

## **Figurative Use of Animal Names in Kurdish Idioms (Ilami Dialect)**

**By**

**Shahla Sharifi**

Associate Professor in Linguistics, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad

E-mail: sh-sharifi@um.ac.ir

**Amir Karimipour**

M.A Student in Linguistics, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad

E-mail: am\_ka439@stu-mail.um.ac.ir

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### **Abstract**

While speakers are involved in a daily conversation, they frequently use idioms in order to transfer their desired concepts in an implicit and indirect way. Idioms are frozen structures that sometimes their meanings are not transparent and their constituents cannot predict their meaning obviously. Hence speakers need to have a cultural background and personal experience to understand them. In fact, idioms are among structures that speakers try to learn and use throughout their lifelong. In this article, we definitely focus on the idioms having at least one animal name inside. These names are used in Kurdish language to convey specific concepts figuratively. In this article we try to show how frequently these lexical terms are used and which concepts they convey in Kurdish. As far as frequency is concerned, it was seen that some of these names are widely used in the rigid structure of idioms. It should be noted that these concepts symbolized by animals are mostly culture-dependent. That is, an animal standing for a peculiar concept in Kurdish, may not stand for the same concept in another language. As it can be figured out, in this article the semantic components of idioms are focalized.

**Key Words:** Kurdish, Animal Name, Idiom, Symbol.

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### **Introduction**

Idiom is a term used in grammar and lexicology to refer to a sequence of words which is semantically and often syntactically restricted, so that they function as a single unit. From a semantic viewpoint, the meanings of the individual words cannot be summed to produce the meaning of the idiomatic expression as a whole. From a syntactic viewpoint, the words often do not permit the usual variability they display in other contexts, e.g. it's raining cats and dogs does not permit \*it's raining a cat and a dog/dogs and cats, etc (Crystal, 2003: 225-226).

They are some phrases which are exceptions to compositionality. An idiom is a phrase whose meaning is not what you'd expect given the meanings of the words making it up. In other words, idioms are not compositional: keep an eye on X, get a handle on X, and kick the bucket do not get their meaning exclusively from the meaning of their parts and the way they are put together (Fasold, 2006: 141).

One has to learn the expressions as whole units and store them in the lexicon as lexemes. Because idioms are fixed expressions, the idiomatic meaning is typically not preserved if any of the components words are replaced with a (near) synonym, as in spill the pulses. Some idioms are metaphorically motivated-for example, let off steam 'release pent-up emotions' can be seen as involving a metaphorical conceptualization of a person as a pressurized steam cooker (Murphy, 2010).

In this article, we try to represent the contexts in which an idiom is used, for example an Ilami Kurdish idiom like “**ruwi dæsə wæ ændzir nijæræsi wət wələ kə kæræsə**” is used in a situation in which a person cannot reach something and pretends that it is useless, like “sour grapes” in English. Then we discuss that animals are symbolically used in idioms as in “**do qəla də sərə gujə dawləmæne binæ dʒæng**”. In this idiom [qəla] (Crow) is the symbol of greed.

The study of idioms is always interesting for linguists. These frozen structures can be studied from different perspectives; semantically, syntactically, etc. There are many works done in this regard in which these are among: Nunberg 1994, Abeille 1995, Coopmans 1988, Copestake 1994, Cronk 1993, Ernst 1981, Everaert 1995, Fellbaum 1993, Fillmore 1988, Fraser 1970, Gibbs 1985, 1989, 1989, Katz 1973, Keysar 1995, Krenn 1994, Sailer 2003, Ackerman 1982, Cacciari 1989, Prinz 1983, Seidl 1987, Glucksberg 2001, Groszler 2008, Varga 2008, Giora (2002), Hsieh and chiu (2004). There are also some works which have specifically addressed the use of animal names in the idioms and proverbs of a language. I mention some of them here. Nakhavali (2010) studied animal names in the Persian proverbs in her MA thesis. She determined there which animal names are more frequently used in the Persian Proverbs and each animal name is the symbol of which characteristic features of human beings. According to her study, "donkey" is the most frequent animal name in the Persian proverbs. "Dog", "camel", "Hen" and "rooster" take the later positions, respectively.

Nesi (1995) has studied the metaphorical meaning of animals in different cultures. In this work the problems which language learners are encountered with, while facing with conventional metaphors, are discussed.

Halupka-resetar and her co-author (2003) have also a work on the metaphorical use of animal names which are used to address people in Serbian. Finally Hsieh (2001) has done a comparative work on the metaphors containing animal names in German and Mandarin Chinese. This work follows a semantic and sociological approach. He believes that metaphors having animal names inside represent semantic and social roles in human language. He argues that these structures form language through culture and linguistic society.

As far as we know any piece of works has been done on Kurdish idioms, especially with the specific attention to animal names. So in this paper we will have a survey on the way animal names have been used in Ilami Kurdish idioms and the characteristic features which have been attributed to these animals by Kurdish People.

### **An introduction to Kurdish**

Kurdish has many dialects, and Ilami is one of these varieties. Britannica describes Kurdish so:

*Kurdish is a new western Iranian language spoken in Kurdistan; it ranks as the third largest Iranian language group, after Persian and Pashto, and has numerous dialects. There are two main dialect groups. The northern group—spoken from Mosul, Iraq, into the Caucasus—is called Kurmānji; in Turkey, Hawar (Turkized Latin) characters are used in the written form. It is spoken within a broad region that stretches roughly from Orūmīyeh, Iran, to the lower reaches of traditional Kurdistan in Iraq. In Iraq, Kurdī is the official form of Kurdish (Britannica).*

As noted, Ilami (sometimes is called Feyli) is another variety under the Kurdish umbrella. This dialect is widely spoken in Ilam, a small mountainous city located in the west of Iran. Ilami shares some features with Kermanshahi and Kalhori. Although most of Kurdish varieties have ergative system, Ilami does not have such a system (Kalbasi, 2010).

## DATA ANALYSIS

Here, idioms containing animal names are classified based on frequency. For each idiom word for word and exact English translations are given. we will show which traits are symbolized by an animal. One of the authors, as a native speaker on Kurdish, helped analyzing the data.

### **Dog (symbol of impurity, uncleanness)**

1. wæfr warijæw surə sægə  
Snow rained has wedding of dog is  
*English equivalent: He walks on air.*
2. dærja wæ dæmə sæg pes nijaw  
Sea with mouth dog dirty not become  
*English equivalent: The sun loses nothing by shining into a puddle.*
3. fowanu gawan gærtaw hæræmə to wæ tʃæ wəsajtə sotə sæg dæmə  
shepherd cows got sedition you with what wait ass hole dog mouth  
*English equivalent: Time and tide wait for no man!*
4. mənijæ sægə hæræs mæræs  
(you) like are dog tired and idle  
*English equivalent: He is goofing off like a dog.*
5. mənijæ tötəg bənə lanæ  
(you) like are whelp in doghouse  
*English equivalent: She always turns on the waterworks.*
6. kə|æ qəŋ bəke de  
doggy ass put in  
*English equivalent: its bad taste turned my stomach.*

### **Donkey (symbol of ignorance, stupidity and foolishness)**

1. xærəm kə|i döm naft.  
donkey my short was tail not had.  
*English equivalent: I have no pretension to begin with.*
2. xær wæ zərə daraw buwegæt.  
Donkey from under tree take you.  
*English equivalent: To be pure and simple.*
3. særə xær qəjæ sənginiye ha mæle xwe.  
Head of donkey heavy is heaviness is on itself.  
*English equivalent: Let every peddler carry his own burden.*
4. xær də mə tʃæg atæf də bare.  
donkey from me went fire on it.  
*English equivalent: Repentance comes too late.*

5. tʃænæ xærə ma| hamsa tupənəme.  
As much as donkey of house neighbor beat him/her.

**English equivalent:** *To beat someone severely, like your neighbor's donkey.*

6. hær kæ ha tæmaj hæsen alijæ xære ha nuwaj juwe xalijæ.  
Everyone is hope of Hasan Aliya donkey is in front of pocket his/her empty is.

**English equivalent:** *Who depends upon another man's table often dines late.*

### **Crow (Symbol of faultfinding, greed and inauspiciousness)**

1. qə|aj wæ qə|aj wət |aj rujət sijæ

Crow to crow said beside face black

**English equivalent:** *The pot calling the kettle black.*

2. qə|a hataə zuwan wət gou.  
Crow came to tongue said shit.

**English equivalent:** *It's all hot air.*

3. qə|a bæqətənə.  
Crow cough.

**English equivalent:** *Saving your presence!*

4. do qə|a də særə göjə daw|xəmæne binæ jæng.  
Two crow from due of waste(=excrement) of a rich person started fighting.

**English equivalent:** *It's a storm in a teacup.*

### **Fox (symbol of trickery, mendacity and agility)**

1. ta ruwi xwas qæwa|xæ begæ dæs mæ|e də peftaw bərin.  
Untill fox wanted proof give hand neck its from back was cut.

**English equivalent:** *You snooze, you lose.*

2. ruwi dæsə wæ ænjir nijæræsi wət wəle kæ kæræsə  
Fox hand its to fig not arrived said no matter raw is.

**English equivalent:** *It is sour grapes.*

4. mənəgæ ruwijə də qərəq suzijag.  
(he/she)Like is fox in pasture burnt.

**English equivalent:** *He is as ugly and thin as a lath/rake.*

5. dʒərikə ruwi ta dærə kənə.  
Leap of fox to door of kennel.

**English equivalent:** *As quick as lightning or in the blink of an eye.*

### **Goat, Sheep (symbol of playfulness, innocence and foolishness)**

1. bəzən bælə hæm dijjætə kælə  
Goat again will come to here.  
**English equivalent:** *Every fox must pay his skin at the flayer's.*
2. agær ŋuwan bəxwaze də ɡənə niri qaqaənə dərəs ke.  
If shepherd want from scrotum goat milk make.  
**English equivalent:** *Where there is a will there is a way.*
3. jəx jəx kəjærəl kəf kəfə mərɣə jə baxə ʃasə ja tʃəga sərɣə?  
Urging on goats shooting of hens is here Bakhe shah or Cheqa serkh is?  
**English equivalent:** *What's going on here? (It's like a brothel).*
4. mijə wə paj xwə kənə dar bəzən wə paj xwə.  
Sheep with foot itself hang goat with foot itself.  
**English equivalent:** *Let every peddler carry his own burden.*
5. ægær bətʃi kawər ɡərən kəj.  
If you go sheep expensive make.  
**English equivalent:** *He is good for nothing.*
6. mənəgə mijə peqəmbær.  
(he/she) like is lamb of prophet.  
**English equivalent:** *He is as innocent as a lamb.*

#### **Cow (symbol of impressibility)**

1. də ɡa də je du| bəxwæn ja buwə jæk ɡərən ja xuwə jæk.  
Two cow in one bucket eat either smell each other get or trait each other  
**English equivalent:** *Who keeps company with the wolf, will learn to howl.*
2. dʒurə mezə ɡa tʃæftə  
like piss cow slant.  
**English equivalent:** *He is as cunning as a fox.*
3. mənijə ɡaj namə ɡurəl  
you like are cow among calves  
**English equivalent:** *Your friends are all younger than you, so you are like a cow among calves.*

#### **Hen, Chicken (symbol of vagrancy)**

1. mərɣ də lanə nəjən  
Hen in aviary putting  
**English equivalent:** *He eats like a horse.*
2. mənijə mərɣə tʃa|æwan hæ ɡærdi.  
(You) like are hen loafer always rove.  
**English equivalent:** *He is goofing off like a hen.*
3. mənijə jəjəgə dömalan

(You) like are chicken callow.

**English equivalent:** *He is as thin and short as lath/rake.*

**Wolf (symbol of savagery)**

1. wætænæ gowærg æmru juwani wæt we tæru næmu paj  
said to wolf today shepherd are said with wet foot

pætijæ ki bætju?  
bare who go?

**English equivalent:** *He has set the fox to watch the cabbage.*

2. gowærg wæ rijænaw kærdæn xu juwanægæ.  
Wolf with cattle tearing good young is.

**English equivalent:** *This is necessary for a man to be as fierce as possible like a fox that rends cattle.*

**Sparrow (symbol of contentment)**

1. jæke agær dæ mæle tʃægi jækæ mælitʃæg dæ bane dowerʃan.  
Someone fire from house went someone sparrow on it was frying.

**English equivalent:** *He takes advantages of my problem.*

2. mælitʃæg wæ mænæ xwe.  
Sparrow with slice itself.

**English equivalent:** *we should be contented in our life like a sparrow.*

**Mouse (symbol of uncleanness and sabotage)**

1. hær tʃæg dæ mōʃaw kæfe hæmanæ dære  
Everything from mouse drop sheepskin tear.

**English equivalent:** *A crow is never the whiter for washing herself often.*

**Cat (symbol of uselessness)**

1. wætænæ pæʃi gōjæt aræ dærman xasæ dæ zæræ xak tʃalæ kærd.  
said to cat waste for treatment good is under soil buried it.

**English equivalent:** *If you are a cock, crow; if a hen, lay eggs.*

**Turtle (symbol of weakness)**

1. wætænæ kisæl ære ku tʃi ? wæt ære mæle xōda wæt. we  
said to turtle for where go? Said for house of God. said with these

gæte gamæ azizætæ kæftægæ.  
Pace good of you can.

**English equivalent:** *You are unlikely to do that, because you walk at a snail's pace.*

### **Horse (symbol of agility and obstinacy)**

7. æsbə bəɖaw də meɖan nijəwəse.

Horse agile in ring not hesitate.

**English equivalent:** *Where there is a will there is a way.*

As far as the English equivalents of the Kurdish idioms show in most cases either there is no sign of an animal name in the English equivalent, or there is an animal name but it's not necessarily the same name as the Kurdish idiom in the English equivalent. For example in the examples given for the "wolf" in Kurdish, we usually see the "fox" in the English equivalents or while in Ilami "putting the hen in the aviary" applies for the people who take the big bits and are greedy, in English "eating the horse" convey almost the same meaning and in Persian instead of "horse", "cow" appears in the same idiom or we find "horse" a very frequent name in the idioms of the people who live in the south of Iran( specially in the Khoozestan province), but it's not a frequent animal name in the Ilami idioms. We also see in the English equivalents of the Kurdish idioms which have the name of "donkey" inside, we mostly see no sign of the animal name. Or while "dog" may be the symbol of truthfulness and loyalty and is admired for these features in some other languages, it is a symbol of impurity and uncleanness in Kurdish. So even if the speakers of the languages use the same idioms, they may not necessarily convey the same implicit meanings. Or in the case of this paper if the speakers of two languages use the same animal name, it doesn't mean that those names symbolized the same thing or show the same features in those languages.

Comparing the Ilami Kurdish idioms with Persian proverbs also reveals that while in Persian, "camel" and "rooster" are among the most frequent animal names used in the proverbs, in Ilami Kurdish idioms there is no sign of "camel" and "rooster" is of a very low frequency or for example In Ilami Kurdish idioms "crow" is a more frequently used animal name comparing to "hen", while in Persian "hen" is the most frequent bird name and "crow" is not among the frequent animal names.

Comparing Chinese to Persian shows that while in Chinese "camel" is the symbol of a stupid person, "donkey" is the animal name which has the same role in Persian and as we mentioned before in Ilami Kurdish, there is no idiom constructed by this animal name or While in Chinese and German "serpent" can be applied as the compliment for a well-shaped and slim body, in Persian it has just the negative meaning and like "fox" applies for the japer and hypocritical person and for those who make hostility to the others. So as we see idioms can be regarded as the culture-dependent structures which mostly are language-specific. They are the reflection of different communities' norms, believes and thoughts, hence they should be interpreted in the same value system.

### **Conclusion**

Idioms are the crystallized structures which are highly culture-dependent, so they reflex their users' believes, thoughts and experiences from the world. The findings of this papers show that Ilami speakers have the great tendency to use the animal names in their idioms in order to describe the human-being characteristics or say some thing which is often unpleasant indirectly. Among the animal names "dog" and "donkey" are of the most frequency in Ilami Idioms. Among the birds, "crow" has a high frequency and different uses in Ilami idioms, at least comparing to the way its uses in Persian idioms. As a whole the frequency of the animal names in the Ilami idioms reflexes the way of life of the Ilami people and the importance of the animals from their point of view. The characteristics which they attribute to the animals also show their way of thinking and looking at the world which is different from the speakers of the other languages.

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