



## Study of mythological lexemes in modern linguistics

Sarvinoz PULATOVA<sup>1</sup>

National University of Uzbekistan named after Mirzo Ulugbek

### ARTICLE INFO

#### *Article history:*

Received August 2021

Received in revised form

20 August 2021

Accepted 15 September 2021

Available online

11 October 2021

#### *Keywords:*

mytho-lexeme,  
mythical creatures,  
semantics,  
semantic analysis,  
semantic meaning,  
homonymy,  
corpus research,  
normative frequency,  
corpus.

### ABSTRACT

The article is given to considering semantics and recurrence of “Legendary creatures” names of the Germanic root within the English dialect. The creator looks at semantic implications of three lexemes of Germanic beginning designating legendary animals, analyzes standardizing recurrence of these lexemes in four corpuses, five sort sub-corpuses of the English dialect. The semantic implications of lexemes are distinguished; the lexemes are positioned agreeing to polysemy-monosemy feature and the recurrence within the present day English dialect. The paper considers the conceivable interrelations between the semantic, recurrence and rambling characteristics of mytho-lexemes beneath investigation.

2181-1415/© 2021 in Science LLC.

This is an open access article under the Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.ru>)

## Hozirgi zamon tilshunosligida mifologik leksemalarning o'rganilishi

#### *Kalit so'zlar:*

mifo-leksema,  
afsonaviy mavjudotlar,  
semantika,  
semantik tahlil,  
semantik ma'no,  
omonimiya,  
korpus tadqiqotlari,  
me'yoriy chastota,  
korpus.

### ANNOTATSIYA

Maqola ingliz shevasida nemis ildizining “Afsonaviy mavjudotlar” nomlarining semantikasi va takrorlanishini ko'rib chiqishga bag'ishlangan. Yaratuvchi afsonaviy hayvonlarni belgilaydigan german tilining uchta leksemasining semantik ta'sirini ko'rib chiqadi, bu leksemalarning to'rt korpusda, ingliz lahjasining beshta kichik korpuslarida standart takrorlanishini tahlil qiladi. Leksemalarning semantik ma'nolari ajratiladi, leksemalarning polisememiya-monosemiya xususiyati va hozirgi ingliz lahjasida takrorlanishiga mos holda joylashtirilgan. Maqola so'roq ostidagi mifo-leksemalarning semantik, takroriy va hamma tanish xususiyatlarining o'zaro bog'liqligini ko'rib chiqadi.

<sup>1</sup> PhD student faculty of Foreign Philology National University of Uzbekistan named after Mirzo Ulugbek, Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

## Изучение мифологических лексем в современной лингвистике

### АННОТАЦИЯ

#### Ключевые слова:

мифолексема,  
мифические существа,  
семантика,  
семантический анализ,  
семантическое значение,  
омонимия,  
корпусное исследование,  
нормативная частота,  
корпус.

Статья посвящена рассмотрению семантики и повторяемости имен «Легендарных существ» германского корня в английском диалекте. Автор рассматривает семантические значения трех лексем германского начала, обозначающих легендарных животных, анализирует стандартизирующую повторяемость этих лексем в четырех корпусах, пяти родовых под корпусами английского диалекта. Выделены смысловые значения лексем; лексемы позиционируются в соответствии с признаком полисемии-моносемии и повторяемости в современном английском диалекте. В статье рассматриваются возможные взаимосвязи между семантическими, повторяющимися и бессистемными характеристиками исследуемых мифолексем.

Language is a tool for building a system of concepts about the world, as well as a tool for operating with these concepts. The complication and structuring of the reality surrounding a person entails the complication of language as a means of operating with the concepts of the surrounding reality. Mythological vocabulary is one of the most ancient, durable and stable layers of the vocabulary of any language. The value of mythological vocabulary as an object of linguistic research lies in the fact that it reflects the cultural meaning deeply rooted in the inner form of the word, the specific mentality of a particular ethnos, people, nation. Semantic and lexico-statistical studies of mythological vocabulary seem relevant from the standpoint of cognitive science, anthropolinguistics, psycholinguistics and a number of sciences dealing with the problems of thinking and cognitive mechanisms.

Studies of the semantics of mytholexemes make it possible to assess their semantic load and cultural connotation, while lexical and statistical studies form the structure of these elements in the language array.

The issues of the semantics of myth are currently being dealt with rather actively, both in our country and abroad. Interesting, for example, are the works of N.Yu. Kuznetsova, I.L. Kuchesheva, O.Yu. Nikolenko, N.A. Faylert, O.A. Plakhova, J.S.G.S Kirk, Ch. Rojek and others. Corpus linguistics has been developing very actively in recent years, especially abroad: D. Glynn, S.Th. Gries, T. McEnery, A. Hardie, K. Stuart, A. Botella, I. Ferri and others. However, the approach that combines these methodologies is new, and yet it allows one to empirically study the patterns of development of the meanings of the mythological layer of vocabulary in dynamics.

Lexicographic analysis of mytholexemes using data from 18 mythological, etymological and explanatory dictionaries of the English language, covering the period from 1859 to 2017, made it possible to collect information about the language of origin and further transformation of the names of mythical creatures, as well as their semantic meanings. In this case, only semantically related meanings were taken into account and cases of unmotivated homonymy were ignored. Lexemes are taken as examples: *dwarf*, *elf*, *bugbear*.

**Dwarf.** This lexeme is widely represented in the studied dictionaries (17 out of 18). In all lexicographic sources, the authors unanimously agree on the Germanic origin of this lexeme. Some point to a more ancient, proto-Indo-European origin, a hypothetical reconstructed ancestral language of the Indo-European family. In particular, D. Harper (2001) points to the origin of the word dwarf from the pro-Germanic \*dweraz, possibly from the pro-Indo-European \*dhwergwhos “something tiny” [15] (something tiny) (hereinafter, the translation of the author of the article is M.I.).

The class of creatures denoted by the dwarf token has a number of semantic characteristics. The only semantic feature of this class of humanoid creatures is abnormally small stature. J. Auto (2005) describes the process of transforming the meanings of the lexeme dwarf as follows: “In English, it originally meant simply person of abnormally small stature”; the modern connotation of ‘small manlike creature that lives underground and works metal’, a product of Germanic mythology, is not recorded until the late 18th century”. / “Ingliz tilida bu dastlab “g‘ayritabiiy kichkina odam” degan ma‘noni anglatardi; Germaniya mifologiyasi mahsuloti bo‘lgan “yer ostida yashaydigan va metall bilan ishlaydigan kichik gumanoid mavjudot”, uning zamonaviy ma‘nosi 18-asr oxirigacha uchramaydi”.

Despite this, most of the studied dictionaries refer primarily to the mythological meaning of this word: “an imaginary creature that looks like a small man” (kichkina odamga o‘xshab ketadigan xayoliy mavjudot), “a member of a mythical race” (afsonaviy jonot vakili).

Some sources attribute magical properties to creatures of this class: “a creature like a little man, esp. one having magical powers” (sehrli kuchlarga ega bo‘lgan kichkina odamga o‘xshagan jonot), - as well as a certain way of life: “In Scandinavian mythology dwarfs are inhabitants of the interior of the earth and especially of large isolated rocks”. / “Skandinaviya mifologiyasida mittilar yer osti va ayniqsa katta toshli tog‘larning aholisi”; “... small supernatural being ..., skilled in metal-working”. / “... kichik g‘ayritabiiy mavjudotlar ..., metall bilan ishlovchilar”. Modern explanatory dictionaries give two more interpretations of the meaning of the word dwarf, in particular with an offensive connotation: “A person who is of unusually or abnormally small stature because of a medical condition”. / “Tibbiy sabablarga ko‘ra juda kichik bo‘yli odam” – as well as spreading in relation not only to humans, but also to animals or plants and even celestial bodies: “person, animal, or plant, much below ordinary size of species” (odam, hayvon yoki o‘simlik, bu turga xos bo‘lganlardan ancha kichik); “A star of relatively small size and low luminosity”. / “Nisbatan kichik o‘lchamli va past yorqinlikdagi yulduz”.

Thus, the entire presented range of semantic characteristics of the lexeme can be generalized into two meanings: 1) someone or something of abnormally small size or height; 2) a mythological human-like creature of small stature, living underground and in the rocks and engaged in metal processing.

**Elf.** Lexeme elf of Germanic origin. Most dictionaries point to the Anglo-Saxon roots of the lexeme: “The word comes from a prehistoric Germanic \*albiz, a variant of which produced Old Norse álf”. / “Bu so‘z nemis tarafdori bo‘lgan \*albizga qaytadi, undan o‘z navbatida álf degan eski skandinaviya so‘z keladi.”

The semantics of the lexeme elf and its connection with other considered mytholexemes of the Germanic group are interesting. The mythological dictionary of J.A. Coleman defines this concept as generic in relation to the concept of dwarf: “The black

elves were the dwarfs living in Svartalfheim, the light elves were the fairies living in Alfheim”. / “Qora elflar – Svartalfeymda yashaydigan mittilar, yorqin rangdagi elflar – Alfeymda yashovchi parilar edi”. Apparently, the source of this is the “Younger Edda”, which speaks of the division of elves (alves) into Dockalfar or Svartalfar – dark, living in the earth, and Liosalfar – light, white”. J.A. Coleman’s dictionary is the only one of the reviewed sources that describes the origin of the creatures themselves: “beings created from the maggots breeding in the flesh of the dead Ymir” [9. P. 330] (o‘lik Ymirning go‘shida ko‘payadigan lichinkalardan yaratilgan mavjudotlar) and directly points to their ancient Germanic, more precisely to Old Norse, origin.

Among the most common characteristics of creatures called the elf lexeme are small stature (which combines this concept with the concept of dwarf), an evil temperament and magical abilities. In particular, we meet: “a supernatural being; mischievous creature; dwarf; little creature” (g‘ayritabiiy mavjudotlar; yovuz mavjudotlar; mittilar; kichik jon-zotlar). In addition, some more specific signs are indicated: “... a small, imaginary person, ... dressed in green with pointed ears and a tall hat”. / “... kichkina xayoliy odam ... quloqlari uchli, yashil kiyingan, baland shapka va shisha tufli kiygan”.

The most detailed, colorful description is given by the American Encyclopedia (1918–1920): “They are capricious spirits, of diminutive size but preternatural power. They are divided in the sagas into good and bad, or light and dark elves, the former having eyes like the stars, countenances brighter than the sun, and golden yellow hair, the latter being blacker than pitch, and fearfully dangerous. The elves ordinarily wear glass shoes, and a cap with a little bell hanging from it. The elves sometimes become domestic servants, and would be valuable as such if they were less easily offended and less dangerous after taking offense”. / “Bu injiq mavjudotlar, ularning o‘lchami kichkina, lekin g‘ayritabiiy kuchlidir. Sagada ular yaxshi va yomon, yorqin va qora elflarga bo‘linadi. Yorqin rangdagilarning ko‘zi yulduzlarga o‘xshaydi, yuzlari quyoshdan yorqinroq, sochlari oltin sariq. Qora elflar juda qora va o‘ta xavfli. Elflar odatda shisha poyabzal va kichkina qo‘ng‘iroqli qalpoq kiyadilar. Ba‘zida elflar uy xizmatchisiga aylanishadi va bu ish ular uchun qimmatbaho bo‘lar edi”.

The considered explanatory dictionaries of the English language do not contain negative connotations and tend to neutralize it. For example, the Cambridge Dictionary gives the following description: “... a small, imaginary person, ... often described in stories as playing tricks and having magical powers”. / “... kichkina xayoliy mavjudot ... ko‘pincha buzg‘inchi va sehrli kuchlarga ega deb ta‘riflanadi”. Only the Oxford Dictionary contains the definition of “a capricious nature”, thus slightly shifting the connotative coloring to a negative plane.

The semantics of the word elf in the course of history has undergone some changes depending on the development of one or another mythological tradition that uses this word to characterize a class of creatures. The Western Germanic concept in the early Middle Ages began to differ from the Scandinavian myths, and the Anglo-Saxon one went even further from them, probably under the influence of the Celts. J. Auto (2005) writes: “In Germanic legend, elves were potent supernatural beings, capable of exercising considerable magic powers to the benefit or harm of human beings. Their decline to their modern status as small mischievous sprites seems to have begun in the 16th century”. / “Nemis afsonasida, elflar odamlarga foyda yoki zarar etkazish uchun katta sehr kuchlarini ishlatishga qodir bo‘lgan g‘ayritabiiy mavjudotlar edi. Ularning zamonaviy kichik spritlar ko‘rinishga kelishi XVI-asrda boshlanganga o‘xshaydi”.



In connection with such a semantic transformation, it is interesting to compare the semantic characteristics of the concept elf, obtained as a result of lexicographic analysis, and the author's semantic characteristics incorporated into this concept by J.R.R. Tolkien and J. Rowling in their works. Tolkien's elves retain only a few orthodox Germanic traits: magical properties and pointed ears – but otherwise they are similar to humans, but more beautiful and wiser, possessing greater fortitude and sharper senses, able to live in harmony with nature. In *The Book of Lost Tales*, Tolkien began to develop the theme that the miniature, fairy-like race of elves was once a great and powerful people and that when the world was conquered by humans, these elves “belittled”. Some of the works written by Tolkien as part of the history of the elves were directly influenced by Celtic mythology. Tolkien wrote that his elves are different from the elves of “more famous works”, referring to the Scandinavian mythology.

A little closer to the original Germanic meaning is the house elves from J.K. Rowling's book on Harry Potter. In this series of books, they are presented as humanoid creatures of small stature, with pointed ears and strong magical abilities. And the most significant in this case is that these creatures are in the service of people, as mentioned by the American Encyclopedia. However, J. Rowling turns the service into slavery, and rather rigidly and magically limited.

Thus, with some semantic and connotative variations of the concept nominated by the lexeme elf, on the basis of the lexicographic analysis carried out, it is possible to identify a certain semantic core of this concept. That is, the semantic characteristics of the lexeme elf can be summarized as follows: a small humanoid creature with magical powers, capricious, touchy and naughty character, with pointed ears, often in green clothes, hats and glass shoes.

**Bugbear.** The origin of this lexeme is highly uncertain. All the sources considered are unanimous in the composite character of this lexeme, however, earlier than the 16th century, the path of this lexeme was not traced in the sources considered. In particular, D. Harper's etymological dictionary says: “... a sort of demon in the form of a bear that eats small children, also ‘object of dread’ (whether real or not), from obsolete bug ‘goblin, scarecrow”. / “... Kichkina bolalarni yeydigan ayiq shaklidagi jin hamda “qo‘rquv obyekt” dir (haqiqiy ham emas), “goblin, qo‘rqinchli” so‘zining eskirgan ma’nosidan olingan.” Some sources make an attempt to trace the etymological connections and characteristics of the lexeme. H. Wedgwood's Dictionary of English Etymology finds links with Scottish, Danish and Welsh words. In addition, the dictionaries contain a large number of modifications of the mytholexeme: “Other modifications are boggart, bogle, signifying an object of terror” [Ibidem]. / “Boshqa o‘zgartirishlar – boggart, bogle, – dahshat ob’ektini anglatadi”.

As for the semantics of the word, such characteristics as “goblin”, “scarecrow”, “ghost”, “object of fear / horror” are found in all the sources considered. Above, there is one more meaning-making feature – “that eats small children”, which J.A. Coleman and D. Harper talk about, adding categoricity to the negative connotation of the concept.

In addition to the narrowly specific meaning of the concept nominated by the bugbear lexeme, a number of dictionaries also indicate a more abstract meaning, which probably arose as a result of the transfer of an object of influence from a narrowly limited (small children) to a wider one - a person in general. In particular, we find:

“... Object of baseless fear; false belief used to intimidate or dissuade; ... cause of annoyance”. / “... asossiz qo‘rquv obyekt; qo‘rqitish yoki qaytarish uchun ishlatilgan noto‘g‘ri e’tiqod; ... bezovta qiluvchi omil”; “A particular thing that annoys or upsets you”

(sizni bezovta qiladigan yoki xafa qiladigan narsa); “Something that makes people feel annoyed or worried” (odamlarni bezovta qiladigan yoki tashvishga soladigan narsa); “A cause of obsessive fear, anxiety, or irritation. “The biggest villain is that adman’s bugbear, saturated fat”. / “Asossiz qo‘rquv, xavotir yoki asabiylashishning sababi”.

This extended meaning of the lexeme is consistent with the author’s vision of J. Rowling. In a series of books about Harry Potter, she describes the so-called Boggart – an entity that does not have its own physical form, but in fact, is the embodiment of the fears of the one who faces her. As a result, it is possible to generalize all the described semantic nuances of the concept nominated by the bugbear lexeme in the form of two meanings: 1) a mythical creature in the form of a bear, which has an extremely negative effect on (small) children (from eating to instilling terror); 2) any object of fear, irritation, anxiety or annoyance.

As a result of studying the structure of the distribution of each lexeme over the subcorpus of COCA, we can assume a connection between the semantic and discursive characteristics of lexemes. In order to identify clear and statistically reliable tendencies in the use of lexemes in different semantic meanings in different discourse, it is necessary to turn to a wider range of names of mythical creatures, as well as to trace the contextual coloring of lexemes found in different subcorpus, which is possible using the technique constructing and analyzing concordances for each lexeme, analyzing the right and left contexts, identifying stable collocations and studying their semantic meanings.

#### REFERENCES:

1. Ayto J. Word Origins. The Hidden Histories of English Words from A to Z. 2nd edition. L.: A & C Black Publishers Ltd, 2005. – P. 577.
2. Cambridge Dictionaries Online [Электронный ресурс]. URL: <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/> (дата обращения: 21.06.2017).
3. Coleman J.A. The Dictionary of Mythology. An A-Z of Themes, Legends And Heroes. England: Arcturus Publishing Limited, in association with W. Foulsham & Co. Ltd, The Publishing House, 2007. – P. 1136.
4. Fimi D. «Mad» Elves and «elusive beauty»: some Celtic strands of Tolkien’s mythology // Folklore. 2006. Vol. 117. Issue 2. August. – PP. 156–170.
5. Fowler H.W., Fowler F.G. The concise Oxford dictionary of current English. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1919. – P. 1088.
6. Global Web-based English (GloWbE) [Электронный ресурс]. URL: <http://corpus.byu.edu/glowbe/> (дата обращения: 21.06.2017).
7. Glynn D. Corpus-Driven Cognitive Semantics. Introduction to the field // Corpus-Driven Cognitive Semantics: Quantitative Approaches. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2010. – PP. 1–42.
8. Gries S.Th. Quantitative corpus data on blend formation: Psycho- and cognitive-linguistic perspectives // Cross-disciplinary perspectives on lexical lending / eds. V. Renner, F. Maniez & J.L.P. Arnaud. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2012. – PP. 145–167.
9. Harper D. Online Etymology Dictionary [Электронный ресурс]. URL: [http://dictionary.sensagent.com/Online\\_Etymology\\_Dictionary/en-en/](http://dictionary.sensagent.com/Online_Etymology_Dictionary/en-en/) (дата обращения: 15.06.2017).
10. Hoad T.F. The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology. Oxford – N. Y.: Oxford University Press, 1996. – P. 552.

11. Kirk G.S. Myth: its meaning and functions in ancient and other cultures. Berkeley: Cambridge [Eng.] University Press; University of California Press, 1970. – P. 299.
12. Klein E.A. Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the English language. Amsterdam – L. – N. Y.: Elsevier Publishing Company, 1966. Vol. 1. – P. 879.
13. Longman English Dictionary [Электронный ресурс]. URL: <http://www.ldoceonline.com/> (дата обращения: 02.06.2017).
14. Macmillan Dictionary [Электронный ресурс]. URL: <http://www.macmillandictionary.com/> (дата обращения: 29.05.2017).
15. McEnery T., Hardie A. Corpus Linguistics: Method, Theory and Practice. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. – P. 312.
16. Monaghan P. The Encyclopedia of Celtic Mythology and Folklore. Facts On File. N. Y.: Inc. 132 West 31st Street, 2004. – P. 529.