



THE FORMATION OF ORNITHONYMS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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The formation of ornithonyms in the English language constitutes a complex linguistic phenomenon situated at the intersection of onomastics, lexicology, and word-formation theory. Ornithonyms, defined as lexical units denoting birds, represent a significant subgroup within *zoonym* and reflect not only biological classification but also the nominative capacity of language, the conceptual structures of human cognition, and the cultural-historical experience embedded in the lexicon. The study of bird names therefore provides valuable insight into the mechanisms of nomination, semantic motivation, and the diachronic development of English vocabulary.

From a theoretical perspective, word-formation in English operates through both morphological and semantic mechanisms. Morphological processes include *compounding, affixation, and conversion*, whereas semantic mechanisms involve *metaphor, metonymy, and onomatopoeia*. Given the predominantly analytic structure of English, compounding has historically functioned as one of the most productive means of lexical expansion. This tendency is particularly evident in the formation of ornithonyms, where two or more free morphemes combine to create a semantically transparent nominative unit.

A representative example is *blackbird*, formed through the combination of the adjective "*black*" and the noun "*bird*." In this determinative compound, the second component functions as the head (hypernym), while the first element serves as a specifying modifier that introduces a differential semantic feature. The same structural model is observed in *woodpecker*, where the lexical components "*wood*" and "*pecker*" reflect the bird's ecological environment and behavioral characteristic. In such cases, the naming process is motivated by salient perceptual features, demonstrating the close relationship between linguistic form and extra linguistic reality.

Color-based nomination represents one of the most productive semantic patterns in English ornithonym. For instance, *snowy owl* and *goldfinch* illustrate how chromatic features function as primary differentiating markers. Color constitutes a cognitively accessible category that facilitates rapid identification and categorization. Consequently, it frequently serves as a dominant semantic component in compound ornithonyms. Habitat-based compounds, such as those incorporating references to forests, seas, or marshlands, similarly reflect environmental associations as key nominative determinants.

Onomatopoeia constitutes another significant mechanism in the formation of bird names. Onomatopoeic ornithonyms arise through phonetic imitation of the characteristic sounds produced by birds, thus demonstrating a natural correspondence between sound form and meaning. The name *cuckoo* originates from a direct imitation of the bird's call, while *chiffchaff* exemplifies reduplicative sound symbolism. Such formations are particularly noteworthy from



a phono semantic perspective, as they illustrate the interplay between acoustic perception and lexical creation. Historically, many onomatopoeic names emerged within vernacular usage before being incorporated into standardized scientific terminology.

Affixation, although less productive than compounding in the domain of ornithonyms, performs a distinct semantic function. The *suffix -ling*, for example, denotes smallness or immaturity and appears in forms such as duckling. For instance, affixation does not generate a new taxonomic category but rather specifies a developmental stage within an existing species. This morphological pattern reflects older Germanic derivational traditions and demonstrates how word-formation may encode biological age distinctions within lexical structure.

Eponymous naming represents a further dimension of ornithonym formation, particularly within scientific nomenclature. In such cases, bird species are named in honor of explorers, naturalists, or ornithologists. For example, Steller's jay commemorates the naturalist Georg Steller, while Wilson's warbler is associated with the ornithologist Alexander Wilson. Structurally, these forms often employ the possessive construction, thereby encoding personal attribution within the lexical unit. Eponymous ornithonyms reflect extra linguistic motivations and illustrate the interaction between scientific discovery and linguistic codification.

Metaphorical and *metonymic* processes also contribute significantly to ornithonym formation. Metaphor operates on the basis of perceived similarity, whereas metonymy relies on contiguity or associative relationships. The name robin, for instance, is semantically linked to *the bird's reddish breast*, which serves as a salient identifying feature. In such cases, the nominative act is guided by anthropocentric perception, where by human observers select and lexicalize the most prominent visual or behavioral traits. These processes underscore the cognitive foundations of lexical innovation and highlight the role of conceptual salience in linguistic categorization.

From a diachronic perspective, several English ornithonyms preserve elements inherited from Old English. The term nightingale derives from the Old English form *nightingale*, meaning "*night singer*." Although phonological evolution has altered its surface form, the semantic core remains intact. The historical continuity of such forms demonstrates the stability of certain nominative patterns across centuries and provides evidence of the deep-rooted integration of ornithonyms within the English lexical system.

Conversion, another characteristic feature of English morphology, occasionally intersects with ornithonym, although bird names predominantly function as nouns. In certain contexts, however, ornithonyms may develop secondary verbal or adjectival uses, illustrating the flexibility of English word-class boundaries. Despite this potential for functional shift, the primary role of ornithonyms remains terminological and referential, ensuring taxonomic precision.

The findings of this analysis indicate that semantic motivation constitutes the central organizing principle in the formation of English ornithonyms. Observable characteristics such as *color*, *sound*, *habitat*, and *behavior* serve as primary nominative triggers. Structurally, compounding emerges as the most productive morphological model, reflecting the analytic typology of English. Onomatopoeic formations tend to originate in popular usage, while eponymous names are predominantly associated with scientific classification. Affixation plays a more limited but semantically specific role, particularly in expressing diminutive or developmental meanings.



In conclusion, the system of ornithonym formation in English reveals the intricate interaction between morphological structure, semantic motivation, cognitive perception, and historical development. The study of bird names not only enriches our understanding of English word-formation processes but also contributes to broader inquiries in cognitive linguistics, etymology, and cultural linguistics. A comprehensive analysis of English ornithonyms may further serve as a theoretical foundation for comparative investigations involving other languages, including typologically different systems, thereby deepening our understanding of universal and language-specific patterns of nomination.

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