

# Semantic Features of Ornithonym Words in the English and Tatar Languages<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

The article studies ornithonyms, names of birds in the English and Tatar languages with the purpose of comparative study of their semantic structure. Attempts to compare the semantic volume of ornithonym-words in two languages are made. Studying this lexical-semantic group may help to define associations and symbolic meanings which particular birds are endowed with. At the same time, when studying associations, it is necessary to distinguish those associations which are based on traditional, sociohistorical judgments of the certain realities peculiar only to speakers of this language.

**Keywords:** Linguistics; Lexical-Semantic Group; Ornithonyms; Symbolic Meaning.

## 1. Introduction

Ornithonym is the nominative linguistic unit used for the name of birds. As well as all nominative units, ornithonyms are allocated with denotative and connotative meanings.

The relevance of a subject of research is caused by the fact that studying the structure of a word meaning promotes disclosure of national and cultural features of the English and Tatar languages speakers. The main goal of this research is comparative studying of semantic structure of ornithonym words in two unrelated languages. The following tasks were set to achieve this goal: - to determine the semantic volume of ornithonym words and to study associative and symbolic components of meanings of these words.

Works of such scientists as A.P. Denisova, M.A. Kutyeva, L.V. Amelina, E.V. Kuznetsova, O.B. Simakova, N.Yu. Kostina, V.V. Sibul, N.B. Neronova, S.

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Hervey, I. Higgins, Mao Chinkhua, M. Patsis, etc. are devoted to a research of semantic structure of a word and of ornithonyms as a linguistic unit, in particular.

## 2. Methods

We considered two ornithonyms in this paper: “duck” and “crow” as representatives of domestic and wild birds. Explanatory dictionaries of the English and Tatar languages, such as Collins English dictionary (Explanatory dictionary of the Tatar language, 2015) and Explanatory dictionary of the Tatar language (Written case of Tatar), were used in order to carry out the definition-seme analysis of ornithonym words of the English and Tatar languages and for identification of specifics of their components of meaning. We compared the types of semes and their quantitative ratio in two languages.

The component, i.e. semy analysis which allows to reveal the semantic signs of a word expressing essence of this meaning is applied to study the semantic structure of a word meaning.

## 3. Results and Discussion

Various semantic elements of a word, such as seme or sememes, are connected among themselves by certain relations. Speaking about semantic structure of a word, linguists mean, first of all, different meanings of multiple-valued words, communication and relationship between them. Koldukhov (1974) believes that the semantic structure of a word "is formed by semantic components (meanings, lexical-semantic options) different types".

Among lexical semes the dominating and subordinated semes are distinguished. The dominating semes or an archiseme represents an integrated component of meaning and is general for certain thematically connected groups of words. The subordinated or differentiating semes specificate major importance.

Ornithonym DUCK, in the Collins English Dictionary the following definition is given: "A duck is a very common water bird with short legs, a short neck, and a large flat beak" (Explanatory dictionary of the Tatar language, 2015). The following definition is presented in the explanatory dictionary of Tatar: the cultivated and widespread waterfowl (Written case of Tatar).

The duck, in general representation, is a symbol of resourcefulness and finesse, because of its ability to go on the ground, to float, fly and dive under water to disappear from predators (Mubarakshina et al., 2016). In mythology of North America, a duck is a symbol of connection of the sea and sky. In the Celtic culture the duck is considered a symbol of honesty and simplicity (Mubarakshina et al., 2016). The clumsy, shaking gait of a duck is associated with stupid behavior and awkwardness (Mubarakshina et al., 2016). In this connection, in English there is an expression of “lame duck” is used for the description of the unlucky person. At the

same time, this expression is very often used for designation of the politician finishing the term and who is not elected to new: "Many thought that now he had said he would be off within the year, that he would become a lame duck, and the real power would pass to Brown" (Collins dictionary).

We can define the following senses in connotative meaning of an ornithonym duck: resourceful, clumsy. Let's try to present components of value of an ornithonym duck in English: duck – bird – water bird – duck family – short legs – short neck – large flat beak – webbed feet – waddling gait – different plumage – nimble – caring – clumsy. (a duck – a bird – natatorial – family duck – short legs – a short neck – a big flat beak – webby paws – the rolling-over plumage - the rolling-over gait – resourceful – clumsy).

In the Tatar culture duck has more often negative connotative meaning as is associated with the talkative woman, the clumsy person. The clumsy gait of a duck is often attributed to the person, for example: Probably, his dark-browed uncle Rafis who always smiles, lays down on a floor, and his wife who goes to a razvalochka as the duck, to and for, through it steps (The short encyclopedia of symbols). Such meanings of an ornithonym resulted from observation of behavior of a bird. Also, the duck is represented as a gluttonous bird therefore in Tatar there is an expression "eats as a duck", which means "eats much": These cows are so big (when they were brought, the weight of one was 670 kilograms), eat constantly as ducks) (The short encyclopedia of symbols).

So, considering all above-mentioned definitions of an ornithonym 'duck', we can consider components of its meaning in Tatar: duck – bird – water fowl – cultivated – widespread – talkative – clumsy – eats a lot.

The first of the specified symbolic meanings is based on an ability of a bird to move on the ground and water, and to fly in the sky. The awkwardness can be connected with clumsy gait of a bird. As we observed, analyzing components, such components of meaning of the word "duck" such components as resourcefulness and awkwardness appeared as a result of allocation of separate properties of this bird and their further development.

CROW (RAVEN). English: "any large gregarious songbird of the genus *Corvus*, of Europe and Asia: family *Corvidae*. Other species are the raven, rook, and jackdaw and all have a heavy bill, glossy black plumage, and rounded wings" (Explanatory dictionary of the Tatar language, 2015). Tat.: a bird of the average sizes, family the *Corvidae*, with brilliantly black or blue-black plumage (Written case of Tatar; Cosmos Magazine; De Wit, 1963).

For identification of full semantic volume of an ornithonym of CROW, besides dictionary definitions, it is necessary to consider the metaphorical, symbolic meanings and associations connected with this bird. At the West European people traditionally, the raven was considered as the bulletin of a devil, war and death. Such negative symbolism is connected with appearance of crows on battle fields in search

of food as they eat drop (Leech, 1974). Also the crow was considered to be able to foresee the future, portend a trouble. In this regard, the raven was associated and now is associated with death. For example, in the work by Gerry Smith-Redi "Eyes of a crow" we can find confirmation for this meaning: As long as new life grew and flourished, like the leaves and branches of a tree, there was hope. Even Crow, death's constant companion, had taught her so (Collins dictionary; Mao Chunhua, 2013; Popel, 2010) Such meaning of an ornithonym can be expressed by the seme: death harbinger.

Besides, the crow has also a positive meaning, it is a symbol of wisdom and mind that can be observed in expression "to have crow's knowledge", which means to have exclusive knowledge (Mubarakshina et al., 2016). The same meaning of the given ornithonym can be observed in literature: A long time ago there was a man by the name of Smart-Crow (Collins dictionary). Proceeding from it, we can allocate one more seme as a part of semantic structure of this ornithonym: wise, clever.

So components of meaning of an ornithonym crow can be presented as follows: crow – bird – large – perching – gregarious – black plumage – rounded wings – heavy bill – raucous voice – smart – ugly old woman – messenger of the death.

As a result of numerous researches and experiments scientists came to a conclusion that the raven has intelligence which can be compared to intelligence of the seven-year-old child (Google Ngram Viewer). Besides, people began to attribute to a raven such qualities as mind and intelligence for a long time because of ability of a raven to imitate the human speech. Observations of this bird were resulted by the first symbolic meaning of an ornithonym. The last symbolic meaning is connected with frequent emergence of a raven on battle fields, being a death bird. It was considered that crows flew to places where death was expected (Wierzbicka, 1996). As for the meaning "an old woman", accurate explanations of what features of a bird influenced emergence of this meaning were not revealed (<https://www.britannica.com/animal/crow-bird>; <https://www.ldoceonline.com>; <https://www.etymonline.com>).

While in English, the raven has image of a clever bird, in Tatar on the contrary the image of a raven is associated with nonsense and bears in itself negative connotative meaning. In the explanatory dictionary of Tatar, it is also possible to find the following meanings of this ornithonym: "the impudent person, a parasite who lives at the expense of others", "the person who wants thing which he doesn't deserve" (Written case of Tatar).

But the raven holds significant position in the culture of the Tatar people as many traditions and signs of the people are connected with this bird. For example: a holiday which is celebrated at the end of spring where children picked in the village grain, oil and then porridge for everyone was cooked called "raven's porridge" (Written case of Tatar).

We can distinguish the following components of meaning of an ornithonym the crow in Tatar: the crow – a bird – the average sizes – family Corvidae – brilliantly black color – impudent – lives at the expense of others – silly.

#### 4. Summary

Thus, semantic properties of such ornithonyms as duck and crow in the English and Tatar languages differ, first, with different quantity of semes, secondly, with quality of semes. Different semes can act as the differentiating signs for the name of the same bird in two languages. In semantic structure of ornithonym words, besides semes, found out in the dictionary definitions, it is necessary to include symbolic and associated meanings of this or that bird.

#### 5. Conclusion

Our observations showed that one ornithonym can be allocated with positive connotative meaning in one language and negative in another. At the same time, same ornithonym can be allocated with both positive and negative meanings in one language.

The isomorphic relations of semantic structures of lexical units' ornithonyms of the English and Tatar languages are observed in denotative aspect of their meaning.

The allomorphic relations observed in connotative aspect of meaning of ornithonym words in two languages are connected with cultural features of the people speaking these languages, reflected in perception of an image of each certain bird.

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