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FEATURES OF ADJECTIVE USE IN PLANT AND ANIMAL NAMES

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Abstract. This article examines the grammatical and semantic functions of adjectives in plant and animal names, with particular attention to Russian naming patterns and their English equivalents. The study combines a focused review of linguistic resources with qualitative analysis of selected examples. The expressions are examined according to grammatical agreement, adjective position, semantic motivation, and naming function. The analysis distinguishes adjectives used in ordinary descriptions from adjectives incorporated into established organism names. Colour, relative size, geographical association, and morphological characteristics emerge as important sources of naming motivation. Cross-language comparison shows that equivalent names may highlight different characteristics of the same organism. The findings provide a framework for teaching biological vocabulary, analysing adjective–noun relationships, and translating plant and animal names.

Keywords: adjectives, plant names, animal names, grammatical agreement, semantic motivation, biological terminology, lexicalization, translation.

Introduction

Plant and animal names illustrate how language organizes knowledge about the natural world. These names may identify organisms through visible characteristics, geographical associations, habitat, or comparison with related organisms. Adjectives frequently contribute to this process by modifying a noun that denotes a broader group.

Expressions such as бурый медведь and большая синица contain adjectives that form part of conventional animal names. However, the presence of an adjective does not automatically make an expression a biological name. A phrase such as a small brown bird describes an individual without identifying a particular species.

The distinction between naming and description is important for linguistic analysis. In an ordinary descriptive phrase, an adjective attributes a characteristic to an object. Within an established organism name, it also contributes to conventional reference.

Russian and English offer contrasting grammatical structures. Russian adjectives display agreement with their head nouns, whereas English adjectives generally do not change according to the noun's gender, number, or case. Equivalent names may also differ in their semantic motivation.

The aim of this article is to identify the principal grammatical and semantic features of adjectives in plant and animal names and explain their relevance to language teaching and translation.

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Materials and Methods

The study employs qualitative descriptive analysis. Its material consists of a purposively selected set of Russian and English naming expressions, including берёза повислая, белая берёза, бурый медведь, большая синица, great tit, blue tit, and silver birch.

The examples were selected to illustrate contrasting linguistic features rather than establish their statistical distribution. No questionnaire, classroom experiment, or quantitative corpus analysis was conducted.

Four criteria guided the analysis:

1. The grammatical relationship between the modifier and the head noun.
2. The position of the adjective within the expression.
3. The semantic characteristic motivating the name.
4. The distinction between conventional naming and free description.

Cambridge grammar resources supplied the framework for examining English adjective position and compound structures. Botanical and ornithological resources were consulted to establish the reference of selected organism names. dictionary.cambridge.org

Results

Grammatical Agreement in Russian Names

Russian adjectives retain agreement with their head nouns when they occur within established plant and animal names. In бурый медведь, the adjective has a masculine singular form. In большая синица, it has a feminine singular form.

Grammatical gender must be distinguished from biological sex. The feminine noun синица can refer to either a male or a female bird. The adjective agrees with the grammatical properties of the noun rather than indicating the organism's sex.

Case inflection also affects both components. The expression бурый медведь becomes бурого медведя in the genitive singular and бурым медведем in the instrumental singular. Similarly, большая синица becomes большой синицы in the genitive singular.

These transformations demonstrate that the conventional status of a name does not prevent its components from participating in the grammatical system of Russian.

Adjective Position

The selected Russian examples contain both preposed and postposed adjectives. In белая берёза, the adjective precedes the noun. In берёза повислая, it follows the noun.

Postposition can serve a differentiating function in systematic naming expressions. Nevertheless, adjective position alone is insufficient to determine whether a phrase is a formal name. Its use and conventional reference must also be considered.

English attributive adjectives normally precede their head nouns, as illustrated by blue tit and great tit. This structure differs from predicative use, where an adjective follows a linking verb. dictionary.cambridge.org

Semantic Motivation

The analysis identifies several sources of semantic motivation.

Colour. Colour adjectives associate an organism with a visible feature. In бурый медведь, the modifier draws attention to brown coloration. In blue tit, the adjective

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contributes to an established bird name. Colour-based names should not be interpreted as exhaustive descriptions of an organism's appearance.

Relative size. The adjective in большая синица or great tit contributes to differentiation within a naming system. It does not mean that the bird is large in comparison with all birds. The British Trust for Ornithology identifies great tit as Parus major and blue tit as Cyanistes caeruleus, confirming their distinct species references. www.bto.org

Geographical or environmental association. Adjectives such as полярный and арктический can associate a name with a region or environment. Such modifiers motivate a name but do not independently establish the complete geographical distribution of the organism.

Morphological characteristics. In берёза повислая, the adjective highlights a structural feature. This naming pattern illustrates how a characteristic of growth or form can provide a basis for differentiation.

Naming and Description

Established names and descriptive phrases perform different communicative functions. A descriptive expression selects characteristics relevant to a particular situation. A conventional name identifies an organism through an accepted linguistic designation.

For example, a small brown bird remains a general description. By contrast, blue tit denotes a particular species. Changing a descriptive adjective may simply alter the information conveyed about an individual. Changing an adjective within an established name may alter the reference or produce an unrecognized designation.

The identifying role of an adjective therefore limits the freedom with which it can be replaced. Its interpretation depends on the expression as a whole.

Adjectives and Other Modifiers

Not every word preceding a noun is an adjective. Plant and animal names may contain noun modifiers or more complex constructions.

The expression silver birch illustrates this analytical difficulty. Although silver modifies birch, its position alone does not establish its lexical classification in every grammatical account. A rigorous analysis must distinguish syntactic function from word class.

Cambridge's treatment of compounds recognizes several structures, including combinations involving nouns and adjectives. This distinction prevents all modifying elements in organism names from being grouped indiscriminately as adjectives. dictionary.cambridge.org

Cross-Language Correspondence

Russian and English names can refer to the same organism while selecting different characteristics. Russian берёза повислая emphasizes a structural feature, whereas English silver birch evokes a colour association. The scientific name Betula pendula provides a reference point for identifying the plant across languages. powo.science.kew.org

Consequently, translating each component literally may fail to reproduce the established target-language name. Translation requires identification of the organism before selection of its conventional equivalent.

Discussion

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The findings show that adjective use in organism names must be examined at both grammatical and lexical levels. Agreement and word order describe the internal structure of an expression, while conventional usage determines its naming function.

These expressions offer useful material for Russian-language teaching. Students can identify the head noun, determine its grammatical gender, and transform the accompanying adjective into different case forms. Such exercises also help distinguish grammatical gender from biological sex.

Semantic tasks can ask students to classify modifiers according to colour, relative size, geography, or morphology. A further exercise can contrast a conventional name with an ordinary description, encouraging students to explain why an adjective cannot always be replaced freely.

Translation activities should include verification of biological reference. A grammatically acceptable literal translation may be terminologically inappropriate. Comparing vernacular names with scientific names can help students recognize this distinction without assuming that every scientific epithet is itself an adjective.

The study is limited by its illustrative sample. It does not establish the frequency of particular adjective classes or naming structures. Further research could analyse a larger bilingual corpus and compare patterns across botanical and zoological vocabulary.

Conclusion

Adjectives in plant and animal names perform descriptive, differentiating, and identifying functions. In Russian, they retain agreement with their head nouns in gender, number, and case. Their semantic motivation may involve colour, relative size, geographical association, or morphology.

An adjective within an established name cannot always be interpreted or replaced as freely as an adjective in ordinary description. Furthermore, equivalent names in different languages may highlight different characteristics.

Accurate teaching and translation therefore require attention to grammatical structure, word class, conventional usage, and biological reference.

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