

**THE USE OF ALLUSION AND PRECEDENT IN CHILDREN'S FOLK SONGS**

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**Abstract**

This article investigates the artistic, semantic and lingvocultural characteristics of allusion in children's folklore songs on a comparative-analytical basis. The research object comprises children's folk songs from the oral traditions of the English, Russian and Uzbek peoples. The article examines the function of allusion in folkloric texts, its role in preserving historical and cultural memory, transmitting national values from generation to generation, and shaping children's worldview. Furthermore, the artistic expression of the people's customs, mythological beliefs, and religious and historical conceptions through allusion is analysed. The study comparatively examines allusive units in English folklore that refer to historical events and characters, mythopoetic images in Russian children's songs, and allusions to ceremonies and folk beliefs in Uzbek folklore. The relationship between allusion and literary devices such as metaphor, symbol, precedent and simile is also analysed. The article demonstrates that in children's folklore songs, allusion not only serves an aesthetic function but also has an educational significance, acting as a means of instilling national culture, moral values, and social experience in children. The research findings have significant theoretical and practical importance for scientific research in the fields of folkloristics, linguoculturology, and textual linguistics.

**Key words:** precedent names, precedent expressions, precedent situations, precedent texts, allusion, historical allusion, religious allusion, mythological allusion, cultural allusion, literary allusion.

**Introduction**

Children's folk songs are priceless gems that have been handed down from generation to generation for centuries. These folk examples are among the oldest and most multifaceted layers, reflecting each nation's aspirations, history, religious beliefs and everyday way of life. Moreover, children's folk songs possess not only didactic but also artistic and aesthetic value. In this type of folk material, allusion – a reference to a specific historical figure, mythological character or event – often occurs. The word allusion comes from Latin and means “reference”. In literary texts, allusion is the art of referring to a historical event or person without mentioning their name. In children's folk songs, allusion carries a more symbolic meaning. Likewise, onomastics can also serve as the basis for allusion in children's folk songs. As the Russian linguist M.V. Kalinkin noted, any name is a unique “vehicle” that conveys historical, cultural, geographical, and connotative information to the text.<sup>1</sup>

**Research methods**

The research methodology is based on comparative-analytical, linguo-cultural, and semantic-pragmatic approaches. In the article, allusive units in English, Russian and Uzbek children's folklore songs were selected and their aesthetic function and semantic characteristics were examined from a comparative perspective. During the research, methods of describing folklore texts, contextual analysis, interpretation, and linguistic-semantic analysis were used. Furthermore, the historical, mythological, religious, and cultural sources of the allusions were identified, and their connection to the collective memory of the people was analysed from a linguacultural perspective. The study also examined the interrelationship between allusion and

<sup>1</sup> Kalinkin, M. V. From Literary Onomastics to Poetonymology // Logos Onomastics. — 2006. — No. 1. — P. 84.

precedent units, symbols, metaphors, and folk imagery in folk songs. The comparative method was used to identify common and nationally-cultural aspects in children's folk songs from various peoples. The article also utilised methods of generalising theoretical sources and of selecting and classifying folklore samples. The research findings serve to illuminate the aesthetic, educational and cultural-communicative functions of allusion in children's folklore.

### Literature review

In linguistics, the phenomenon of allusion and precedent has recently become one of the phenomena attracting interest among linguists. Allusion and precedent units have long been a significant research aspect of linguoculturology, as they clearly reveal the integration and interconnection between language and culture. Precedent names are widely known proper nouns that are used not to directly refer to a specific person (situation, city, organisation, etc.) in a text, but rather as a cultural signifier or symbol of certain qualities, events, or destinies. As units of language and speech, precedent names are considered representatives of precedent concepts. — that is, mental-verbal units used in the process of depicting, categorising, conceptualising and evaluating reality, as well as in the formation of a worldview and its individual components.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, precedent units are taken from famous works, films or historical events and are regarded as precedent phenomena. According to Y. Karaulova, a precedent phenomenon is an event that is cognitively and emotionally significant to a particular individual, yet at the same time transcends personal boundaries, being well known to those around them—both past and present generations. Furthermore, reference to such events is regularly renewed in the discourse of the speaker.<sup>3</sup>

The precedent phenomenon is a concept that encompasses precedent names, precedent texts, precedent situations and precedent expressions. According to the modern theory of precedent, the following types of precedent phenomena are distinguished:

1. Precedent names – are interpreted as individual names associated with a widely recognised precedent text or precedent situation. Such a name is a complex sign, because in the communication process it does not denote the referent directly, but rather the set of primary (differential) signs and qualities associated with that name.

A precedent name may consist of a single component or several components, but in both cases it expresses a single concept. Many proper nouns are reinforced by vivid attributive descriptors. Such attributes make the associated image more precise and impactful and are often used metaphorically.

2. Precedent expressions are semantically complete and independent units of discourse that are repeated in speech, and can appear in both predicative and non-predicative forms. It is considered a complex sign, as its overall meaning is broader than the sum of the simple lexical meanings of its components. Precedent expressions include famous quotations as well as proverbs.

Such expressions often serve to express or characterise the precedent situation, and sometimes also embody a precedent name within their structure.

3. Precedent texts are units with a complete and independent meaning, created as a result of speech and thought activity, and which often contain several predicative structures. It is a complex sign, as its general meaning is broader than the sum of the simple meanings of its

<sup>2</sup> Nakhimova, E. A. Precedent Names in Mass Communication [Electronic resource]. — Yekaterinburg, 2007. — Available at: <http://www.philology.ru/linguistics2/nakhimova-07a.htm> (accessed: 17.03.2026).

<sup>3</sup> Yuri Karaulov Karaulov, Yu. N. *Russian Language and Linguistic Personality*. — Moscow: LKI Publishing House, 2007. — 203 p.

components. Precedent texts include works of fiction, song lyrics, advertising and journalistic materials, jokes, and other popular texts.

4. Precedent situations are interpreted as a “standard” (exemplary) situation associated with a specific set of connotations. Its differential features are part of the cognitive base. A precedent expression or precedent name, as well as a non-precedent phenomenon, can also serve as the expression of a precedent situation.<sup>4</sup>

The precedent phenomenon is characterised by making people aware of their past, enabling them to feel it deeply, and alluding to a specific event in the past; to understand it, one must be familiar with that particular event. T. V. Marchenko highlights the distinctive features of precedent phenomena, such as their function in condensing and reflecting the experience of human existence, as well as in preserving cultural constants and traditions.<sup>5</sup> V. A. Efremov, however, calls the theory of precedent a ‘powerful tool’ for the linguistic study of cultural memory.<sup>6</sup> Precedent units are studied from both linguistic and linguacultural perspectives, as they are phenomena that occur between society and culture and are usually examined from the standpoint of a particular society. In linguistics, precedent phenomena are interpreted as the main components of a given society’s background knowledge.

They are understood and generally familiar to the members of a particular society and possess the property of being easily comprehended and decoded by the addressees, even when complex information is transformed. In the process of their speech realisation, precedent units serve as ready-made linguistic material and often underpin allusion in the text. Allusion is the linguistic realisation of precedent units, creating an association between cultural information stored in the cognitive mind and the text. Allusion is typically defined as “an indirect or unstated reference.” This term denotes a phenomenon based on a metonymic relationship between a signifier and its referent.<sup>7</sup> The word allusion is derived from the Latin word “alludere”, meaning “to hint by means of a play on words” or “to refer to with irony”.

Some scholars regard allusion as a literary device that indirectly refers to real or imaginary persons, places, objects or events. Allusion is a device for conveying complex ideas or situations in a simple way by associating them with a widely recognised event that is understandable to everyone. One condition of allusion is that it must not be overly obscure or incomprehensible to

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<sup>4</sup> Elena Nakhimova Nakhimova, E. A. *Precedent Names in Mass Communication* [Electronic resource]. — Yekaterinburg, 2007. — Available at: <http://www.philology.ru/linguistics2/nakhimova-07a.htm> (accessed: 17.03.2026).

<sup>5</sup> Tatyana Marchenko Marchenko, T. V. Narrative Nature of the Formation and Functioning of Complex Precedent Phenomena // *Scientific Thought of the Caucasus*. — 2023. — No. 3(115). — Available at: <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/narrativnayapriroda-formirovaniya-i-funktsionirovaniya-kompleksnyh-pretседentnyh-fenomenov> (accessed: 18.03.2026).

<sup>6</sup> Viktor Efremov Efremov, V. A. Cultural Memory and Precedent Phenomena: The Case of Fyodor Dostoevsky // *The World of Russian Word*. — 2021. — No. 4. — Available at: <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/kulturnaya-pamyat-i-pretседentnye-fenomeny-sluchay-f-m-dostoevskogo> (accessed: 18.03.2026).

<sup>7</sup> Ziva Ben-Porat Ben-Porat, Z. The Poetics of Allusion — A Text Linking Device in Different Media of Communication // *A Semiotic Landscape. Panorama sémiotique: Proceedings of the First Congress of the International Association for Semiotic Studies* (Milan, June 1974) / Ed. by Seymour Chatman, Umberto Eco, Jean-Marie Klinkenberg. — Berlin; New York: Mouton Publishers, 1979. — P. 588–593. — Available at: <https://www.degruyterbrill.com/document/doi/10.1515/9783110803327-105/html> (accessed: 24.03.2026).

the majority. Otherwise, the information intended for the addressee may remain unclear. According to researchers, allusion is divided into the following types:

- Historical;
- Mythological;
- Religious;
- Literary;
- Cultural.<sup>8</sup>

### **Discussion and results**

In folkloric texts, particularly in children's songs, the use of allusion through precedent units enhances the impact of the song lyrics. In this instance, precedent units are not merely an expressive device but serve to condense information. That is, by compressing cultural information while preserving its essence, they act as a means of storing and transmitting it from one generation to the next. Furthermore, they are considered part of the historical development of a national culture and are closely linked to the historical customs and traditions of each people. In many cases, allusion units are cited as the basis for allusion. Allusion units are cultural units well known to members of the language community and regularly used in speech. Allusion units can be divided into the following types.

1. Precedent names
2. Precedent expressions
3. Precedent situations
4. Precedent texts.

English children's folk songs (nursery rhymes) are distinguished by their rich, hidden allusions to historical and political events. Many researchers regard them as a means of covertly expressing political thought among the people. In English children's folk songs, allusion is distinguished by its predominantly political character:

Girls and boys come out to play,  
The moon does shine as bright as day;  
Come with a whoop, come with a call,  
Come with a good will or not at all.  
Loose your supper, loose your sleep,  
Come to your playfellows in the street.  
Up the ladder and down the wall  
A halfpenny loaf will serve us all  
But when the loaf is gone, what will you do?  
Those who would eat must work- 'tis true.

This English children's folk song alludes to an era when the phrase "he who bites must work" prevailed. This period in English history corresponds to the 19th-century Industrial Revolution, when only children from wealthy families could afford schooling, while those from ordinary families were forced to help their parents with work. Children typically began working at the age of five, labouring sixteen hours a day in factories, mills and mines. They had almost no time for play, and their childhood was stolen by the Industrial Revolution. In the song's lyrics, children are even urged to forgo their evening meal and sleep in order to play. Due to the harsh working conditions, they died in their early twenties.

### **"Ring a Ring o' Roses"**

<sup>8</sup> M. I. Kiose Kiose, M. I. *Linguistic-Cognitive Aspects of Allusions: Based on the Headings of English and Russian Journal Articles: Diss. ... Cand. Philol. Sci. — Moscow, 2002.*

Ring-a-ring o' roses,  
A pocket full of posies,  
A-tishoo! A-tishoo!  
We all fall down.

This English children's folk song refers to the Great Plague of London in 1665. The "ring-a-ring o" roses in the first line of the song refers to the red, circular spots on the skin, which were the first symptoms of the plague. In this instance, "Ring-a-ring o' roses" serves as a precedent expression, an idiom in the song's lyrics that exists in the cultural consciousness of the English people and is understandable and familiar to all. The line

"*we all fall down at the end of the song signifies that the plague ends in death*". In this instance, "*We all fall down*" can be interpreted as a precedent. This is because in the song's lyrics, it refers not to a specific name or phrase, but rather to the phenomenon of people dying after an illness.

#### **Allusion in Russian Children's Folk Songs**

*"Во поле берёза стояла"*

The song *Во поле берёза стояла* is also widespread in the children's repertoire. The image of the birch is interpreted in Russian folklore as a symbol of purity, beauty, and the beautiful maiden. The birch is also interpreted as a symbol of Russia. Thus, hidden behind the depiction of a simple tree is an allusion to national identity. In Russian children's folklore, allusion often manifests through a mythological layer. They reflect more archaic conceptions than historical events.

#### **Allusion in Uzbek Children's Folk Songs**

Uzbek children's folk songs reflect the aspirations, history, and social life of the Uzbek people. The most famous of these songs is "Boychechak".

##### 1. "*Boychechak*"

Boychechak is famous as a spring ritual song. A thorough analysis of the *boychechak* image in this song is required. "Boychechak" is actually a Uzbek word denoting a type of flower. In this sense, it directly conveys the notion of a flower, a type of bloom. However, "*boychechak*" also embodies a value intrinsic to our national culture – the name of a calendrical ceremony, one of the spring customs. In this sense, it is a genuine mental concept, manifesting simultaneously as a cultural concept and summarising information about a historical-cultural, national, and traditional value formed on the basis of our people's belief in nature cults.

In artistic creativity, the primrose is equated and likened to childhood, the earliest stage of human life, as the first flower to bloom in nature. This makes clear its connection with imagery. On this basis, one can observe that some pre-school educational institutions where children are brought up are named "Boychechak". In this context, Boychechak embodies the image of a child. Now, having been personified, it has moved away from its former state, that is, the concept of a concrete object, and has become a genuine logical phenomenon.<sup>9</sup> In conclusion, the daffodil in the song symbolises renewal and the awakening of nature. This song alludes to childhood and the ancient Nowruz ceremonies.

#### **Conclusion**

In children's folk songs, allusion is a particularly important semiotic device for preserving the people's historical memory, cultural experience and national consciousness. It usually does not appear directly but emerges through precedent units that activate certain historical,

<sup>9</sup> Otabek Fayzulloev Fayzulloev, Otabek Muhammadovich. *Representation of Linguoculturemes of Uzbek Folklore in English Translation (Based on Children's Folklore and Fairy Tales)*: Dissertation written for obtaining the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Philological Sciences. — Tashkent: Bukhara State University, 2019. — P. 17.

mythological, religious or cultural associations in the listener's or reader's mind. In this respect, allusion manifests itself as an important mechanism that creates hidden layers of meaning in children's folklore texts and integrates them into a unified artistic system. A comparative analysis of materials from English, Russian and Uzbek children's folklore makes it clear that allusive units are directly linked to the historical stages of development, social life and worldview of each national culture. While allusions to historical figures, legendary heroes and real events are more prevalent in English folklore, mythological figures, nature cults and folk beliefs predominate in Russian children's folklore. In Uzbek children's folklore, however, allusive layers related to rituals, customs, and folk beliefs are predominant. This situation demonstrates that, whilst allusion is a universal linguistic phenomenon, it is shaped in each culture according to its own specific national-cultural code. The outward simplicity of children's songs conceals complex layers of meaning in their internal semantic structure. These layers are expressed through metaphor, symbolism, precedent units and allusion, enhancing the text's aesthetic and cognitive potential. Allusion serves precisely as the artistic 'bridge' linking these layers of meaning and bringing them into a coherent system. Consequently, children's folklore songs are interpreted not only as texts for play or entertainment, but also as an important communicative means of transmitting cultural memory and social values from one generation to the next. For this reason, the study of children's folklore is considered relevant not only from a pedagogical standpoint but also from the perspectives of philology, linguoculturology, and cultural studies. It allows for a deeper understanding of the cultural codes, mechanisms of historical memory, and aesthetic thinking preserved through the people's language.

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