

Livestock Symbolism in Jordanian Popular Proverbs: A Semiotic Analysis

Alaualdeen Algharibeh

Department of Arabic Language and Literature, Yarmouk University, Jordan

Rafat Al Rousan*

Department of Translation, Yarmouk University, Jordan

Yousuf Aljawarneh

Department of Arabic Language and Literature, Yarmouk University, Jordan

Ala' AlKhalafat

Department of Arabic Language and Literature, Yarmouk University, Jordan

Abstract—This paper explores the semiotic representations of livestock in Jordanian proverbs. Specifically, it examines the cultural and symbolic meanings of these proverbial expressions. To this end, livestock-related proverbs were collected from two popular books written about proverbs in Jordanian culture. Barthes' (1957) semiotic theory was adopted to analyze the data of the study. The findings have revealed that livestock are used in the Jordanian proverbs to signify both positive and negative meanings, traits, and values. This study has identified the following positive traits in the data: distinguished status, skill, uniqueness, strength, endurance and patience. It has also revealed the following negative traits: worthlessness, poor judgment, foolishness, laziness, mockery, stubbornness, baseness, submissiveness, bad taste, and resentment. The findings have shown that livestock-related proverbs express more pejorative connotations than positive ones. The study supports previous literature that animal proverbs are culture-specific, and their meanings depend on the context in which they are used.

Index Terms—livestock, proverbs, Jordanian Arabic, applied linguistics, semiotics

I. INTRODUCTION

Proverbs, or proverbial expressions, are the mirror of societies. They reflect their wisdom, values, traditions, and teachings in concise, expressive, and memorable expressions (Honeck, 1997; Meider, 2004). They are a common feature of every language and culture, and people use them subconsciously to communicate emotions, attitudes, and opinions (Al Rousan & Shatnawi, 2023). Proverbs are vital to societies' linguistic and cultural mosaic. One way to understand a culture is to study its proverbs and sayings (Yusopova & Kazmina, 2015). In Jordan, as is the case in other societies, proverbs are used as a medium to convey social norms, moral values, and aspects of relationships. Proverbs cover almost all aspects of life in Jordan. One of the important topics that are represented by Jordanian proverbs is livestock, which holds a special place in Jordanian culture because of its historical, cultural, and socio-economic significance.

Animals have influenced our lives since the beginning of humanity (Alster, 1993). They have played an important part in our folklore, myths, and superstitions (Mieder, 2004). The relationship between humans and animals has been so strong throughout history (Rayan et al., 2024). Animals have been people's friends, companions, and enemies; they have helped in shaping their emotions, views, attitudes, and values. For many generations, people have been observing animals, studying their habits and character, and applying this competence to clearly describe people's negative and positive aspects (Yusopova & Kazmina, 2015). Therefore, studying the connection between human beings and animals is essential both culturally and linguistically. Livestock are one type of animal whose impact on different angles of human lives is worth investigating. For centuries, livestock has been vital to Jordan's agrarian and nomadic lifestyles. They have played a crucial role in labour, trade, sustenance, and social status (Zawahreh, 2022). Therefore, their portrayal in Jordanian proverbs shows their practical and symbolic significance within Jordanian society. This study investigates how livestock is represented in Jordanian proverbial expressions as symbols of values and traits. Such images offer invaluable insights into Jordanian societal norms and values.

Drawing on Barthes' (1957) theory of semiotics, investigating Jordanian animal proverbs deepens our understanding of how language creates and conveys meaning. By examining the linguistic and cultural aspects of livestock-related proverbs in Jordanian culture, our study looks into how Jordanian people view their relationship with livestock, dealing

* Corresponding Author.

with them as a practical necessity and linguistic and cultural metaphors. This paper explores the semiotic representation of livestock in Jordanian proverbs; it aims to unveil the cultural, social, and symbolic meanings entrenched in these proverbial expressions. This study contributes to the growing body of research on the representations of animals, particularly livestock, in folklore, specifically Arabic and Jordanian folklore. It will reveal the livestock's cultural value in Jordanian society and show how semiotics is utilized to analyze meaning on linguistic and cultural levels.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. *Origin and Definition of Proverbs*

The origin of proverbs, which belongs to phraseology is still unknown (Marvin, 1922; Dominguez, 2006). They are as old as the beginning of human's clear thinking (Honeck, 1997). The originality of proverbs is attributed to those who first brought them up and used them (Mieder, 2004). Mieder (2004) also argued that proverbs have enjoyed high status and great value across the ancient world until this day. This implies that the founder of any proverb is hardly ever known. Alster (1993) pointed out that animal proverbs are almost 4000 years old, the oldest of which shows the frequent use of animal imagery to portray human beings. This fact may suggest that proverbs involving animals to depict human characteristics are a universal phenomenon whose purpose is to implicitly convey human wisdom. Animal proverbs express positive and negative connotations based on the linguistic and cultural context in which they occur (Mieder, 2004; Yusopova & Kazmina, 2015; Al Rousan & Shatnawi, 2023). The metaphorical transfers from the animal domain to the human domain can be found in any language, culture, or language (Dominguez, 2006).

Although scholars such as Norrick (1985), Hernadi and Steen (1999), and Mieder (2004) have admitted to the challenge of constructing a comprehensive definition for proverbs, they offered some definitions which cannot be regarded as ultimate ones. For example, Norrick (1985) stated that a proverb is "a traditional, conversational, didactic genre with a general meaning, a potential free conversational turn, preferably with figurative meaning". On the other hand, Hernadi and Steen (1999, p. 7) defined them as "brief, memorable, and intuitively convincing formulations of socially sanctioned advice". For Hagos (2015), proverbs are traditional sayings humans founded to transfer experience, knowledge, wisdom, and culture from one generation to another. In sum, they are philosophical expressions about some aspect of people's lives.

B. *Characteristics of Proverbs*

According to scholars (Norrick, 1985; Hernadi & Steen, 1999; Aasland, 2012; Umidjanovna, 2020; Umarova, 2022), proverbs enjoy the following main characteristics. Firstly, they are fixed, complete grammatical units that resist change, which make them distinct from other language structures. Secondly, they are a feature of colloquial speech and can be realized in different forms and contexts (Ilyassova et al., 2019). Thirdly, proverbs are pre-formulated and pre-fabricated generalized expressions. That is, their interpretation does not rely on a specific textual context. Fourthly, all cultures highly value proverbs because they are didactic and edifying (Norrick, 1985). Fifthly, proverbs are easy to memorize because their structure and metaphorical language are not complicated. Rhetorical devices, such as rhythm, rhyme, and alliteration, are primary features of a proverb, making it comprehensible and easy to remember and transfer. Furthermore, proverbs are traditional collective human experience and wisdom used as moral teaching. They are also situational, poly-functional and poly-semantic, making them semantically indefinite. Moreover, proverbs are described as creative elements of language that describe some state of affairs by comparison. According to Krikmann (2001, p. 11), "the semantic field of animals must be the most productive in proverbial metaphors". Furthermore, proverbial expressions often communicate general meanings rather than specific ones (Norrick, 1985). That is why they are often expressed in the present tense. Finally, wisdom and brevity are what make up a proverb. All of the above-mentioned characteristics make proverbs practical to use in everyday interactions.

C. *Functions of Proverbs*

Proverbs are a universal phenomenon reflecting the relationship between people and their traits, actions, views, experiences, and traditions. Mieder (2004) claimed that proverbs can be found in most of the world's cultures, although with different frequencies. Almost every aspect of human life has been expressed in a condensed proverbial form, calling them "frames unveiling a world-view" (Gordon, 1968). Sibarani (2004) indicated that proverbs express the views and characteristics of a culture; they also emphasize its tradition and folklore by means of language. In Utebaev and Sarsenbaeva's (2023, p. 10) own words, "proverbs express the experience of the nations, reflecting their history, way of life, culture, and development." According to Mieder (2004, p. 1), "proverbs fulfil the human need to summarize experiences and observations into nuggets of wisdom that provide readymade comments on personal relationships and social affairs". Proverbs also have literary and practical functions (Honeck, 1997), which indicates that they can be used in prose, songs, and poetry. Proverbs, which result from people's lifelong and well-established experiences, are a mere reflection of their history, development, culture, and way of life (Utebaev & Sarsenbaeva, 2023). Proverbs describe man "with all his virtues and flaws" (Blaga, 2003, p. 312).

D. *Livestock in Jordanian Culture*

In Western culture, livestock or farm animals include mainly cattle, sheep, pigs, goats, cows, horses, donkeys, mules, camels, bulls, buffalos, or llamas (Britannica. com). Except for buffalo, pigs, and llamas, other animals dominate in the agrarian and nomadic areas of Arab culture, specifically Jordanian culture. This study focuses on livestock, excluding pigs, buffalos, and llamas, which are non-existent in Jordan. Some wild or domestic animals have been an important source of people's livelihood (Yusopova & Kazmina, 2015). For example, livestock is a vital source of food and income for many individuals and families around the globe. In Jordan, low-income families rely heavily on livestock to survive by selling their meat, dairy, wool, and skin, offering them a steady source of income (Zawahreh, 2022). That is why livestock holds significant importance in rural and Bedouin communities in Jordan. One clear evidence is Jordan's outstanding stock of sheep, goats, cattle, camels, and others. There is a strong, well-established connection between the Jordanian people and livestock. Based on such a relationship, this study symbolically examines this class of animals to reveal the details of this relationship, both linguistically and culturally. Particularly, this relationship reflects the expressive articulation of popular proverbs in Jordanian Culture, which provide insight into how Jordanians experience joy, pride, emotions, and concerns. Moreover, this study explains the connection between proverbs and human traits in Jordanian society. This study focuses on livestock because of their significance, role, and status in Jordanian culture.

E. Previous Studies

The linguistic and cultural study of animal proverbs has been a topic of interest for many scholars in different parts of the world (Domínguez, 2006; Rodriguez, 2009; Nakhavali, 2011; Yinggang & Xuena, 2015; Yusopova & Kazmina 2015; Al-Harashsheh & Al-Rousan, 2020; Rayyan et al., 2023). Domínguez (2006) examined the metaphorical use of animal names in describing various human aspects, including physical and mental traits, body parts, secretions, illnesses, and actions, often with derogatory connotations. While most animal-based terms were offensive, only a few lacked pejorative meanings. The study analyzes Polish and Spanish data. He categorized animal names into the following subclasses: physical features, sexuality, character traits, social groups, occupations, and human conditions. Rodriguez (2009) explored the figurative use of animal names for women in English and Spanish, highlighting their often negative connotations. Women are commonly compared to pets, farm animals, and wild animals. Pet names imply ugliness, promiscuity, or cruelty, though they can also suggest domesticity. Farm animal metaphors vary between praise and insult, while wild animal imagery is predominantly derogatory, with "crow" used in both languages to describe an old or unattractive woman. Studying animal names in Persian and English, Nakhavali (2011) pointed out that animal names, which serve significant functions in society, are highly dependent on human relations and culture. These names carry different connotations in different cultures based on the context in which they are used. Animal names convey social behaviours and social roles. In their study of the cultural significance of Chinese and English animal names, Yinggang and Xuena (2015) argued that animal expressions can have similar or identical connotations in both languages. They also reported that the same animal name can be associated with a negative connotation in one culture and a positive connotation in another. Yusopova and Kazmina (2015) studied domestic animal names in the proverbs of three unrelated languages: Russian, German and Tatar. Their findings show that proverbs with the names of domestic animals sometimes carry the same connotative connotation, which is mostly pejorative, in all three languages. However, they may have different meanings based on the situation of talk. The following pejorative connotations were identified in the proverbs of these languages: stupidity, ignorance, laziness, cowardice, and greed.

Some scholars have studied the connotations of animal names in Arabic, such as Al-Harashsheh and Al Rousan (2020), Rayyan et al. (2023), and Al-Rabee and Al Khanji (2024). Al-Harashsheh and Al- Rousan (2020) explored the topic of people addressed using animal names in Jordanian society. Their findings show that in Jordanian culture, animal names are assigned to people based on four factors: appearance, behaviour, intelligence, and character. Rayyan et al. (2023) examined the connotative meanings of animal names in Algerian society using a questionnaire with 20 common animal names. The qualitative analysis reveals that animal names convey varied meanings depending on context, beliefs, and personal perceptions. Some names are gender-specific, while others apply to both genders. These names are associated with physical appearance, size, and character and serve semantic, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic functions. Ultimately, the use of animal names expresses Algerian cultural diversity and helps shape social interactions. Having looked at the diverse research of animal names, this review of previous studies establishes some rigid foundation for the semiotic analysis of livestock in Jordanian proverbs, focusing on the relationship between linguistic expressions and cultural meaning. Al-Rabee' and Al Khanji (2024), who studied the meanings conveyed by the wolf and sheep in Arabic and English, revealed that both animals conveyed meanings specific to human beings, and that such meanings are common in both languages' proverbs. The survey of previous literature indicates the lack of studies conducted on livestock in proverbs in the Arab setting, particularly in Jordan.

F. Barthes' Semiotic Theory

Ronald Barthes' (1957) semiotic (or semiology) theory, which was built on Ferdinand de Saussure's sign theory, proposes that a sign is "combination of its signifier and signified" (Griffin et al., 2012, p. 333). To illustrate, a sign comprises a signifier (word, sound, image, etc.), and a signified (their meanings). Semiology or semiotics is the science of interpreting signs, and it is "concerned with anything that can stand for something else" (Barthes, 1988, p. 326). Semiotics also proposes that a sign has its denotation and connotation. The denotation of a sign is its literal or dictionary meaning (the word/image "horse" denotes a large solid-hoofed domesticated mammal); and this denotation signifies

connotation (i.e., what is associated with the word or image of a horse, such as strength or beauty). Barthes' theory also suggests that denotations and connotations are arranged into ideological meaning, called myth. It also postulates that the signified is represented metaphorically by the signifier. This theory offers an important window to comprehend the symbolic and cultural significance of livestock in Jordanian proverbs. According to this theory, the proverbs in our study can be viewed as a mythological construct that encodes our cultural meanings and values. In the study of livestock-related proverbs in Jordan, livestock serve as a signifier (denoting their shapes, sizes, habits and their socio-economic role), and signified at the same time (connoting broader associative meanings, like strength, wealth, status, etc.) For instance, a proverb depicting a mule as "stubborn" may literally describe the behavior of this animal, but may metaphorically criticize a person as being obstinate and hard to change. Barthes' theory can show how proverbs employ cultural symbols to express complex thoughts, attitudes, and ideas. This theory, although somewhat old, still hold a great value as the two levels introduced by Barthes (denotation and connotation) cannot be bound by time. This theory is also highly interested in how culture builds meaning which is also boundless. Cultures have been constructing meaning and they will continue doing so.

III. METHODS

This study is primarily a descriptive qualitative analysis of livestock-related proverbs in Jordan. However, it uses some quantitative data to support its analysis. We have confined our study to this group of animals because the number of animal proverbs in Jordanian Arabic is large, which makes it hard to explore them all in one study.

A. Data Collection

The data were extracted from two published books about Jordanian proverbs: Al-Amad's (1987) *Jordanian Popular Proverbs* and Alazizi's (2004) *Dictionary of Jordanian Customs, Dialects and Unusual Things*. They are among the most widely referenced books on popular folkloric proverbs in Jordanian culture. They also have excellent potential as repositories of proverbs and their meaning. Another data collection method used in the study was a survey test distributed among ten Jordanian people to elicit livestock-related proverbs from Jordanian folklore. The participants were asked to provide the authors with livestock-related proverbs they are familiar with. They provided forty- six proverbs, from which 9 were excluded either because they were unrelated to livestock or because they were not proverbs. The other thirty- seven proverbs were similar to those sourced from the books. A total of two hundred and thirteen proverbs related to livestock were collected and used in this study.

B. Data Analysis

This study adopted Barthes' (1957) semiotic theory as a guide for its data analysis. It also used Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis approach. We analyzed the relationship between the animal and human domains while investigating the meanings and messages communicated by the livestock-related proverbs. The meanings expressed by the livestock in the proverbs were first classified into categories of negative and positive connotations or values. Under each one of these two categories, sub-thematic categories representing the main themes were presented. The authors simultaneously conducted the data analysis. To validate the meanings expressed in the proverbs, the authors held a discussion group with six native Jordanians between 50 and 70 years old. This group were quite familiar with the use of proverbs in Jordanian Arabic. They were all friends and family members of the authors. The authors would give them the proverb and ask about its meaning and usage. The group discussion occurred in a friendly atmosphere.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The data analysis shows that livestock-related proverbs in Jordanian culture can express both positive and negative cultural meanings and values. In the subsequent sections, these proverbs are classified into two main categories: positive traits and negative traits. Each category is further sub-classified into a number of related traits and qualities. Illustrative examples representing each category were selected randomly for discussion purposes.

A. Positive Traits

The analysis of the proverbs revealed positive symbolism for the livestock they use. The positive traits represented by livestock in Jordanian proverbs were categorized into the meanings and values shown in Table 1 below:

TABLE 1
POSITIVE TRAITS EXPRESSED BY LIVESTOCK IN JORDANIAN PROVERBS

<i>Animal</i>	<i>Horse</i>	<i>Camel</i>	<i>Cow/bull</i>	<i>Sheep/Goat</i>	<i>Donkey</i>	<i>Mule</i>	<i>Total</i>
Traits							
Distinguished Status	11	9	4	----	1	1	26
Skill	8	1	2	----	1	----	12
Uniqueness	4	----	1	5	----	----	10
Strength	2	6	----	----	----	1	9
Patience and Endurance	1	1	----	1	3	3	9
Total	26	17	7	6	5	5	66

(a). Distinguished Status

Certain animals, such as the camel and horse, have held a prominent position in Jordanian society as indicated by their recognized status and positive aspects associated with them in popular Jordanian proverbs. The purpose of these proverbs is not to praise these animals but to communicate a more profound meaning by alluding to the positive values inherited in society. The camel has held a deep-rooted value in peoples' lives, particularly in the Arab world (Al-Maalouf, 1985). Thus, a strong relationship has been established between Arabs and the camel. This kind of relationship is derived from the camel's unique traits, which enable it to endure a hot and arid environment. That is why it is called "the ship of the desert".

For example, Jordanians praised the camel, as in the proverb *إن عشقت عشق قمر، وإن سرقت اسرق جمل* / 'in i' shiqt, i' shag gamar, win saragt, isrig jamal/ "if you love, love a moon; if you steal, steal a camel." The signifiers in this proverb are the "moon" and the "camel", whereas the signified are the "moon's prominent place and the camel's high status". The proverb implies that if theft must occur, it should target something of great worth. It also urges people to aim for the highest in love and ambition. On the cultural level, this proverb criticizes those who cannot recognize the true value of things because of their weak evaluation and poor judgment.

This positive value has also appeared in the following proverb describing noble women, *مأصلة زي الفرس الأصيلة* /ma'šala zay il-faras il-'ašilih/ "She is as noble as a genuine horse". In this proverb, the signifier is the "horse" and the signified is "the nobility feature of horses". Horses have several important features that the Arabs praised. Horses are characterized by strength, speed, beauty, and nobility. Accordingly, a girl known for good conduct is compared to horse of a genuine pedigree that symbolizes beauty, obedience, and nobility. The proverb highlights the importance of high status as an extremely positive value in Jordanian society.

(b). Skill

Some animals are strongly associated with extraordinary skills in Jordanian proverbs such as *اللي ما بقدر ع الفرس وعليقها* /illi ma bigdar 'al-faras w-'alīgiha b-jannib 'an ṭarīqha/ "He who cannot handle a horse and its brambles should stay out of its way". The "horse" and "its brambles" symbolize the meaning of "having the skill to handle a difficult situation". This proverb emphasizes the importance of having the skill to handle a horse in battles, and those who lack the necessary skills to do so should step aside. Additionally, those who cannot face challenges or hold responsibilities should not get involved. Culture-wise, this proverb conforms to Arab wisdom that leadership and commitment are only for skilled and prepared people.

The camel also has his share of this positive value in the Jordanian proverbs. It is symbolized by some proverbs as experienced and professional in handling matters, as in *ماحد بيصرف وين يحط رجله غير الجمل* /maḥad bi'raf wēn yīḥuṭ rijluh ghēr il-jamal/ "Only the camel knows where to tread." Denotatively, this proverb means that only the camel, because of its unique skills and abilities, knows when and where to step in a challenging situation. "Camels" signify "experience and skill" as they are well-familiar with the desert landscapes and the best places to place their feet. This saying suggests that personal experience and skills are very important in making successful decisions in life. It is a semiotic structure that emphasizes cultural values of expertise, skill, knowledge, and self-reliance.

(c). Uniqueness

Uniqueness is a positive value depicted in the data, emphasizing that only certain livestock can perform specific actions better than others. These livestock include calf, camel, sheep, and goat. For example, calves, the offspring of a cow, are used in proverbs to symbolize self-reliance. The proverb *ما بخرث لبلاد الا عجولها* /ma biḥruth li-blād illā 'jūlha/ "No one ploughs the land better than its calves" semantically means that no one can serve the country better than its people. This proverb highlights citizens' loyalty, skill and responsibility to contribute to their country's prosperity. From a cultural perspective, this proverb expresses the wisdom that those raised in a land are best suited to work in it and that outside interference to control a land is refused.

Jordanian proverbs have also assigned a positive value of uniqueness to sheep, depicting them as symbols of distinct intelligence. For example, the proverb: *مثل الجدي يرضع من فوق اللجام* /mithl il-jidy yirḍa' min fūq ilijām/ "Like a buckling sucking from above the bridle," is used for someone who is out of control. The "buckling" and "bridle" are the signifiers, and the signified is "the cleverness of children in their early years"; they learn things even before they mature. Semantically, this proverb shows some children's distinction and superiority over their peers in comprehending issues and their meanings. On a cultural level, the proverb warns against the rebellion of some children in their situations because they understand what is going on around them without boundaries, perceiving matters with maturity and awareness.

(d). Strength

Another positive quality represented by animal proverbs in Jordanian culture is strength. This value is symbolized by animals like the horse and the camel, for example, *فلان ينح جمل يقوم جمل* /fulān yinikh jamal ygūm jamal/ "So-and-so kneels like a camel and rises like one". This proverb portrays the camel as a symbol of strength, power, and resilience, highlighting its ability to bear and do hard work. Semantically, the proverb depicts strength and resilience in certain men, "a man behaves like a man in all situations". In Jordanian culture, a person may be compared to a camel in this way to emphasize their ability to prevail through tough situations.

Jordanian proverbs also portray the camel as a formidable opponent. For example, they say *اللي ما يقدر ع الجمل يعض البردعه* /'ili ma yi'dar 'a-l-jamal yi'uḍ il-barda'a/ "If you cannot take on the camel, you bite the saddle". The "camel" and "saddle" signify "the powerless entity that cannot challenge a stronger opponent", so instead, they direct their anger against the weak. This is akin to the English proverb, "If you cannot fight the lion, you kick the cub." This proverb stresses the power of a man whose dignity cannot be undermined, often leading to baseless accusations against him. In Jordanian culture, this proverb aims to deter anyone who dares to challenge strong and resilient individuals because such challenges are a waste of time.

(e). *Patience and Endurance*

Endurance is expressed in the proverbs portraying the camel, bull, and sheep. The camel in Jordanian culture is regarded as a symbol of endurance. A man who can bear hardships and endure them is referred to as *جمل المحامل* / jamal il-maḥāmil/ "The camel of all burdens". The signifier here is the "camel", and the signified is "a man enduring heavy burdens, enduring huge responsibilities, being relied on by people and facing challenges with patience". This proverb presents a unique image of a man's endurance and patience, just like the camel. Culturally, Bedouins, in particular, hold a great value for the camels, which stems from their ability to carry heavy loads and endure long journeys. Thus, this proverb emphasizes endurance as a noble value essential for societal harmony. It also signifies admiration and praise for unselfish, giving, and enduring people.

Among the animals associated with this positive trait is also the bull. One proverb states that *ما بُصْبِرْ ع الجور الا الثور* /ma buṣbur 'al-jūr illā i-thūr/ "Only the bull endures oppression with patience". The "bull" signifies "a person who patiently endures hardships". Semantically, the proverb illustrates the ability of some men to endure and remain patient through hard and exhausting life situations. This proverb praises strong individuals who withstand hardships with patience. It also empowers patient men to lead matters successfully, as patience and endurance are considered great values essential for our well-being.

B. *Negative Traits*

The findings show that livestock-related proverbs express several negative connotations. These proverbs often criticize negative traits in Jordanian society by symbolically associating them to certain animals, representing individuals who exhibit these characteristics. These negative qualities are classified into the categories shown in Table 2:

TABLE 2
NEGATIVE TRAITS EXPRESSED BY LIVESTOCK IN JORDANIAN PROVERBS

Animal \ Trait	Camel	Horse	Cow/bull	Sheep/Goat	Donkey	Mule	Total
Worthlessness	2	5	5	2	14	-----	28
Poor judgment	9	2	3	5	7	2	28
Foolishness	4	1	5	5	6	3	24
Laziness	8	1	4	1	2	----	16
Mockery	----	1	2	4	5	-----	12
Stubbornness	1	-----	1	1	2	5	10
Baseness	1	----	1	----	5	2	9
Submissiveness	1	----	----	2	4	2	9
Bad taste	3	----	----	2	2	----	7
Resentment	1	----	2	----	----	1	4
Total	30	10	23	22	47	15	147

(a). *Worthlessness*

The findings show that livestock can be associated with worthlessness in some proverbs. These negative livestock proverbs are used to criticize actions and behaviours done by some Jordanians. The negative image of the horse in Jordanian proverbs is almost rare, except in some horses, which are considered inferior in ability and status. They are described in some proverbs as *مثل حصان الحماشي يصهل بلا فائدة* /mithl iḥṣān il-ḥamāshi yiṣḥal bala faydih/ "Like the Hamashi's horse, it neighs to no avail." The signifier here is the "hamashi's horse", and the signified is 'nothing but talk'. The proverb describes individuals who talk, complain, and brag but perform no actions. On the cultural level, the proverb criticizes people who put so much effort into their work without being productive. It also urges people to perform tasks silently because Jordanians favour action over talk. This proverb advises the Jordanian elderly to young generations to be committed, reliable, and productive.

The donkey has also been portrayed as being worthless in Jordanian culture. The donkey mainly holds low value in Jordanian proverbs, as it represents failure, dumbness, and laziness; for example, *يا مَرَحِبَا بِالْحَمَارِ ظَلَنَ أَدَانِ جَوْشُهُ* /Yā marḥabā bil-ḥmār ṭallan 'adhān jhūshuh/ "Welcome the donkey whose big ears have surfaced". The signifiers in this proverb are the "donkey" and its "big ears", which signify "stupidity, foolishness, and failure". The donkey's ears cannot go unnoticed because they are big, making them a symbol for something undeniable. The phrase "have surfaced"

implies that the presence of trouble, foolishness, that are very hard to deny. This proverb suggests that individuals should contribute to the well-being of their society, not like a donkey who never achieved anything successfully.

(b). *Poor Judgment*

Some of these animals are associated with poor judgment. In this regard, Jordanian proverbs show a negative image of the camel, describing it as a reckless and disorganized animal; for instance, *زَي احراثُ الجَمالِ اللِّي بِخَرْتُهُ تُدْبِكُهُ* /zay iħrāth li-jmāl il-y btuħruth tudubukh/ "Like a camel's ploughing - what it furrows, it tramples." In this proverb, the "camel" and the "trampling" represent a "reckless person who destroys what they have established", much like the camel that ploughs the land and then tramples on it, destroying their work. The Jordanian society criticizes those who lack reasoning and precision in performing their job, encouraging them to have management, care, and wisdom in doing their tasks.

Cows have also received their share of criticism in Jordanian proverbs, linking them to destruction and poor judgment. For example, the proverb *التَم الاعوج من الثور الكبير* /it-tilim il-'awaġ min ith-thūr il-kabīr/ "The ruined bend comes from the big bull." is used to indicate that a major mistake can come from a person in authority and power. The bend is a straight line left by a plough in the ground. The signifiers are the "bend" and the "bull", which may signify "mistakes" and "people in power", respectively. Culturally, the proverb depicts those in power who, instead of correcting problems, complicate things and cause more harm and destruction. It may also show that the powerful forces in society, such as "bulls," often cause damage (ruined paths) in ways that are taken as part of their natural traits.

(c). *Foolishness*

Foolishness is another negative value symbolized by livestock in Jordanian proverbs, especially the donkey, mule, and sheep. For example, a mule remains a symbol of mockery, even if characterized by strength, toughness, and patience. It is said that *الجسم جسم بغلة والعقل عقل سخلة* /il-jisim jisim baghla wal-'aql 'aql sakhlah / "The body is that of a mule, but the brain is that of a lamb." The signifier is the "mule" and "lamb". The "mule" signifies "someone who has a big body". The "lamb" signifies "innocence, childhood, little brain". This proverb refers to those who are mature but whose behaviours do not reflect their adult body. Culture-wise, it targets unhinged individuals in society, although they have large size and mature age. Society is a staunch advocate of the value of wisdom and soberness. In sum, physical strength is not enough; one should also have mental acuity to act.

In Jordanian proverbs, foolishness is always associated with donkeys; it is a default symbol for donkeys because they are fools and easy to deceive. A Jordanian proverb says *ذلك يا حمار تا يجيك العليق* /dhalak yā ħmār tā yijik il-'ulīq/ "Stay as you are until the brambles come your way". Here, the signifier is the "donkey", and the signified is "the one who gets deceived and still builds hopes over people's lies". Culturally, this proverb refers to foolish people who always fall for others' empty promises. This proverb serves as criticism to individuals easily deceived by empty words. It targets deception and simultaneously rejects foolishness to reinforce the value of righteousness in Jordanian society. From another perspective, this proverb motivates people to work hard, stay vigilant, and overcome laziness.

(d). *Laziness*

Jordanian proverbs criticize society by portraying an excuse-maker and indolent person as a camel limping on its ear or lip, so they said: *الجمال بعرج من اذنه* /il-jamal bi'ruj min 'idhnuh / "A camel limping on its ear". This proverb metaphorically uses the image of a camel, often associated with strength and endurance, and compares it with the image of a limp, signifying weakness or disability. The "camel" and "limp" depict "strong people who keep looking for unconvincing excuses to procrastinate". Semantically speaking, this proverb criticizes deceit, laziness, and pretending, as there is no direct relationship between "ears" and "limping". The proverb likens someone pretending to avoid work to a camel limping on its ear. Jordanian society criticizes indolent people and exposes their weak excuses because they do not align with its values. This proverb also suggests that people should use their resources wisely and effectively to face challenges.

The following example also illustrates how cows are portrayed as a symbol of laziness: *البقرة المربوطة ما بتغلبش حالها* /il-baqara il-marbūta ma bitghalbish ħālha/ "The tied cow does not tire itself." This proverb semantically denote that the cow is tied up and, thus, cannot move or put unnecessary effort. It is physically restrained, so it remains passive and avoids unnecessary activity, whereas, culturally, the proverb highlights the negative consequences of laziness. It implies that one should not blame the circumstances for the unfortunate situation they are in. It also urges people not to give up, but instead stay strong and fight for what is best for them.

(e). *Mockery*

The goat, bull, and donkey represent mockery in the data. For example, *العنز الجربا تشرب من راس النبع* /il-'anz il-jarba tishrab min rās in-nab' / "The mangy goat drinks from the mouth of the spring". At the literal level, this proverb describes a diseased goat drinking directly from the best place in a spring. This image shows an inane creature accessing a valuable resource. The signifiers here are the "mangy goat" and the "mouth of the spring"; they symbolize "untrustworthiness" and "prestige and high status", respectively. The proverb implies social discontent and dissatisfaction with injustice and discrimination and condemns corruption and social inequity.

Donkeys are shown as a symbol of mockery and lousiness since they cannot differentiate good from bad. Therefore, Jordanians ironically say, *شو عرف الحمير بشم الورد* /shū 'arraf il-ḥamīr b-sham il-ward/"What do donkeys know about roses smelling?" The signifier is the "donkey" and the "roses", and the signified is the "person who lacks good judgment and sophistication". Semantically, this saying applies to people incapable of discerning right and wrong in any aspect of life. Culturally, the proverb targets people who misjudge and underestimate beautiful things.

(f). *Stubbornness*

This negative value is closely associated with animals such as the mule and donkey. For example, the mule inherits the endurance of a donkey and the strength of a horse from both its parents, the donkey and the horse. A mule is an animal that is often used metaphorically to denote stubbornness, as in the phrase: *عنيد عند البغل* /'anīd 'ind il-baghul/.

"As stubborn as a mule". Some proverbs condemn the stubbornness of a mule, an animal whose malice can reach dangerous levels. One saying goes: *ما تستكثر الرفس من البغل النجس* /ma tistakthir ir-rafs min il-baghul in-najs/"Do not be surprised if a filthy mule kicks too much." This proverb applies to those of evil nature, for no matter how seemingly good a "mule" appears, one must always foresee a "kick" coming from it. Semantically speaking, "mule" here refers to the "wickedly stubborn individuals" of the real world and its "kick" to the type of "harm" these people bring others. Culturally speaking, the proverb focuses on the people who hurt others due to their stubbornness and insistence on inflicting harm due to their corrupt nature. Consequently, this reinforces the importance of forbearance and leniency and dismisses stubbornness that harms others in a community.

Bulls are also used in proverbs to depict stubbornness. For example, they say *نقول ثور يقول احلبوه* /ingūl thūr yiqūl ihlibhūh /"We say it is a bull, yet they ask to milk it". This proverb describes stubborn people who refuse reason and insist on committing the same mistakes or those who stick to their opinions and defy reality. Semantically, the proverb illogically uses a bull, a male livestock that cannot produce milk, yet stubborn people insist on trying to milk it. Culturally, this proverb symbolizes stubbornness, stupidity, ignorance, and waste of time and effort.

(g). *Baseness*

Baseness refers to a lack of honour or morals (Cambridge Dictionary Online). It describes dishonest and shameful actions or behaviours. The Jordanian society abhors all that contradicts its noble traditions and teachings and strongly criticizes those who deviate from its moral values. Hence, their proverbs depict such acts of baseness as a mangy camel. One saying goes: *الناقاة الجربا يطئها أهلها* /il-nāqah al-jarbā yuṭlubha ahil-hā/"Only its owners bear the burden of the mangy camel." The *naaqah* is a female camel. The "mangy camel" symbolizes "ill-behavior". Semantically, this proverb compares an ill-mannered woman to a mangy camel. In Jordanian culture, this proverb emphasizes the importance of adhering to customs and traditions and condemns any deviation from them. If a member of a society behaves dishonourably, their close family are responsible for handling the situation to protect the family's reputation. The proverb also urges the parents to prevent their children from committing immorality as they are responsible for their misbehaviour.

The donkey is also used as a symbol of vileness, low- status, and ill-manner in Jordanian proverbs, as in *الحمار حمار ولو بين الخيول سار* /li-ḥmār iḥmār walaw sār bēn ili-khyūl/"A donkey remains a donkey even if he walks among horses." This proverb literally conveys that no matter the environment, a donkey remains a donkey. It implies that a person's inherent nature does not change, regardless of the people they interact with or the higher status of those around them. In this expression, the "donkey" represents someone who is innately "base or of low- status," while the "horse" represents a "superior social class." Therefore, no matter how much a person tries to link themselves with people of prestige and high status, their inherent nature remains the same, emphasizing social hierarchy.

(h). *Submissiveness*

Submissiveness is another negative value portrayed by livestock in Jordanian proverbs. This value is highly rejected and despised in Jordanian culture, which criticizes people for unthinkingly following others by comparing them to a donkey that obeys its owner, as in *حمار تركبته ولا خسان تقوده* /iḥmār trikbuh wala ḥiṣān tgūdoh/"A donkey you ride is better than a horse you lead". This proverb explains how a donkey can be easily led, but a horse can be difficult to control. In Jordanian culture, leaders who surround themselves with submissive individuals and sycophants are strongly criticized. This proverb implicitly urges those in power to hire people with strong character and decision-making abilities, like the horse.

Jordanian folkloric proverbs also criticize people who surrender their affairs to others despite their intellect. Thus, they describe them as a large camel led by a small child. The proverb says: *جمال كبير لكن يقوده عيل صغير* /jamal kabīr lākin ygūduh 'ayel ṣaghīr/"The camel is mighty, but a small child leads it." This proverb constitutes a paradox. A "big camel" signaling "strength, power and status" is led by "a small, weak, immature child". This proverb emphasizes that ability is the key factor, not size. It also condemns those who fail to activate and use their intellect; instead, they allow others, even with less power and competence, to control them. It also argues that having physical or intellectual strength is worthless if not used properly.

(i). *Bad Taste*

Some animals in Jordanian society, such as the camel, donkey, and bull, have been characterized as having bad taste. They were used in popular proverbs to reflect and apply this trait to social behaviours. The camel, for instance, is used mockingly to represent ignorance and bad taste, as in *ما يشبع الجمل إلا الخرفيش* /*mā bishbi' il-jamal illā al-khurfīsh*/ "Nothing satisfies a camel like milk thistle." The signifiers here are the "camel" and "milk thistle," a thorny annual winter plant. The signified is a "gluttonous person who is never satisfied" except with "hardships". Semantically, the proverb reveals some individuals' vulgarity, ignorance, lack of good taste, and crude eating manners. Culturally, it critiques ignorant individuals while celebrating the values of dignity and self-respect, which are highly cherished in Jordanian culture.

Jordanian popular proverbs have portrayed the donkey a symbol of ignorance and bad taste, as it cannot distinguish between what is beneficial and what is not. They say mockingly: *شو فهم الحمير بأكل الزنجبيل* /*shū fahham al-ḥamīr bi-akl al-zanjabīl*/ "How can donkeys appreciate the taste of ginger?" The signifier here is the "donkey" and the "ginger", while the signified is an "ignorant person" who lacks appreciation for "good things". This proverb describes people who attempt to engage in something not suiting their nature or temperament and those who cannot enjoy the value of things. The proverb also suggests that not everyone fits for every task and that some jobs require specific knowledge and experience.

(j). *Resentment*

Resentment is a feeling of profound hate, anger, and bitterness against someone else due to unfair treatment or insult (Strawson, 1962). Popular Jordanian proverbs have criticized certain individuals for being resentful. Some of these proverbs use animals as symbols of resentment, a dominant characteristic in camels (Al-Maalouf, 1985). It is a metaphor for a vindictive individual who does not forgive or forget. They say: *فلان حقود مثل الجمل* /*fulān ḥaqūd mithl al-jamal*/ "So and so is resentful like a camel." In this example, the signifier is the "camel", while the signified is a "resentful person". This proverb indicates that some people hold grudges against others like camels do. It also targets people who resent others and refuse to forgive, depicting resentment as a trait condemned by Jordanian society.

Mules are also a symbol of resentment in Jordanian proverbs, as in *لا تقط من وراء بغل، ولا من قدام حاكم* /*lā tuqluṭ min warā baghul, walā min giddām ḥākim*/ "Do not approach from behind a mule, nor from in front of a ruler." Here, the signifier is the "mule", while the signified is a "resentful person who hates others". This proverb warns against the harm caused by people in power, likening it to the danger of passing behind a mule, which might kick unexpectedly. Culturally, the proverb criticizes individuals who resent and harm others; it also praises forgiveness and tolerance as values society appreciates.

V. CONCLUSION

This study has investigated the symbolism of livestock in Jordanian proverbs from a linguistic and cultural viewpoint. The study's findings have indicated that livestock proverbs significantly contribute to shaping Jordanian society, reflecting the nation's mindset and unique cultural characteristics. This particular conclusion agrees with Alster (1993) and Gordon (1968), who indicated that proverbs intentionally use animal symbolism to communicate perspectives on life and criticize human behaviour. The findings have also revealed that livestock, mainly camels, sheep, goats, cows, horses, donkeys, mules, and bulls, are used in the proverb to signify both positive and negative meanings and values in Jordanian society. This study has identified the following positive traits in livestock-related proverbs: distinguished status, skill, uniqueness, strength, and endurance and patience. It has also been identified that the following negative traits are embodied in these proverbs, including worthlessness, poor judgment, foolishness, laziness, mockery, stubbornness, baseness, submissiveness, bad taste, and resentment. The findings have shown that livestock-related proverbs express more pejorative connotations than positive ones. Livestock are more commonly used in a derogatory way. This finding agrees with the findings of Domínguez (2006), Rodríguez (2009), Yusupova and Kazmina (2015), and Yinggang and Xuena (2015). This study has also indicated that animal names are culture-specific, supporting Nakhavali's (2011), Yusupova and Kazmina's (2015), and Al-Harashseh and Al-Rousan's (2020) findings. Finally, this study recommends that a comparative study of livestock proverbs between Arabic and English be conducted in the future. This study unravels the linguistic and cultural similarities and differences in the use of such proverbs, the attitudes of people towards livestock, and people's behaviour. It also shows how these two cultures use animals to express meanings, such as wisdom, worthlessness, pride, or stubbornness.

REFERENCES

- [1] Aasland, E. (2012). The function of proverbs in discourse. The case of a Mexican transnational social network by Elías Domínguez Barajas. ed. Joshua A. Fishman. New York: De Gruyter Mouton. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, 22(3), 273–275. DOI:10.1111/j.1548-1395.2012.01131.x
- [2] Alazizi, R. (2004). *Qāmōs ilṣādāt wa lahadzāt wa lṭawābid alṭurdunijja* [Dictionary of Jordanian customs, dialects and unusual things] (1st ed.). Amman, Jordan: Ministry of Culture Publications.
- [3] Al-Amad, H. (1987). *ṭalamṭāl afaṭbījja alṭurdunijja* [Jordanian popular proverbs]. Amman, Jordan: Ministry of Culture and Youth.

- [4] Al-Harahsheh, A., & Al-Rousan, R. (2020). Animal names used to address people in Jordanian spoken Arabic. *Dirasat: Human and Social Sciences*, 47(1), 328–336.
- [5] Al-Maalouf, A. (1985). *Mu'jam al-Ḥayawān* [Animal dictionary (Arabic-English)] (3rd ed.). Beirut: Al-Raed Al Arabi Publication House.
- [6] Al-Rabee', B. Y., & Al-Khanji, R. (2024). The metaphor of the animals' names (wolf and sheep) in Arabic and English proverbs: A comparative study. *Jordanian Educational Journal*, 9(2), 70–87. <https://doi.org/10.46515/jaes.v9i2.684>.
- [7] Al Rousan, R., & Shatnawi, H. (2023). The portrayal of women in Jordanian proverbial expressions: A thematic analysis. *Lebende Sprachen*, 68(2), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1515/les-2022-1040>.
- [8] Al-Shahabi, M. (2003). *Al-Shahabi dictionary of agricultural sciences terminology* (5th ed.). Beirut: Lebanon Publishers.
- [9] Alster, B. (1993). Proverbs from ancient Mesopotamia: Their history and social implications. *Proverbium: Yearbook of International Proverb Scholarship*, 10, 1–19. University of Vermont.
- [10] Barthes, R. (1988). *The semiotic challenge* (R. Howard, Trans.). New York: Hill and Wang.
- [11] Blaga, L. (2003). Studiul proverbului [The study of proverb]. In *Zări și etape* [Horizons and stages] (pp. 310–312). București: Humanitas.
- [12] Britannica. (n.d.). *Livestock*. <https://www.britannica.com/animal/livestock>
- [13] Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.
- [14] *Cambridge Online Dictionary*. (n.d.). <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/>
- [15] Dominguez, P., & Zawisławska, M. (2006). Animal names used as insults and derogation in Polish and Spanish. *Philologia Hispalensis*, 20, 137–174.
- [16] Gordon, E. I. (1968). *Sumerian proverbs: Glimpses of everyday life in ancient Mesopotamia*. New York: Greenwood Press Publishers.
- [17] Griffin, E., Ledbetter, A., & Sparks, G. (2012). *A first look at communication theory* (8th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- [18] Hagos, S. (2015). The portrayal of women in Tigrigna proverbs and proverbial expressions: The stereotypical beliefs and behavioral tendencies. *International Journal of English Literature and Culture*, 3(6), 183–189.
- [19] Hernadi, P., & Steen, F. (1999). The tropical landscape of proverbs: A crossdisciplinary travelogue. *Style*, 33(1), 1–20.
- [20] Honeck, R. (1997). *A proverb in mind: The cognitive science of proverbial wit and wisdom*. USA: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- [21] Ilyassova, L., Latanova, R., Narmukhametova, N., & Tazbulatova, G. (2019). Common features of Russian and English proverbs: Functional aspects of intercultural communication. *Translation and Interpreting Issues*, 6, 104–112.
- [22] Krikmann, A. (2001). Proverbs on animal identity: Typological memoirs. *Folklore*, 17, 7–84.
- [23] Marvin, D. E. (1922). *Antiquity of proverbs*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons.
- [24] Mieder, W. (2004). *Proverbs: A handbook*. Westport: Greenwood Press.
- [25] Nakhavali, F. (2011). A semantic and cultural study of animal expressions in English and Persian. In *ASEE Annual Conference & Exposition* (pp. 22–97).
- [26] Rodriguez, I. L. (2009). Of women, bitches, chickens and vixens: Animal metaphors for women in English and Spanish. *Cultura, Lenguaje y Representación: Revista de Estudios Culturales de la Universitat*, 1(7), 77–100.
- [27] Sibarani, R. (2004). *Antropologi linguistik*. [Anthropolinguistics]. Medan: Penerbit Poda.
- [28] Strawson, P. S. (1962). Freedom and resentment. *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 48, 1–25.
- [29] Umidjanovna, M. (2020). Proverbs and its functions. *Nauka i obrazovanie segodnja*, 4(51), 45–47.
- [30] Utebaev, T., & Sarsenbaeva, Z. (2023). Linguoculturological analysis of proverbs. *Berlin Studies Transnational Journal of Science and Humanities*, 1(1.5), 110–115.
- [31] Wang, Y., & Xuena, C. (2015). A study on cultural connotation of animal words in English and Chinese. In *International Conference on Education, Management and Computing Technology (ICEMCT-15)* (pp. 57–60).
- [32] Yusupova, L., & Kazmina, O. (2015). Pejorative connotation of proverbs and sayings with zoonym in the Russian, German and Tatar languages. *Journal of Sustainable Development*, 8(4), 284–291.
- [33] Zawahreh, A. (2022). Tawthīf al-ḥayawān fī shi'r al-Imām al-Shāfi'i [The use of animals in the poetry of Imam Al-Shāfi'i]. *Al-Zaytoonah University of Jordan Journal for Human and Social Studies*, 3(3), 61–77.

Alualdeen Algharibeh is an Associate Professor of Linguistics in the Department of Arabic Language and Literature at Yarmouk University. He holds a Ph.D. from the University of Jordan. He has authored over thirty-five research papers and serves as an editorial board member for seventeen peer-reviewed academic journals. His research interests include Discourse Analysis, Phonetics, Semantics, Dialectology, Semiotics, and Syntax and Morphology.

Rafat Al Rousan is an Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics at the Department of Translation, Yarmouk University, Jordan. He received his PhD in Applied Linguistics in 2013. He has taught several courses in Linguistics and Translation, including Discourse Analysis, Semantics, Pragmatics, Sociolinguistics, Legal Translation, and Religious Translation, among many others. His research interests include sociolinguistics, Pragmatics, Discourse Analysis, Computer-mediated Communication, and translation studies. He has published a number of papers on linguistics and translation studies in Scopus-indexed journals.

Yousuf Aljawarneh is a faculty member in the Department of Arabic Language at the Faculty of Arts, Yarmouk University. He holds a Ph.D. in Linguistics and Grammar from Yarmouk University. His research interests include Linguistic Studies and the examination of Linguistic Heritage Texts.

Ala' AlKhalafat is a faculty member in the Department of Arabic Language, Faculty of Arts, Yarmouk University. She holds a Ph.D. in Syntax from Mutah University. Her research interests include Syntax, Morphology, phonetics, Dialectology, and Lexicography.