

Lexical Means of Expressing Estimation in Medicinal Plants Names in Germanic and Slavonic Languages

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Abstract

The article deals with one of the most up-to-date linguistic problems – the problem of evaluation. Using medicinal plants names in languages of Germanic and Slavonic groups as data for the research the author considers evaluative meanings expressed by nouns and adjectives. Cultural concepts that are used to express evaluation are analyzed and the results obtained in the languages of this research are compared. The article also gives an account of evaluative nouns in Germanic and Slavonic phytonyms.

1. Introduction

Anthropocentric approach to language ascending to the ideas of W. Gumboldt provides conditions for deeper penetration into the essence of language functions, leading to new insights into language nature. Modern linguistics treats language not only as a means of communication, but also as a way of cognizing the surrounding world. One of the aspects providing such an approach is the study of the linguistic world view, its universal and nationally specific features in different languages. From this point of view plants names analysis is rather productive as it can be seen in a number of investigations carried out on this language material (Кирюшкина 2002; Панасенко 2006; Сердюк 2002). Plants, and especially medicinal plants, have always been among the most usual and close phenomena for people, an integral part of their everyday life; they form accordingly a considerable segment of native speakers' linguistic world view.

Evaluative attitudes also belong to another aspect reflecting a person's interaction with one's environment. A number of investigations (philosophical, psychological and linguistic) acknowledge the important role estimation plays in all spheres of a person's activity, in the processes of perception, cognition and speech activity in particular (Бессонова 2002, Кислицина 2002, Колшанский 1990). Medicinal plants names constitute a huge bulk of language material, so I have chosen only those which have evaluative meanings in their semantic structure, because they reflect mental peculiarities of a nation most vividly thus being the most interesting for a comparative analysis.

So the aim of this investigation is a comparative analysis of lexical means used for expressing estimation in medicinal plants names in the German, English, Russian and Ukrainian languages. To achieve this aim I have to solve some particular problems, that is: 1) to point out the role and place of phytonyms in a linguistic world view; 2) to define the estimation as an object of this analysis; 3) to give an account of lexical means that are used to express estimation in phytonyms and to compare their usage in the languages under consideration.

2. The notion of a linguistic world view

A linguistic world view is generally understood as a system of knowledge existing in a person's mind and being the result of one's life experience. G. Kolshanskiy points out that a notion of a world view should correlate with the mankind's scientific notion about the surrounding world at a certain stage of its historical development (Колшанский 1990: 21). This definition calls attention to the difference between the general understanding of a world view and the naïve world image which implies the native speakers' everyday consciousness.

N. Sukalenko, studying the correlations between the empirical everyday life consciousness and a language, came to the conclusions which can be useful for my investigation. The world views reflected in the national commonplace consciousness are the product of a long-time historical development and experience transmission between generations but at the same time they are imprinted in their carriers' minds as integral and stable formations. Such images are formed spontaneously and include various forms and levels of everyday consciousness: knowledge, beliefs, suppositions, assumptions, prototypes of materialistic and idealistic world outlook, reflection of reality in the everyday labour practice, aesthetic notions and attitudes, common sense and irrational ideas reflected in myths, legends and superstitions (Сукаленко 1992: 6). It is obvious that a comparative analysis of phytonyms deals both with scientific and naïve world views as a native speaker's notions about a certain plant include scientific knowledge on the one hand and experience of using them, myths and legends about plants etc. on the other.

Every language basing on the general principles of cognizing the surrounding world, finds its own ways of assimilating and generalizing the reality. Correspondently a linguistic world view can also be defined as the whole complex of ideas a person has about the surrounding world, which are consolidated in the system of meanings in a certain language, in its lexico-semantic system, in the structure of encyclopedic and explanatory dictionaries, in all variety of communicative situations, texts of various genres and in the individual communication (Соколовская 2002: 87). This is, of course, only one of the existing definitions of a linguistic world view, but I chose it as one of the most detailed and at the same time laconic enough for investigations of this kind.

Linguistic world views are in some ways similar and in some ways they differ. Studying their universal components and national peculiarities in a cross-cultural interaction allows one to reconstruct considerable fragments of linguistic world views and their constituent ideas, which form the conceptual world view (Селиванова 2006: 260). The problem of correlation between the linguistic and conceptual world views, their extent and ways of their contents systematization is a problem for discussion in modern linguistics and its solution depends directly on the general approach chosen by the researchers.

A. Zalevskaya points out that the researchers study national and cultural peculiarities of different world view aspects or fragments from different positions: some of them take a language as a starting point, analyze facts of inter-language similarity or differences from the point of view of the language systematic character and the result of such an analysis is the language world view, others give priority to the cultural component, linguistic consciousness of a certain linguo-cultural community members, and as a result the world view is brought to the center of attention (Залевская 2000: 40). I share the author's opinion that nowadays investigations on this topic should shift to studying national and cultural peculiarities of language functioning and cultural values correlating with it, language consciousness, language and linguo-cultural competence. From this latter position medicinal plants names are studied by Nataliya Panasenko. Studying medicinal plants names in Romanic, Germanic and Slavonic languages she came to the conclusion that phytonyms reflect stages of historical development, everyday life of a society, formation of primary notions about natural phenomena (Панасенко 2005: 42). The conclusions mentioned above also proved true for my language material which will be shown later.

3. The problem of estimation and evaluation in linguistics

The first question I should consider here is the problem of terminology. It is necessary to make clear if the meanings I analyze in phytonyms express estimation or evaluation. According to the Collins Cobuild Essential English Dictionary, the term **estimation** can be

used in two meanings: 1) “the opinion that you have formed of a person or situation, 2) an approximate calculation or the result obtained by such a calculation” (Collins 1989: 262). Those two types of estimation are generally known as the quantitative estimation and the qualitative one (Платонов 1981: 91). The qualitative estimation stands close to the notion of **evaluation** which is defined as “a decision about how significant or valuable something is, based on a careful study of its good and bad features” (Collins 1989: 263). From the point of view of linguistic terminology the term estimation stands closer to the general notion of this phenomenon and its linguistic understanding. Now a deeper insight into the linguistic category of estimation is necessary.

As for linguistic estimation, it is impossible to give a clear and short definition of it within the limits of one investigation since estimative attitudes penetrate into all spheres of a person’s activity and so the boundaries for its study are rather wide. Therefore, scholars focus their attention on some specific features of estimation that are urgent for their research. In the terminological encyclopedia “Modern Linguistics” by Olena Selivanova (Селіванова 2006) the most exhaustive explanation of estimation as a linguistic category can be found. The author indicates three main approaches to the study of estimation existing in linguistics nowadays.

According to the first approach, estimation is a connotative component of a language unit semantic structure which indicates the native speakers’ attitude to a designated phenomenon according to the absolute scale “good – neutral – bad” or according to the relative scale “better – just as good – just as neutral – just as bad – worse” (Селіванова 2006: 438). Such an approach is basic for a number of investigations, but some researchers insist on referring evaluative meanings to denotation. This question is still being discussed, but more scientists stick to the point that evaluative meanings can form both denotative and connotative components of a language unit semantic structure. The analysis of my language material proves the latter point of view.

The second approach treats estimation as a text category, which expresses the author’s, personages’, or a hypothetic reader’s attitude towards the described events, characters, their behaviour according to the absolute scale “good – neutral – bad” or according to the relative scale “better – just as good – just as neutral – just as bad – worse” taking into consideration other types of axiological modalities (Селіванова 2006: 438).

The third approach studies estimation as a kind of utterance modality, which reflects axiological aspect of a situation denoted by this utterance, that is the speaker’s evaluative attitude to the interiorized event. Within the limits of this approach, the following types of estimation are distinguished: **rational** (utilitarian, normative, teleological); **logical** (epistemological, deontical); **emotional** based on feelings (pleasant/ unpleasant); **aesthetic** that functions through ideas of beautiful and ugly; **ethic** that is based on moral norms (moral / immoral); **sensory** that is a result of perception and **quantitative** that characterizes the degree or extent of an object or its characteristics (Селіванова 2006: 439). This approach raises question about the classification of estimative meanings that is also an object for discussion nowadays.

One of the most detailed and exhaustive classifications of language estimation has been devised by Nina Arutiunova. Her classification partly coincides with that Olena Selivanova mentioned above, but it is more detailed and well-grounded. Moreover, this classification fits my language material and the aim of my research. Nina Arutiunova distinguishes *general estimation* which is based on a summary of miscellaneous properties of an object and *particular estimation*, the meaning of which includes additional components referring to the estimation structure (e.g. motivation) (Арутюнова 1999: 194). The meaning of **general estimation** is realized by adjectives “good” and “bad” and their synonyms with different stylistic and expressive characteristics (wonderful, great, excellent, terrible etc.) (Арутюнова 1999: 198). Meanings of **particular estimation** are differentiated according to

the side of a complex object they characterize. These are: 1) **sensory estimation** (pleasant – unpleasant; tasty – tasteless, fragrant – stinking etc.); 2) **psychological estimation** which includes two sub-types: a) intellectual estimation (interesting, gripping, clever – uninteresting, trite, silly); b) emotional estimation (happy – sad, pleasant – unpleasant); 3) **aesthetic estimation** (beautiful – ugly); 4) **ethic estimation** (moral – immoral, kind – unkind) 5) **utilitarian estimation** (useful – harmful, favourable – unfavourable); 6) **normative estimation** (right – wrong, standard – non-standard, healthy – ill); 7) **teleological estimation** (effective – ineffective, successful – unsuccessful) (Арутюнова 1999: 198). First I would like to consider general properties of my language material types of evaluative meanings found in Germanic and Slavonic phytonyms and then I will analyze ways of their expression and give some examples.

4. Language material

One should bear in mind that any plant usually has several names: the scientific name (usually in Latin), one or sometimes more literary names in a language, and popular names (there are as a rule several of them in the same language). For this investigation literary and popular medicinal plants names have been chosen from two Germanic languages (English and German), and two Slavonic languages (Russian and Ukrainian). As every language has its own rules of spelling medicinal plants names, in the text of the article the examples will be given according to the following pattern which will help to bring the examples from different languages to unification and make them more obvious: 1) the name of the language from which the example is taken (shortened); 2) the kind of the name (literary or popular), shortened; 3) the plant name in bold; 4) the Latin name to show which plant the example belongs to.

As it has been mentioned above, all the names have evaluative meaning, since I am mainly interested in the cross-cultural analysis of world views and this aspect shows national mentality and outlook on the world most vividly. Every nation has its own system of ideals, scale of values, according to which evaluation is carried out. An object belonging to the outside world is compared to this scale and estimated depending on its position (far or close) towards the ideal. I think it is better to use the term “evaluation” rather than “estimation” when speaking about phytonyms. Let me explain why. A detailed research of a man’s cognitive activity reflected in phytonyms was carried out by Nataliya Panasenko. She distinguishes four stages of cognitive activity: 1) initial information which includes knowledge about where the plants can be found, time when they blossom, what parts of them can be used and how effective their usage is; 2) processing the received information which means comparing plants with the aim to find similarity in form, colour or other outward features with another plants or object; 3) attracting cultural background that refers to the social sphere of a person’s existence rather than to the biological one; 4) final evaluation of useful properties, effectiveness of usage etc. This final stage refers the plants to a certain class: healing, poisonous, edible, raw materials or other (Панасенко 2006). In other words, estimative meaning in phytonyms is a result of obtaining various kinds of information about a plants and careful studying their features, so further I will speak of evaluative meanings in medicinal plants names.

5. Kinds of evaluative meanings in phytonyms

Before I start analyzing lexical means of expressing evaluation I find it necessary to indicate kinds of estimation found in Germanic and Slavonic phytonyms and supply them with some examples.

- (1) a. **General estimation:** Germ. pop. *Wolfsbeere* – *Paris quadrifolia*, Engl. pop. *Wolfspoilson* – *Aconitum napellus*, Russ. pop. *Дорогая трава* – *Chelidonium maius*, Ukr. pop. *Погане зілля* – *Atropa Belladonna*
- b. **Particular estimation:** a) *sensory*: Germ. pop. *Honigbeere* – *Rubus idaeus*, Engl. pop. *Aromatic weed* – *Gaultheria decumbens*, Russ. pop. *Крушина игольная* – *Rhamnus catharticus*, Ukr. lit. *Маренка запашна* – *Asperula odorata*;
- b) *aesthetic*: Germ. pop. *Ballrose* – *Viburnum opulus*, Engl. pop. *Venuse's hair* – *Adiantum capillus-veneris*, Russ. pop. *Барыня-дерево* – *Stataeus sanguinea*, Ukr. pop. *Дика троянда* – *Rosa canina*;
- c) *utilitarian*: Russ. pop. *Трава от ста болезней* – *Hypericum perforatum*, Ukr. pop. *Корінь болячковий* – *Gentiana lutea*;
- d) *normative*: Germ. pop. *Falscher Porst* – *Andromeda polifolia*, Engl. lit. *True lavender* – *Lavandula angustifolia*, Russ. pop. *Лжеакация* – *Robinia pseudoacacia*, Ukr. lit. *Підмаренник справжній* – *Galium verum*;
- e) *teleological*: Germ. pop. *St.Johanniskerze* – *Verbascum thapsus*, Engl. pop. *Panacea* – *Arnica montana*, Russ. pop. *Царь-зелле* – *Aconitum napellus*, Ukr. pop. *Благодатка* – *Gratiola officinalis*

In the medicinal plants names estimative meanings can be expressed only morphologically and lexically, though in a language they can find their embodiment in units of all levels: phonetic, lexical, syntactic and on the level of text. The researchers describe, as a rule, evaluative units of the same level in one language or compare their usage in two or more languages (Вольф 2002, Писанова 1997). As it is generally believed, lexical level is the most suitable for conveying evaluative meaning. A number of investigations have been carried out to study evaluative nouns, adjectives and adverbs in English (Кириллова 1996, Соловьева 2000), German (Вишивана 1999), Russian (Шрамм 1979) and other languages. As evaluative adjectives in phytonyms have been thoroughly analyzed before (Усик 2009), this time I would like to pay attention to nouns as a component of their semantic structure.

6. Nouns as a means of expressing evaluation in phytonyms.

Since the investigation reflected in this article is purely semantic, and not structural, which should be an object of a separate analysis, I believe that it would be better to regard in this chapter both nouns and their derivatives which may belong to other parts of speech. It also concerns nouns forming a part of a compound word (say, in examples obtained from German). The reason for such an approach is as follows. Evaluative nouns in phytonyms are closely connected with cultural concepts, so each example demands careful and detailed explanation which applies equally to the noun itself as well as for all its derivatives.

In examples of medicinal plants names in the languages under consideration nouns can convey the meanings of the following kinds of estimation.

6.1 General estimation

Both in the Germanic and in the Slavonic languages nouns denoting general estimation are used to express negative evaluation in names of poisonous plants, so in some examples it is stated directly with noun “poison” or “death”:

- (2) a. Germ. pop. *Todeskraut* – Atropa Belladonna
 b. Engl. pop. *Wolfspoilon, Wolfsbane* – Atropa Belladonna Engl. pop. *Deadly nightshade* – Atropa Belladonna a
 c. Ukr. pop. *Отруйниця* – Atropa Belladonn

Another way to indicate negative attitude is usage of mythologisms such as “devil”, “witch” and the like:

- (3) a. Germ. pop. *Hexenkraut* – Hyoscyamus niger,
 b. Engl. pop. *Devil’s milk* – Chelidonium majus (poisonous properties)
 c. Russ. pop. *Чертов бурьян* – Xanthium spinosum
 d. Ukr. pop. *Бисове ребро* – Xanthium spinosum (the plant is pricking)

Names of some animals are also used to convey estimation, for example, nouns “wolf”, “dog” (only in the Slavonic languages) and “hog”:

- (4) a. Germ. pop. *Wolfsbeere* – Paris quadrifolia
 b. Engl. pop. *Hog’s bean* – Hyoscyamus niger (a poisonous plant)
 c. Russ. pop. *Волкана* – Geranium pretense, *Собачья смерть* – Colchicum automnale
 d. Ukr. pop. *Песя вишня* – Atropa Belladonna, *Свиня вош* - Conium maculatum

In Table 1 nouns of general estimation are summed up.

Language	Negative estimation
German	Tode, Wolf, Teufel, Hexen, Jude
English	bane, wolf, hog, devil
Russian	яд, смерть, волк, свинья, собака, пёс
Ukrainian	отрута, вовк, свиня, собака, пес, воша

Tab. 1 *Nouns of general estimation in the semantic structure of phytonyms*

6.2 Sensory estimation

Sensory estimation is based on information received through organs of sensitivity and is subdivided according to the channels of perception. In phytonyms nouns denoting touch, smell and taste are found. Positive evaluation of **touch** is expressed by names of some fabrics (silk, flannel, velvet), nouns “thorn”, “needle” and the like mean negative feeling of touch:

- (5) a. Germ. pop. *Seidenpflanzen* – Gentiana lutea
 b. Engl. pop. *Flannel mullein* – Verbascum thapsus, *Way-Thorn* – Rhamnus cathartica
 c. Russ. pop. *Шелковая трава* – Acorus calamus
 d. Ukr. pop. *Колючки, Колючка жах, Колюки, Коляк* – Xanthium spinosum

Pleasant **smell** is expressed through comparison with some plants, e.g. rosemary is a universal standard of pleasant smell as it is widely used as a condiment. On the other hand, animals’ names (such as “louse” or “goat”), being a component of a plant name, express negative attitude to its smell. These and other widespread nouns naming plants which are considered to have pleasant or unpleasant smell can be found in Table 2, here only the most characteristic examples are given:

- (6) a. Germ. pop. *Fliederbaum* – *Sambucus nigra*, *Läusekraut* – *Ledum palustre*
 b. Engl. pop. *Labrador tea* – *Ledum palustre*
 c. Russ. pop. *Желтая лаванда* – *Helichrysum arenarium*, Russ. pop. *Клоповник* – *Ledum palustre*
 d. Ukr. pop. *Лисова м'ята* – *Glechoma hederacea*

Nouns denoting **taste** can express positive, neutral and negative evaluation, unlike touch and smell that can only be negative or positive. As it becomes obvious from the Table 2 below, standards of sweet, sour and bitter tastes are all names of food-stuffs, like in the following examples:

- (7) a. Germ. pop. *Hönigbeere* – *Rubus idaeus*
 b. Engl. pop. *Water pepper* – *Polygonum hydropiper*
 c. Russ. pop. *Водяной хрен* – *Tropaeolum majus*
 d. Ukr. pop. *Заячий квасок* – *Oxalis acetosella*

Language	Positive evaluation	Neutral evaluation	Negative evaluation
German	Seiden, Balsam, Rosmarin, Flieder	-	Pfrieme, Dorn, Wanzen, Läuse, Ziegel
English	flannel, velvet, balsam, rosemary, acacia, jasmine, valerian, tea, tobacco	–	pepper
Russian	шелк, розмарин, мята, лаванда, хмель, шалфей, ладан, бальзам	квас, щавель	шило, игла, свинья, вошь, клоп, перец, хрен, полынь
Ukrainian	розмарин, м'ята, васильки, кріп	квас, щавель	свиня, воша, перец, хрін, полин

Tab. 2 *Nouns of sensory estimation in Germanic and Slavonic phytonyms*

6.3 Aesthetic estimation

Nouns, through which this kind of estimation is expressed, are often connected with the concept “woman’s beauty”. Nouns “sun” and “star” indicate positive aesthetic estimation, too. Also nouns denoting names of some plants (usually garden plants which are kept for their flowers) are widely used as standards of beauty:

- (8) a. Germ. pop. *Frauenspiegel* – *Polygonum hydropiper*
 b. Eng. pop. *Venus hair* – *Adiantum capillus-veneris*, *Blazing star* – *Aletris*
 c. Russ. pop. *Золотое солнце* – *Helichrysum arenarium*
 d. Ukr. pop. *Дівочі пупки* – *Achillea millefolium*, *Заячий мак* – *Adonis vernalis*

Table 3 presents the summary of nouns with positive aesthetic evaluation, from which it is obvious that some concepts, such as the name of the goddess “Venus” and the garden plant name “rose” as standards of beauty are the most widespread ones, usage of other nouns is more nationally specific.

Language	Positive evaluation
German	Venus-, Frau-, Rose, Raute, Malve, Gold
English	Venus, maiden, rose, daisy, marigold, star, sun,

	gold
Russian	Венера, барыня, девица, солнце, золото
Ukrainian	дівчина, троянда, рожа, мак, рута, сонце, зірка, золото

Tab. 3 *Nouns of aesthetic evaluation in Germanic and Slavonic phytonyms*

6.4 Teleological estimation

Teleological estimation in the language material under discussion is only positive, reflecting effectiveness of using a certain plant for treating various diseases. Nouns expressing teleological estimation in medicinal plants names in the languages in the Germanic and Slavonic languages are enlisted in Table 4.

Language	Positive evaluation
German	Herr Gott, Christ, Himmelsmutter, Apostel, Engel, St. Conrad, St. Johannes, St. Catharine, St. Antonis, St. Michaelis
English	bishop, priest, St. John, St. Peter, St. Benedict, St. Jacob
Russian	мать, королева, царь, Бог, Иисус Христос, Св. Иоанн (Иван), Св. Георгий (Егор), Св. Петр, Св. Юрий, благодать, милость, дар
Ukrainian	Бог, Св. Іван, Св. Петро, благодать

Tab. 4 *Nouns of teleological evaluation in Germanic and Slavonic phytonyms*

Positive teleological estimation is found in medical plants names with nouns denoting a person occupying a high social position or highly respected in a certain culture (mother, king and queen). Another group of nouns to denote teleological evaluation belongs to Biblicisms. Names of saints are the most frequent in this group of examples, that are specific for each language.

- (9) a. Germ. pop. *Catarinenwurz* – *Arnica Montana*
 b. Engl. pop. *Jacob's staff* – *Verbascum thapsus*
 c. Russ. pop. *Всем травам мать, Царь-зелие* – *Aconitum napellus*
 d. Ukr. pop. *Петрів батіг* – *Cichorium intybus*

7. Conclusion

The survey of nouns found in evaluative phytonyms can be treated as the first stage of their further and deeper investigation, which demands structural analysis, followed by the onomasiological one. Therefore, the direction for future research work is outlined. Here I would like to sum up the main results of this investigation:

- (a) Nouns and their derivatives in the semantic structure of medicinal plants names are used to denote general, sensory, teleological and aesthetic estimations and express normative and utilitarian meanings.
 (b) In most cases evaluative meanings are implicit and their interpretation is based on understanding cultural background.

- (c) All the nouns expressing estimation in phytonyms denote objects connected with everyday life of the language society. In the case of sensory estimation these objects belong to the sphere of home life, while teleological estimation lies more in the religious and social sphere. General and aesthetic estimation is of a mixed character.

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