

ORNITHONYMS AND NATURE: A BIOLINGUISTIC STUDY

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Abstract: This article explores ornithonyms — the names of birds — from a biolinguistic perspective. In folk language, bird names are not merely linguistic units; they reflect a community's perception of nature, its observational capacity, and cultural mindset. The naming of birds is closely tied to their physical appearance, sound, behavior, and habitat. The study analyzes how these names are formed, how they reflect cultural heritage, and how they serve as a source of ecological and ethnobiological information. By integrating linguistic and biological approaches, the article aims to show the deep interconnection between human language and the natural world.

Keywords: ornithonym, biolinguistics, bird names, ethnolinguistics, language of nature, cultural perception, lexical-semantic analysis

Introduction

The relationship between humans and nature is ancient and complex. Humans not only observe nature but also interpret and classify it through language, creating a linguistic reflection of their natural surroundings. In this context, ornithonyms — names given to birds — play a significant role in the folk lexicon and worldview. Birds have always held a special place in human life, folklore, art, and even military symbolism.

Ornithonyms deserve to be studied as a distinct area within folk linguistics and ethnolinguistics. Through these names, we can uncover how people perceive birds, what characteristics they focus on, and how symbolic meanings are attached to them. For example, Uzbek ornithonyms like qarg'a (crow), bulbul (nightingale), to'ng'izqush (pelican-type bird), hum (mythical bird), and loq-qush reveal not only linguistic features but also cultural and symbolic layers.

From a biolinguistic standpoint, bird names are formed based on their biological characteristics — sound, color, behavior, habitat — as perceived by human observers. At the same time, mythological symbols, cultural values, and human imagination also shape these names.

This article analyzes how ornithonyms reflect the relationship between language and nature, how they are formed based on both biological features and cultural interpretation, and how they serve as cognitive tools for understanding the environment. The study offers an integrated linguistic and biological approach, showing how ornithonyms are more than words — they are reflections of human interaction with the natural world.

Factors in the formation of ornithonyms

The formation of bird names is rooted in careful observation and cognitive categorization. In folk naming, birds are typically named based on:

- Physical appearance (color, size, tail or beak shape)
- Sound production (calls, songs)
- Behavior (aggressiveness, restlessness, flocking behavior)
- Flight style (gliding, rapid flight)

- Habitat (deserts, mountains, forests, near water)

These features help define the bird in the speaker's mind. Examples include:

- G'arga (crow) – dark-colored, associated with misfortune or death.
- Bu'ibu'l (nightingale) – known for its beautiful singing; symbolizes love and poetry.

Lexical-semantic classification of ornithonyms

Ornithonyms can be grouped based on the semantic motivations behind their naming:

a) Names based on appearance

- Siyoxqarga (black crow), oqqarga (white crow), sapsariq (bright yellow), qizilqush (red bird) — reflect color-based categorization using adjectives.

b) Names based on sound

- Chaqqaq, qoqquv, chik-chik, qangqaloq — imitate the sounds made by birds; these are onomatopoeic in nature and reflect folk phonosemantic creativity.

c) Names based on behavior

- Oromsiz (restless), qaëq-qush (suddenly flying bird), urqun (aggressive) — reflect the bird's temperament and how people perceive it.

d) Names based on habitat

- Suwqus (water bird), torliqush (mountain bird), cho'lqush (desert bird) — describe where the bird lives and is commonly seen.

Ornithonyms as reflections of biological cognition

Ornithonyms encapsulate early biological knowledge. Folk naming reflects not only taxonomy but also practical observations. For example:

- Hum – a mythical or legendary bird, also linked to large birds like vultures or eagles in real life.
- Qarga – seen as intelligent and cunning; biologically accurate, as crows are known for problem-solving abilities.
- Chumchuq (sparrow) – a small, common bird, often used to represent the ordinary people in folk metaphors.

Ornithonyms and human attitudes toward nature

Ornithonyms reveal symbolic meanings and emotional associations:

- Bu'ibu'l – a symbol of beauty and love.
- G'arga – a symbol of bad luck or misfortune.

These names suggest that people don't see birds just as part of the ecosystem but as moral, spiritual, and cultural figures.

The linguocultural significance of ornithonyms

Ornithonyms hold an important place in the linguocultural consciousness of the people. Through bird names, aspects of everyday life, cultural values, worldview, and even historical experiences of the nation are reflected. Many ornithonyms in the Uzbek language refer not only to real birds but also convey specific symbolic meanings and imagery.

a) Bird names in proverbs and sayings

Birds frequently appear in various wise expressions and proverbs:

- “A crow does not peck out another crow's eye” – symbolizes solidarity and mutual support.
- “Where the nightingale does not sing, even the crow makes noise” – implies that in the absence of the worthy, the unworthy seek attention.
- “One who fears the sparrow won't sow wheat” – warns against abandoning big goals due to small fears.

In these proverbs, birds serve as symbolic representations of human behavior and moral values.

b) Symbolism in literature and art

Ornithonyms also serve an aesthetic function in literature. For example:

- The nightingale symbolizes a poet or a lover.
- The crow often represents a negative or ominous figure.
- The Huma bird is an ancient mythical creature that symbolizes fortune and power.

Such bird imagery is a powerful tool to convey the emotions, spirituality, and inner world of the people through artistic expression.

c) Role in rituals and beliefs

Certain birds hold special significance in folk beliefs. For instance:

- If a crow dies nearby, it is a sign of bad news – a common superstition.
- Don't disturb a bird's nest – it brings misfortune – reflects traditional teachings.
- A bird entering the house is often interpreted as a sign of an upcoming guest or message.

These beliefs illustrate the deep cultural and spiritual roots of ornithonyms in the collective consciousness of the people.

Conclusion

Ornithonyms play a vital role in shaping how people understand, classify, and emotionally relate to the natural world. Their formation is deeply rooted in observation, folklore, cultural memory, and cognitive reasoning. This study has arrived at several key conclusions:

1. Ornithonyms are biologically motivated – folk naming is based on physical and behavioral traits, reflecting early observational science.
2. Ornithonyms link language and culture – they provide insights into worldviews, symbolic associations, and value systems of a community.
3. Ornithonyms carry symbolic meanings – used extensively in literature, folklore, and spiritual metaphors.
4. They help raise ecological awareness – by naming and categorizing birds, people develop a stronger sense of care and responsibility for nature.
5. Ornithonyms reflect proto-biological knowledge – they are part of folk taxonomy and can inform studies in ethnobiology and traditional ecology.

Recommendations

- Create a comprehensive corpus of ornithonyms: Gather regional and dialectal bird names, analyze their structure and meanings to enrich national linguistic resources.
- Use ornithonyms in ecological education: Incorporate bird names into school and university programs to foster environmental awareness and cultural pride.
- Develop precise translations in lexicography: Ensure accurate, culturally sensitive translation of ornithonyms in multilingual dictionaries.

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