. **Aims:** The study seeks to analyze the cognitive and cultural dimensions of phraseological expressions and explore cross-cultural interpretations of these idioms. **Results:** A qualitative analysis within a cultural and cognitive paradigm revealed both lexical invariance (e.g., the fox as a symbol of cunning) and culture-specific variations. English phraseological units often draw from agrarian and literary traditions, while Kyrgyz expressions are deeply rooted in nomadic and pastoral heritage. **Novelty:** This research is the first to conduct an in-depth comparative study on the portrayal of positive human attributes in Kyrgyz and English through animal-based phraseological expressions, illustrating the impact of sociocultural factors on language use. **Implications:** The findings contribute to translation studies, intercultural communication, and anthropological linguistics by demonstrating how phraseology reflects cultural logic, historical evolution, and linguistic cognition.

Keywords: phraseology, cultural metaphors, zoonymic expressions, linguistic cognition, cross-cultural linguistics

Introduction

Phraseological units that depict positive human qualities serve as powerful tools for understanding the social, psychological, and cultural systems embedded within languages. These expressions encapsulate values and beliefs, reinforcing social identity and cohesion. Sibgaeva et al. (2023) highlight that phraseological units embody imagery, emotional expressiveness, and axiological features, demonstrating their integral role in conveying sentiment and emotion. Additionally, Sánchez et al. (2014) discuss a sociolinguistic positivity bias, which suggests that

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people favor positive language when describing others, shaping interpersonal relationships and societal outlooks. Despite extensive studies on phraseological units, there remains a gap in cross-cultural analyses comparing their meaning, structure, and contextual use across languages. This study aims to fill this void by examining how Kyrgyz and English phraseological expressions related to positive human qualities vary due to cultural, environmental, and historical influences.

Shalkarbek et al. (2024) argue that even the best-formed metaphors encounter interpretative challenges across languages. This difficulty is especially apparent in zoonymic phraseology, where cultural symbols are deeply tied to national identity and cognitive perception. Using Philip's concept of phraseological expressions with zoonymic components, this research investigates how metaphorical meanings evolve across cultures. The main objectives of the article are to analyze regularities of the phraseological collocations with zoonymic components in the two languages and differentiate those with similar meanings based on the construction and context of usage cros-culturally. Primarily, this research seeks to address the relations between language, culture, and thought by showing the impact of animal imagery in depicting human traits like wisdom, insight, endurance, bravery, gentleness, and others, while also reporting use of such phrases in molding personal and group identities. The integration of a cultural perspective fosters a deeper appreciation of language in the macrocosm of people who share the same attitude towards life, problems and concepts.

Although the study of phraseological units that depict positive traits of a person has been the subject of a number of investigations, not much has been done when it comes to the comparative study of the two languages, particularly English and Kyrgyz. While some researchers have examined the emotional and cultural significance of phraseological expressions, a comprehensive contrastive analysis remains lacking. For example, studies by Gwiazdowska (2020) and Hordii (2020) focus on the figurative and emotional nature of idioms but do not consider how these expressions manifest across different linguistic systems. Similarly, works by Garcia Rosa (2023) and Sazdovska-Pigulovska (2020) explore phraseological competence but fail to address the cross-cultural implications of zoonymic phraseology. At the same time, some researchers have analyzed the cognitive and cultural aspects of these units, which proves that there is not enough of such research (Pyskach et al., 2023; Shalkarbek et al., 2024; Taseva & Ivanovska, 2021; Vodyasova, 2024). All of this suggests the imperative to study how various cultures construct and prioritize the positive aspects of human nature using language.

This research underscores a number of gaps related to the study of phraseological expressions that denote positive traits of a person, especially in the comparative study of Kyrgyz and English languages. Many researchers have attempted to analyze phraseological units, such as the emotive and cultural aspects of the expressions, but very few are structured in a comprehensive emulative framework. For example, Sibgaeva et al. (2023) concentrate on the verbalization of emotionality in English phraseology and make an accent on imageries and emotive expressiveness that accompany phraseological units. However, they do not explain how these features are realized in the Kyrgyz language, thus making it impossible to determine the degree of cross-linguistic diversity and similarity. In the same way, Pyskach et al. (2023) studied the structural and semantic features of phraseological units but did not conduct their research in correlation with other languages, especially in the context of positive human qualities.

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In addition, the positivity bias in language suggests, according to Sánchez et al. (2014) that optimistic speech dominates over negative talk. However, it appears that this issue has not been studied in the Kyrgyz-English context. Other researchers (Ebeling & Hasselgård, 2015; Thienel, 2020) have analyzed cultural phraseology, but they did not focus on the affirmative features of personality exemplified by these phraseological units. Also, Garcia Rosa (2023) and Vodyasova (2024) underscore the role of phraseological competence and language in social interaction, but they fail to examine the contexts of cultures from which these phrases originated. This study intends to undertake such an examination with the hope of highlighting the contribution these languages make in portraying affirmative human characteristics and to determine the interplay of ethnic history and social development within the analyzed phraseological units with zoonymic components.

The principal goal of this scientific study is to conduct a thorough comparative study of phraseological expressions of positive human traits in the Kyrgyz language and English. This research seeks to delve into the cognitive and cultural contexts that govern the expression of these traits in both languages through an analysis of their semantic structures, historical and cultural contexts, as well as the contexts in which such phrases are used. This type of analysis of two or more languages not only broadens the knowledge of their specific linguistic details and metaphorical models, but also reveals how the cultural attitudes towards the speakers of these languages is reflected in the language.

In addition, the study attempts to discover common and particular features in the expression of positive human traits with the aim of contributing to the study of phraseology of different languages. This research, therefore, aims to provide a systematic cross-linguistic comparison of how English and Kyrgyz idioms construct and emphasize positive human traits. By doing so, it enhances our understanding of phraseology in different languages while illustrating the intersection of language, cognition, and cultural identity.

Literature Review

The meaning of phraseological units must be analyzed within their historical and cultural frameworks to fully grasp their significance. For example, the English idiom “wise as an owl” derives from Western literary and philosophical traditions, where the owl symbolizes knowledge and intellect (Mieder, 2004). Conversely, the Kyrgyz expression “tülküdöy aylaker” (cunning as a fox) reflects the nomadic lifestyle, where keen survival instincts and strategic intelligence are vital (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). Keysar & Bly (1999) emphasize that idioms are more than linguistic expressions; they act as cultural artifacts, encapsulating beliefs, values, and historical experiences. In Kyrgyz culture, profound respect for nature and adaptability is evident in idioms such as:

Human cognitive abilities, such as foresight and perceptiveness, are reflected in one's words, actions, relationships, and worldview. In the Kyrgyz language, idioms like “balykka til, döngöchkö jan kirgizüü” as noted by Nikolaeva (2001) (giving speech to a fish, bringing a stump to life) and “bödönödön kuyruk chygaryuu” (making a tail out of a quail) hold a special place in describing these qualities. These expressions play a significant role in portraying a person's cleverness, perceptiveness, and ability to find solutions in various situations. For example: Balykka

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til, döngöchkö jan kirgizip jiberchüdögüj bir shuuldak öngödööt (Маданияты, 1984a, 1984b). (He seems like a chatterbox who could give speech to a fish and bring a stump to life). These idioms not only convey cleverness and perceptiveness but also imply additional meanings such as “cunning” and “craftiness”.

The phrase "bilbegeni bit" is used to describe a wise, knowledgeable person who is well-informed about many things. For example: Kichine bolboy kalсын, senin közüñö ошондой körüngönü menen, bilbegeni bit (Маданияты, 1984a, 1984b). “Though he may seem small to you, there is hardly anything he doesn't know”, this expression highlights a person's modest yet profound intelligence and perceptiveness. The metaphor ingeniously juxtaposes the tiny physical size of a flea with vast intellectual capacity, creating a powerful contrast that emphasizes how appearances can be deceiving. This zoonymic phraseology reflects cultural values that prize wisdom over outward impressiveness and suggests that true knowledge often resides in unexpected sources. The expression serves as a reminder to look beyond superficial judgments and recognize that intellectual depth may be found in those who do not immediately command attention. In Kyrgyz oral tradition, such linguistic formulations reinforce social norms that respect elders and experienced individuals while cautioning against dismissing others based on initial impressions or status.

To depict insight and wisdom, idioms such as “jylandyń tilin bilüü” (knowing the snake's language), “jörgömüshtün jötölgönün bilüü” (knowing when a spider coughs), and “kumurskanın ulutunganın bilüü” (knowing when an ant sighs) possess strong emotional and expressive qualities. These are clearly illustrated in the following examples: Kurmankulov bala emes, majburlasa, jylandyń tilin bilgen kishi. (Süimönkulova) (Kurmankulov is no child; if compelled, he knows the snake's language); Al kerek bolso, jörgömüshtün jötölgönün suratpay bilet. (Eraliev) (He knows when a spider coughs without being told); Anyn syryn emgiche bilbeysiñbi? Al kumurskanın ulutunganın bile (Ала-Too, 2001). (Don't you know his secret yet? He even knows when an ant sighs).

These idioms convey a person's exceptional wisdom and keen insight, emphasizing their decisiveness and competence. The meanings of these phraseological units vary depending on context and are closely linked to cultural viewpoints (Kovecses, 2010). As Fernando (1996) points out, "The interpretation of idioms is not merely a matter of linguistic decoding but rather involves a complex process of cultural meaning-making." These phraseological expressions depict a person's wisdom and insight at a high level, emphasizing their decisiveness and competence. Wisdom and insight are among the key qualities of an individual, directly influencing their success in life and position in society. Phraseological expressions in the Kyrgyz language are widely used to artistically and effectively describe these traits, further revealing their linguistic and cultural significance.

In English, the idiom “wise as an owl” describes wisdom, deep thinking, and intelligence. This expression is primarily used to characterize someone who is intelligent, deeply thoughtful, and patient. The comparison is made through the image of the “owl”, as owls are perceived as symbols of wisdom in many cultures. For example: She was wise as an owl, offering solutions no one else could think of (Lee, 2006). In this sentence, the idiomatic expression “wise as an owl” emphasizes the character's exceptional wisdom and ability to perceive things others might

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overlook. The primary component of the idiom, the word “owl” signifies a high level of wisdom and attentiveness. Being a nocturnal creature, the owl carries strong symbolism associated with keen observation and insight. This expression is particularly used to describe individuals who can make sound decisions in unique situations. The idiom retains its emotional nuance in both formal and literary texts, as well as in everyday speech. Its stylistic advantage lies in the precision and vividness with which it portrays a person's intellectual capacity and perceptiveness in decision-making.

The idiom “sharp as a hawk” describes keen observation, perceptiveness, and the ability to notice fine details. It characterizes individuals who conduct reliable observations, discern details, and quickly draw accurate conclusions about people or situations. The “hawk” symbolizes this due to its sharp vision and hunting prowess. For example: With eyes sharp as a hawk, he noticed every movement in the room (Arthur Conan Doyle “Sherlock Holmes”). In this sentence, the character's acute observational skills are highlighted, emphasizing their attentiveness and ability to perceive subtle movements. As Moon (1998) notes, "Bird imagery in English idioms frequently draws from observable behavioral traits, with hawks particularly symbolizing visual acuity and predatory precision."

The idiom “clever as a monkey” characterizes cunning, quick thinking, and the ability to navigate complex situations. The image of the “monkey” is associated with intelligence, agility in movement, and craftiness. The phrase indicates that a person is smart and resourceful, capable of introducing innovation and finding solutions in challenging circumstances. For example: Tom was clever as a monkey, always finding a way out of trouble (Twain, 1876). In this sentence, the character Tom Sawyer's ability to navigate complex situations with intelligence and resourcefulness is depicted. Through his agility and creativity, he consistently resolves issues with ease. In the Kyrgyz language, expressions similar to this idiom include “maymylday aylaker” (as cunning as a monkey), “Kapkanga tüshpös tülkü” (a fox that doesn't get caught in a trap). For example, one might say: Al maymylday aylaker, kyrdaaldy daroo öz paydasyna chechip koydu. (He is as cunning as a monkey; he immediately turned the situation to his advantage).

The idiom “quick as a rabbit” describes a person's ability to think swiftly and make immediate decisions. Here, the image of a rabbit symbolizes agility and rapid movement. The phrase is often used to emphasize the speed of someone's thought processes or actions.

For example: The boy was quick as a rabbit, solving the puzzle in seconds (Carroll, 2012). In this sentence, the boy's rapid and easy solution to a complex problem is depicted. His action is compared to the speed of a rabbit, highlighting the quickness of his intellect.

The term “rabbit” serves as the main component of the expression, symbolizing speed, agility, and the ability to respond immediately to danger. This animalistic expression primarily characterizes a person's capacity to make prompt decisions in situations where time is of the essence. The idiom “quick as a rabbit” carries a positive emotional connotation. It is often used to describe the characteristics of young children or nimble individuals. The phrase adds a dynamic quality to the text and serves as an effective tool for portraying the speed of a person's actions.

In both Kyrgyz and English, animal characteristics play a significant role in depicting human wisdom. For instance, the Kyrgyz expression “jylandyń tilin bilüü” (knowing the snake's language) parallels the English idiom “cunning as a fox”, both conveying cleverness and strategic

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thinking. Similarly, the Kyrgyz phrase “kumurskanın ulutunganın bilet” (knowing when an ant sighs) aligns with the English “sharp as a hawk”, highlighting keen insight and perceptiveness. This cross-cultural similarity aligns with what Wierzbicka (1992) terms "universal semantic primitives" – fundamental concepts that transcend cultural boundaries while maintaining culture-specific manifestations.

English idioms tend to be concise and universal, making them adaptable across various contexts. In contrast, Kyrgyz expressions are deeply rooted in folk mentality and national symbols, often enriched with ethnographic elements. This reflects the unique cultural experiences and environmental interactions of the Kyrgyz people. As Baker (2018) observes, "The phraseological makeup of a language serves as a repository of cultural knowledge, encoding the experiences and worldview of its speakers across generations."

The qualities of endurance, toughness, and resilience are key components of the Kyrgyz national mentality. The era of warfare and the nomadic lifestyle created the conditions for the development of these qualities. As a result, in the Kyrgyz language, there are numerous phraseological expressions that reflect these traits, such as “attın kulagy menen teñ oynoo” (to play on equal terms with the horse’s ear) and “bittin ichegisine kan kuyuu” (to pour blood into a flea’s intestines).

The phrase “to play on equal terms with the horse’s ear” and “to make the horse play” are often used to describe the agility, dexterity, and character of young men. For example, a story describes: Elettin boz bashynyn eröөl maydanynda attın kulagy menen teñ oynop, ary-beri at oynotup turushu Tashkelleni titiretıp, töbösünön biröө basyp turğansyp, bul kordukka chıday albay, Nasiriddin bektin aldına churkap jetıp bügülüp jygyldy (T. Kasymbekov) (In the open field of the herdsman's camp, playing on equal terms with the horse’s ear, while skillfully making the horse play, he shook Tashkele to its core, causing those above to feel as though they were standing on his shoulders, and unable to endure this humiliation, he ran toward Nasiriddin Beg’s presence, bowing and collapsing in front of him).

In this example, the phraseological expressions depict the vitality of life, physical strength, and the agility of a young man. Additionally, the expression “to never let the horse pass in front” characterizes reliability, decisiveness, and leadership qualities: Aldyna at saldyrbagan – Kara Molbo, Moldobasan Kyrgyz mamlekettik filarmoniyasynyn paydubalyn algachky tüptööçülörden bolgon eken. (To never let the horse pass in front refers to Kara Moldo, one of the founding figures of the Kyrgyz State Philharmonic, who was among the first to lay its foundation).

The phrase "bittin ichegisine kan kuyuu" (to pour blood into a flea's intestines) can change its meaning depending on the context, carrying both positive and negative connotations: Bu chaldyn bittin ichegisine kan kuyup jürgönü baykalat (T. Kasymbekov) (It is evident that this old man has been pouring blood into a flea's intestines).

As seen in this example, "bittin ichegisine kan kuyuu" can sometimes reflect cunningness and resourcefulness, while in other cases, it characterizes hypocrisy and dishonest actions. This semantic flexibility highlights the cultural complexity embedded within Kyrgyz phraseology, where evaluations of human behavior often exist on a spectrum rather than in absolute moral categories. Such linguistic ambiguity allows speakers to convey subtle judgments about intention and character, recognizing that the same qualities may be virtuous or problematic depending on

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context and purpose. Through this intricate zoonymic expression, Kyrgyz language preserves cultural wisdom about the dual nature of human ingenuity and the fine line between admirable resourcefulness and questionable manipulation.

These phraseological expressions can have either positive or negative meanings depending on the context. However, they are primarily used to describe key human qualities such as strength, industriousness, and agility. In conclusion, such phraseological expressions in the Kyrgyz language stand out for their emotional and expressive nature. In English, the phraseological expression "energetic as a squirrel" is used to describe a person's high energy levels, activeness, and constant movement. The image of a squirrel—always running, jumping, and engaged in activity—serves as the main comparison element in this expression. For example: The kids were energetic as squirrels, running around the playground all day (Carroll, 2012). This phrase vividly illustrates a person's agility, restlessness, and boundless energy through the image of a squirrel. The natural characteristics of a squirrel—its quick movements and constant activity - enhance the meaning of this expression. In English, "energetic as a squirrel" is commonly used to describe children, young people, and sometimes overly lively adults.

Both English and Kyrgyz widely use animal imagery to depict human qualities. However, in Kyrgyz phraseology, images of animals like squirrels are less common, with livestock such as cattle, horses, and dogs being more frequently referenced. Nonetheless, phraseological expressions in both languages share the goal of creating vivid and expressive imagery to characterize human nature. This differential emphasis reflects what Duranti (1997) describes as "cultural saliency" – the tendency for cultures to linguistically elaborate domains of experience that are central to their way of life. Such linguistic patterns reveal the profound influence of environmental and socioeconomic factors on metaphorical language development. In agricultural and nomadic Kyrgyz society, where livestock represents wealth, status, and survival, these animals naturally became reference points for human attributes. Meanwhile, English-speaking societies, with their diverse ecological exposures, developed a broader range of animal referents. This comparative analysis demonstrates how phraseological expressions serve as cultural artifacts that encode not merely linguistic conventions but deeper cultural values, historical experiences, and relationships with the natural world. Through these zoonymic expressions, languages create conceptual bridges between human and animal domains that both reflect and perpetuate cultural worldviews about character, virtue, and social behavior.

The phraseological expression "hardworking as a mule" is used to describe a person who is diligent, persistent, and tirelessly dedicated to work. The mule, known for its physical strength and frequent use in hard labor, symbolizes industriousness. This expression characterizes strong work ethic and a commitment to fulfilling one's duties. For example: He worked hardworking as a mule to provide for his family (Steinbeck, 1984). This phrase highlights perseverance, responsibility, and devotion to work. It conveys a sense of tireless effort and dedication. Stylistically, this expression is generally used in a positive sense, often as praise, carrying a favorable emotional tone. Unlike some animal comparisons that carry negative connotations, this zoonymic expression elevates human labor through its association with an animal historically valued for its endurance and capacity for sustained effort. The metaphor resonates particularly in agricultural and working-class contexts, where physical labor and stamina are highly regarded

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virtues. Through this expression, language preserves cultural memories of human-animal partnerships in labor, transforming the observable qualities of the mule into an aspirational standard for human industry. The persistence of this phrase in contemporary usage, even as mechanization has largely replaced animal labor, demonstrates how deeply these conceptual metaphors are embedded in our linguistic understanding of work ethics and personal character.

On the other hand, the phraseological expression "stubborn as a mule" describes a person's extreme stubbornness and unwillingness to change their mind or decision. The mule is known for its obstinacy—once it stops, it is extremely difficult to make it move. Because of this characteristic, the phrase is used to describe a person who is unyielding and independent in their nature. This comparison dates back centuries, reflecting the long agricultural history where farmers and laborers directly observed mules refusing commands despite various persuasion attempts. Interestingly, while stubbornness is often perceived negatively, the mule's behavior stems from a strong self-preservation instinct—they won't proceed when sensing danger, illustrating a certain wisdom behind their perceived obstinacy. The expression appears across various contexts in English literature, political discourse, and everyday conversation, often serving as a critique but occasionally acknowledging the value of steadfast determination. The persistence of this zoonymic idiom in modern English, despite decreased direct interactions with mules in contemporary society, demonstrates how deeply animal metaphors are woven into our linguistic understanding of human behavior and personality traits.

Unlike “hardworking as a mule”, which has a positive connotation, “stubborn as a mule” can have a negative or critical tone, as seen in the following example: No matter what they said, he remained stubborn as a mule (Twain, 1876, 2003). The adventures of Huckleberry Finn. Charles L. Webster and Company.). The phrase “stubborn as a mule” emphasizes the negative aspect of a person’s character, particularly their inflexibility. It is often used critically, though in some cases, stubbornness can also be viewed as a sign of strength and determination. Due to its emotional intensity, this phrase can carry either a positive or negative meaning depending on the context. This duality of interpretation illustrates what Liu (2002) terms "evaluative flexibility" in idiomatic expressions, where contextual factors can shift the perceived value of a trait from positive to negative or vice versa.

"Agile as a cat" is a phrase used to describe a person who is agile, flexible, and moves easily. Since cats are known for their agility and quick reactions, this expression is used to refer to people who can make flexible and precise movements. For example: The gymnast was agile as a cat, landing perfectly on the narrow beam (Fitzgerald, 1991). The phraseological expression "agile as a cat" is widely used in English to describe a person's agility and flexibility. This expression is semantically and stylistically similar to the Kyrgyz phrase "tülküdöy shamdagay" (as swift as a fox). However, the choice of animal imagery in each language is adapted to the respective national culture and mentality. This linguistic divergence illustrates how phraseological expressions are deeply rooted in cultural observation and experience, with each language drawing upon locally significant animals to construct its metaphorical framework. The preference for cats in English versus foxes in Kyrgyz reflects different ecological relationships and cultural valuations of particular animal traits. Despite these surface differences, both expressions serve the same communicative function: creating vivid mental imagery that effectively conveys human physical

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capability through familiar zoological reference points. Such cross-cultural similarities amid distinctive animal choices demonstrate how comparative phraseology reveals both universal patterns in human cognition and the unique environmental and cultural factors that shape each language's metaphorical system.

The qualities of endurance, toughness, and resilience hold a significant place in the Kyrgyz mindset. These traits were shaped by the nomadic lifestyle and the warrior traditions of the past. Phraseological expressions such as "attın kulagy menen teñ oynoo" (playing on a horse's ear) and "bittin ichegisine kan kuyu" (pouring blood into a louse's intestine) are widely used in Kyrgyz to depict a person's agility, toughness, and resourcefulness. This comparison reveals how zoonymic phraseology reflects deeper cultural values and historical experiences—English expressions often emphasize domestic or woodland animals familiar to settled populations, while Kyrgyz expressions prominently feature animals central to nomadic herding culture. The selection of specific animals as metaphorical vehicles isn't arbitrary but emerges from centuries of cultural observation and interaction with local fauna. These linguistic differences illustrate how phraseological systems function as repositories of cultural memory, preserving traditional knowledge about both the natural world and valued human attributes. Despite these differences in animal imagery, both languages employ zoonymic metaphors to achieve similar communicative goals: creating vivid, memorable descriptions of human capabilities that connect abstract qualities to concrete, observable animal behaviors known to all members of the speech community.

Similarly, English employs phraseological expressions containing zoonymic components to describe physical or psychological traits. Some common examples include "energetic as a squirrel" (restless), "hardworking as a mule" (diligent), "stubborn as a mule" (stubborn), and "agile as a cat" (agile). These expressions, through their semantic and stylistic nuances, illustrate a person's industriousness, endurance, and determination in English. The prevalence of animal imagery in these idiomatic expressions reveals the deep connection between human observation of animal behavior and our understanding of human character. Such zoonymic phrases form an essential part of English figurative language, allowing speakers to convey complex personal attributes through easily recognizable and culturally resonant comparisons that have endured through generations of language evolution.

When comparing phraseological expressions in the two languages, it becomes evident that Kyrgyz primarily utilizes imagery of animals associated with nomadic culture, such as horses and eagles. In contrast, English favors representations of animals like rabbits, cats, and squirrels. In Kyrgyz culture, the fox represents both intelligence and trickery, while in English, it primarily signifies strategic thinking [9]. However, in both languages, such phraseological expressions serve as powerful linguistic tools for vivid imagery, emotional intensity, and expressive description of human characteristics. As Goddard & Wierzbicka (2014) observe, "The animal kingdom provides a particularly rich source domain for metaphorical expressions across languages, though the specific mappings between animal traits and human characteristics are culturally determined." This highlights the deep connection between language and cultural perception, where shared human experiences are filtered through distinct worldviews. While the choice of animals and their associated meanings may differ, the underlying function of phraseological expressions remains universal—enhancing communication through evocative and culturally resonant imagery.

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Method

The analysis of zoonymic phraseological units which show positive appraisal of human beings is done in this paper through a qualitative comparative analysis of Kyrgyz and English languages. This approach was taken to find the cultures and the cognition underlying the expressions of positive human characteristics in one or the other language or culture. The qualitative analysis corresponds with the meanings and connotations phraseological units bear, which help to understand their importance in every language and society.

A combination of description and comparison is the basis of the study as these two methods form the basis of any linguistics investigation for finding and grouping semantic similarities and differences within the two languages. Descriptive methods focus on the structure, context, and meaning of certain phraseological units while comparative methods focus on how cultures differ in their ability to express positive human traits and the concept behind them. The integration of both analyses allows capturing of the phraseological features of both Kyrgyz and English and ensures full investigation of the phrases on both languages.

The phraseologialon units were collected from various sources, such as dictionaries, literary works, as well as everyday phrases, and colloquialisms. Everyday language is cut out of the limelight, but by diversifying the data collection approach, every representive unit of phraseology common and reflective of two languages were collected. Moreover, the selection process dealt with positive attributes of human beings such as qualities of wisdom, courage, and courage which narrowed the analysis to more useful and important units for this research.

The methodological approach aligns with Tognini-Bonelli's (2001) corpus-based investigation of phraseology, which emphasizes contextual analysis as essential for understanding idiom meaning and usage. Additionally, the cross-cultural comparative framework employed follows Gläser & Laudel (2008) contrastive analysis model for phraseological units, examining both semantic equivalence and cultural divergence. Data analysis involved coding phraseological expressions according to semantic domains (wisdom, courage, endurance) and categorizing the animal referents to identify patterns of cultural significance.

Results and Discussion

A. Result

The findings show both shared and distinct cultural and linguistic features in the use of animal imagery to describe wisdom, insight, foresight, resilience, courage, and other positive human traits. The analysis revealed a variety of semantic distinctions, cultural influences, and contextual applications of the expressions in both languages.

1. Semantic Distinctions

The comparative analysis of zoonymic expressions in the Kyrgyz and English languages highlighted that both languages utilize animal imagery to symbolize human qualities such as

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wisdom, insight, foresight, resilience, and courage. However, the specific animals chosen for these expressions reflect different cultural values and cognitive associations.

a. Wisdom and Insight

In both languages, the owl serves as a prominent symbol of wisdom. The English phrase *"wise as an owl"* is paralleled in the Kyrgyz expression *"jylandyń tilin bilüü"* (knowing the snake's language), both of which emphasize sharpness of intellect and strategic thinking. Similarly, *"sharp as a hawk"* in English corresponds to *"kumurskanın ulutunganın bilüü"* (knowing when an ant sighs) in Kyrgyz, both highlighting acute observational skills and perceptiveness.

b. Cunning and Strategic Thinking

The comparison of animals like the fox in English (cunning as a fox) and the fox and monkey in Kyrgyz (tülküdöy aylaker and Maymylday aylaker) demonstrates the shared emphasis on intelligence and cleverness, although the animals represent slightly different cultural associations. While the fox symbolizes cunning and strategic thinking in both languages, the Kyrgyz language includes the monkey as a metaphor for craftiness and quick thinking.

c. Endurance and Toughness

The expressions *"energetic as a squirrel"* in English and *"attın kulagy menen teñ oynoo"* (playing on equal terms with the horse's ear) in Kyrgyz both depict physical agility, energy, and resilience. However, the Kyrgyz phrase carries a stronger connection to the nomadic lifestyle and the historical context of warriors, highlighting physical endurance and dexterity. In contrast, the English expression emphasizes restlessness and high energy.

d. Bravery and Courage

Both languages use animal imagery to describe bravery and heroism. The phrase "brave as a lion" in English aligns with the Kyrgyz *"arystandai jooker"* (brave like a lion), both of which symbolize valor and strength in battle. Lions, as symbols of courage, are prevalent in both cultures, reflecting similar cultural perceptions of bravery.

2. Cultural-Historical Influences

The animal imagery in both languages is deeply rooted in historical and cultural contexts that shape how positive human qualities are expressed. In the Kyrgyz language, the close relationship between humans and nature, as well as the nomadic lifestyle, strongly influences the choice of animals used in expressions. Horses, eagles, and other livestock play central roles in Kyrgyz culture, which is reflected in expressions such as *"attın kulagy menen teñ oynoo"* (playing on equal terms with the horse's ear) and *"balykka til, döngöchkö jan kirgizüü"* (giving speech to a fish, bringing a stump to life). These expressions emphasize

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traits like physical strength, resilience, and cleverness that were necessary for survival in the harsh environments of Central Asia.

In contrast, English expressions often draw from a broader range of animal symbolism, including more domesticated animals like the squirrel, cat, and mule, reflecting Western cultural values of industriousness, independence, and agility. The use of the owl and hawk as symbols of wisdom and keen insight is widespread across cultures, but the specific emphasis on animals in everyday life varies. As Dobrovol'skij & Piirainen (2005) observe, "The historical development of a society shapes its choice of metaphorical vehicles, with agrarian, nomadic, maritime, and industrial cultures drawing from different domains of experience."

3. Contextual Usage of Zoonymic Expressions

The usage of zoonymic phraseological expressions is highly context-dependent in both languages. In both Kyrgyz and English, expressions can carry positive or negative connotations based on the context in which they are used. For example, *"hardworking as a mule"* is generally used positively in English to describe diligence, while *"stubborn as a mule"* can be used pejoratively to describe someone who is inflexible or obstinate. Similarly, the Kyrgyz expression *"bittin ichegisine kan kuyu"* (to pour blood into a flea's intestines) can convey resourcefulness or deceitfulness depending on the situation.

The emotional intensity and vivid imagery of these expressions help convey complex human qualities with precision and impact. Both languages utilize such expressions as powerful tools for characterization in literature, everyday conversation, and even in political or social discourse, emphasizing their cultural significance and role in communication. This contextual flexibility is what Fauconnier & Turner (2002) describe as "conceptual blending" – the process whereby multiple input spaces (animal characteristics and human traits) are integrated to create emergent meaning that can vary based on discourse context.

4. Similarities and Differences Between Kyrgyz and English

While there are many similarities in the types of human qualities that are expressed through zoonymic phrases in both languages, there are also notable differences. The English language tends to favor expressions that use more widely recognized domestic and wild animals, such as owls, hawks, and squirrels. These animals often symbolize intelligence, sharpness, and energy, respectively.

In contrast, the Kyrgyz language places a heavier emphasis on animals that reflect the nomadic, warrior, and pastoral lifestyle, such as horses, foxes, and eagles. This connection to the natural environment and the historical experience of the Kyrgyz people shapes their idiomatic expressions. For example, *"bödönödön kuyruк chygaruu"* (making a tail out of a quail) in Kyrgyz is used to describe someone's ability to think quickly, a quality important in both everyday life and military strategy.

Despite these differences, both languages share a common interest in using animals as metaphors to convey human qualities, with both cultural traditions recognizing the importance of wisdom, resilience, and courage in human behavior.

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B. Discussion

This part starts by summarizing the key findings of the study, which suggest that there are both common and particular cultural and linguistic aspects concerning the use of animal metaphors for positive human attributes like wisdom, insight, versatility, and bravery. The analysis also revealed several semantic differences, cultural elements, and situational uses of these expressions in the two languages. Using animal imagery to express human qualities is an intricate phenomenon, and the culture's interpretation adds richness and depth that makes it obvious to the culture's specific context.

This study confirms and broadens prior research on phraseological units as their findings. First, the cultural-historical impact spotted in Kyrgyz zoonymic expressions of horses and eagles is linked to nomadic lifestyles, which corresponds with the analysis of symbolic colors meanings where 'the color term for black is rarely used to express neutral or positive meanings' (Ivova, 2021). This also reflects with Taseva & Ivanovska (2021) work on regarding somatic idioms in Macedonian and German which portray 'personal and intellectual characteristics' obtained from 'novels, dictionaries, or parts of the Bible' (Taseva & Ivanovska, 2021). Moreover, the semantic differentiation of the animals' symbolism like the use of monkeys by the Kyrgyz people to squirrels by the English people has further corroborated Sánchez et al. (2014) assertion that, 'people, in general, and some people more than others, tend to talk about the brighter side of life', especially about extroverts, and women (Sánchez et al., 2014).

Expanding upon this issue, the contextual flexibility of zoonymic expressions is at odds with Baran's (2008) findings on phraseological ambiguity. Baran (2008) notes "some shifts in the conceptualization and usage of phraseologisms" over time and through differing age groups. Nevertheless, these results strengthen Shalkarbek et al. (2024) interdisciplinary approach, who pointed out the "difficulties in interpreting these linguistic expressions" because of cultural exaggeration (Shalkarbek et al., 2024). So, for example, the phrase "jylandyń tilin bilüü" (knowing the snake's language) in Kyrgyz connotes strategic intellect and local wisdom like joy metaphors "sky" and "heart" (Sibgaeva et al., 2023). In this light, both languages use animals as metaphors for human qualities, is universal even with cultural differences.

The analysis of phraseology, especially phraseological units, is pertinent to cognition and socio-culture as expressed through zoonymic means in the case of the English and Kyrgyz languages. As an example, Garcia Rosa (2023) states that unit phrases "can become a springboard for teaching grammatical structures" which is in parallel with the focus in this study on how animal metaphors capture the encoding of syntactic and semantic rules (for example, "attın kulagy menen teñ oynoo"). On the other hand, Ebeling & Hasselgård (2015) who criticize Western Europe for being too rigid with their phraseological traditions, which they call 'the multi-word unit syndrome' brings parallelism to the comparisons made with the Kyrgyz English here, both in the context of being referred to as 'a phraseological vacuum' where there is need for a frequency-based approach to multi-word units which do not have fixed meanings. This is

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exemplified in "kumurskanın ulutunganın bilüü" which literally translates to knowing when an ant sighs but are much deeper in meaning and are culturally relevant.

The intricacies associated with translating zoonymic expressions (Sazdovska-Pigulovska, 2020) regarding idiomatic equivalence reveal how "cultural differences" make it difficult to find an exact translation. The context behind the phrase "make a tail out of a quail" illustrates this, as it draws from the Kyrgyz language and culture and requires context in English, similar to how Thienel (2020) observes phraseologisms evolving in narratives as a reflection of "psychosomatic experiences of illness." In addition, context plays a significant role in disentangling expressions such as "stubborn as a mule," supporting Gwiazdowska (2020) who claims that "the markers of phraseological units" are integral to the comprehension of meaning. These comparisons highlight the phenomenon of animal metaphors and illustrate the insistence by Shalkarbek et al. (2024) on the necessity for a multidisciplinary approach to understand its cultural and cognitive features has never been more pertinent.

This research complements the already existing literature by merging several disciplines in culturally adaptive ways. For example, Baran (2008) discussed some aspects of generational change in the comprehension of idioms, but his narrow focus on ambiguity did not consider contextual adaptability of phrases, which is capable of sustaining relevance across many demographics. In the same manner, Sánchez et al. (2014) noted positivity biases in speech using some multiple-culture, multi-ethnic, and universal examples without addressing specific cultural nuance, such as the rich emotional and cognitive depth of the Kyrgyz nomadic metaphor, "attın kulagy menen teñ oynoo" or the the English idiom "stubborn as a mule." These examples illustrate why it is necessary to incorporate culture specific elements in positive psychological discourse analyses.

In contrast, this study fills these gaps by explaining how zoonymic expressions contain both universal and culture specific features. For instance, Ivova (2021) analysis of color symbolism was insightful, yet it emphasized binary meanings (e.g. black being bad), while this analysis illustrates complex animal metaphors that go beyond dichotomies, like the Kyrgyz expression "bittin ichegisine kan kuyu" (resourcefulness/deceit). Unlike Sazdovska-Pigulovska (2020), who recognized gaps in translation but did not attempt to provide contextual solutions, this study proposes ways of recontextualizing idioms (e.g. "kumurskanın ulutunganın bilüü") using cognitive linguistics and Sazdovska-Pigulovska's (2020) introduction of interdisciplinary demands. Lastly, in addition to Thienel (2020) who analyzed phraseologisms in illness narratives, this study attempts to demonstrate how zoonymic units encompass cultural identities as the warrior spirit in the Kyrgyz culture, with Kyrgyz expressions, for example, which responds to Ebeling & Hasselgård's (2015) critique on the conservative approach of phraseological practices.

This study contributes to the field of comparative linguistics and phraseology by examining zoonymic expressions in Kyrgyz and English, offering insights into the interplay between language, culture, and cognition. Unlike previous studies that focus primarily on phraseological ambiguity (Baran, 2008) or the translation challenges of idiomatic expressions (Sazdovska-Pigulovska, 2020), this research delves into the semantic, cultural, and contextual dimensions of animal metaphors. It expands the discussion beyond binary cultural

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interpretations (Ivova, 2021) and highlights the intricate meanings embedded within phraseological expressions. Moreover, by incorporating an interdisciplinary approach that blends cognitive linguistics and socio-cultural analysis, this study underscores how zoonymic expressions serve as powerful cognitive tools for conceptualizing human traits across different linguistic and cultural landscapes.

The findings of this research have significant implications for language education and cross-cultural communication. First, they emphasize the need for integrating phraseological units into second language learning curricula to enhance learners' comprehension of cultural nuances and metaphorical meanings. As Garcia Rosa (2023) suggests, phraseological units act as gateways to understanding grammatical structures, and the present study further illustrates their role in conveying socio-cultural values. Language educators can leverage these insights to design context-based language instruction that incorporates idiomatic expressions in real-world applications. Additionally, the study encourages the adoption of comparative linguistic approaches, allowing students to draw parallels between their native language and the target language, fostering deeper linguistic awareness.

Another key implication relates to the use of phraseology in fostering intercultural competence. By understanding the cultural underpinnings of zoonymic expressions, learners can develop greater sensitivity toward language-specific connotations, reducing the risk of misinterpretation in cross-cultural interactions. For instance, teaching the phrase "attın kulagy menen teñ oynoo" alongside its approximate English equivalents can provide learners with a more nuanced grasp of how metaphors reflect historical and cultural realities. Furthermore, educators can utilize cognitive linguistic principles to facilitate students' understanding of idiomatic expressions, moving beyond rote memorization toward a more conceptual, meaning-driven approach.

While this study provides valuable insights, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the scope of analysis is confined to a selected set of zoonymic expressions, which may not fully represent the entire spectrum of animal metaphors in either language. A broader dataset incorporating regional dialects and variations could yield a more comprehensive picture of phraseological diversity. Second, although this study integrates linguistic and cultural perspectives, it does not extensively explore psycholinguistic aspects, such as how speakers of different languages process and internalize these metaphors cognitively. Future research could incorporate experimental methods, such as eye-tracking or reaction time studies, to examine how native speakers of Kyrgyz and English interpret and use zoonymic expressions in real-time communication. Another limitation lies in the challenge of direct equivalence between phraseological expressions. As highlighted by Sazdovska-Pigulovska (2020), idiomatic translations often struggle to capture the full depth of cultural connotations. While this study offers comparative interpretations, further research could explore how bilingual speakers navigate these differences in everyday language use. Lastly, while the study discusses pedagogical applications, it does not include empirical classroom testing of proposed teaching strategies. Future studies could implement and evaluate the effectiveness of phraseology-focused curricula to assess how metaphorical competence influences second language

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acquisition. Despite these limitations, this research lays a strong foundation for further exploration of zoonymic expressions in comparative linguistics and language pedagogy.

Conclusion

Zoonymic phraseological expressions in Kyrgyz and English demonstrate both similarities and differences in the use of animal imagery to denote positive human traits. The two languages differ in the types of animals they incorporate and the cultural values they encompass; however, they come together in employing strong emotive language depicting human intellect, courage, swiftness, and toughness. This reminds us of the great cultural and mental heritage concealed within language and draws attention to the metaphors and animal symbols that shape perceptions of human nature. These metaphors not only make the language richer but also serve as a bridge between communication and cultural identity, allowing speakers to express themselves more vividly and emotionally. Furthermore, they reveal how linguistic expressions shape and reflect societal attitudes toward certain traits. Two directions in the study of phraseology are suggested: first, attention can be focused on cognitive anthropology, which offers clear-cut explanations of how people think and categorize experiences through language; second, more attention can be directed toward the study of animal metaphors and their influence on shaping perceptions of human characteristics across different linguistic and cultural contexts.

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