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THE HISTORY OF STUDYING FLORA AND FAUNA COMPONENT IDIOMS IN ENGLISH LINGUISTICS

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Abstract: This article traces the historical development of research into flora- and fauna-component idioms within English linguistics, from early lexicographic documentation through structural-semantic classification within the Vinogradov-Kunin tradition to corpus-based and linguoculturological approaches. Particular attention is given to the emergence of dedicated studies of phytonymic phraseology and to the recent extension of this research into comparative work involving Turkic languages, including Azerbaijani and Uzbek. The article argues that the trajectory of this field moves from cataloguing toward increasingly systematic, cross-linguistically oriented analysis of the cultural motivation underlying flora- and fauna-based figurative expressions.

Keywords: flora-fauna idioms, phytonymic phraseology, history of phraseology, Kunin, corpus linguistics, linguoculturology.

Introduction. Idioms built around the names of plants and animals form one of the most stable and productive layers of English phraseology, and their study has passed through several distinct stages over the past century. Understanding this trajectory is useful not only for its own sake but because it clarifies the theoretical resources available to current comparative work, including recent research placing English material alongside Azerbaijani and Uzbek phytonymic phraseology. This article traces that trajectory in four stages: the lexicographic stage, the structural-semantic stage associated with the Vinogradov-Kunin tradition, the corpus-based stage represented by Moon’s work, and the recent comparative-linguoculturological stage.

The Lexicographic Stage. The earliest systematic treatment of English idioms containing plant and animal names took the form of dedicated idiom dictionaries rather than theoretical monographs. The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms and the Cambridge International Dictionary of Idioms, both still used as primary data sources in current comparative phraseological research, established the descriptive inventory on which subsequent theoretical work would draw [Khalibekova, 2020: 560]. Within the Russian tradition of Anglicist scholarship, A. V. Kunin’s Anglo-Russian Phraseological Dictionary served an equivalent documentary function, and remains cited as an authoritative source of English phraseological material in comparative studies to the present day [Khalibekova, 2020: 563].

The Structural-Semantic Stage. The documentary stage was followed by a period in which phraseological units, including those built on flora and fauna components, were subjected to systematic structural-semantic classification. Kunin’s Course of Phraseology of Modern English extended V. V. Vinogradov’s tripartite classification of phraseological fusions, unities and combinations to English material specifically, providing the theoretical apparatus within which subsequent English phytonymic phraseology has generally been described [Khalibekova, 2020: 563]. Within this stage, V. N. Telia’s refinement of the idiomaticity criterion as the full or partial non-deducibility of a unit’s meaning from its components added a linguoculturological dimension that would prove particularly important for the study of culturally loaded components such as plant and animal names [Khalibekova, 2020: 560].

The Corpus-Based Stage. A further methodological shift occurred with the introduction of large electronic corpora into phraseological research. Moon’s corpus-based study of fixed

expressions and idioms in English demonstrated empirically that many nominally idiomatic expressions occupy an intermediate position on a continuum of idiomaticity rather than the fully opaque extreme with which the term idiom is popularly associated, a finding with direct relevance for flora- and fauna-based expressions, many of which retain a transparent, motivated connection to their literal source domain (as, for example, in expressions built on tree or flower as productive superordinate terms capable of substituting for more specific species names).

Dedicated Studies of Phytonymic Phraseology and the Comparative-Linguoculturological Stage. Alongside general phraseological theory, a smaller body of research has focused specifically on plant-name components. E. F. Arsentyeva's comparative study of Russian and English phraseology and phraseography established quantitative benchmarks still cited in current research, finding that phraseological units built on the component rose account for approximately seven percent of English phytonymic phraseology, the largest single share identified for any individual phytonym [Mirzayeva, 2021: 43]. L. V. Borisova's study of the concept tree as a linguocultural code and L. M. Boyarkina and I. I. Kashtanova's anthropocentric study of the lexeme rose in English phytonymic vocabulary extended this quantitative groundwork into a more explicitly linguoculturological analysis of individual, highly productive phytonyms [Mirzayeva, 2021: 40]. N. I. Konovalova's study of folk phytonymy as a fragment of the linguistic picture of the world and O. I. Vasilenko's work on otphytonymic semantic derivation further broadened the field toward the cognitive and derivational mechanisms underlying figurative extension from plant names [Mirzayeva, 2021: 40].

The most recent stage in this trajectory extends English phytonymic phraseology research into explicit cross-linguistic comparison with Turkic languages. Mirzayeva's comparative study of English, Azerbaijani and Russian phytonymic phraseology represents, by the author's own account, the first attempt to study Azerbaijani onomastic phraseology comparatively with English and other languages from a linguocultural perspective, noting that prior Azerbaijani scholarship, including Seyidaliyev's monograph on the phraseology of Azerbaijani epic and tale language, had not extended its classification of onomastic phraseology to include phytonyms at all [Mirzayeva, 2021: 40–41]. Khalibekova's comparative study of English and Uzbek phytonymic phraseological units represents a parallel, independently conducted extension of the same general research programme into Uzbek material, applying continuous sampling from established English and Uzbek lexicographic sources to identify and classify units by component and by connotative orientation [Khalibekova, 2020: 559–560].

Conclusion. The study of flora- and fauna-component idioms in English linguistics has moved through a documentary stage, a structural-semantic stage grounded in the Vinogradov-Kunin tradition, a corpus-based stage that refined the notion of idiomaticity itself, and a comparative-linguoculturological stage that has recently begun to extend English phytonymic phraseology research into systematic comparison with Turkic languages. This trajectory suggests that future research in this area is likely to continue moving toward more systematic, quantitatively grounded, cross-linguistic comparison, building on the benchmarks already established for individual, highly productive components such as rose, apple and tree.

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