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# INTERPRETATIVE POTENTIAL OF BIRD NAMES AS PART OF COMPLEX NOUNS IN GERMAN

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## *Abstract*

The research is based on the modern theory of interpretation. The formation of interpretive meanings is based on conceptual derivation enabled by the cognitive mechanisms of metaphor, metonymy and metaphtonymy. It is noted that metaphor has the leading role. This article describes the relationships between both parts of compound nouns with the bird names. It is most important is to study the formation of secondary meanings of these birds' names, depending on the semantic structure of the noun. The work considers 5 cognitive areas to which these complex nouns belong: plants, animals, people, artifacts and body parts. Therefore, the source domain of interpretation is 'birds' and the target domain is plants, animals, humans, things and body parts. In most examples, the bird's name acts as the defining part of the compound nouns. This means that the referent, characterized by the composite, receives some of the characteristics of birds. The urgency of this research is determined by its theoretical prerequisites based on the principles of the cognitive approach. This fact allows dealing with specificity of interpretive activity of human's mind in the view of mental and language structures relation. The research made on German contributes to our understanding of the universal character of the basic principles, cognitive mechanisms and interpretive formats of knowledge of lexical categories determining the processes of interpretive conceptualization and categorization.

**Keywords:** Theory of interpretation, conceptual derivation, bird names, cognitive metaphor, metonymy, metaphtonymy.

# 1. Introduction

In this work the possibilities of the formation of secondary meanings of complex adjectives containing an animal name are explored. Different source and target domains determine the outer vector of interpretation between the cognitive domain "animals" and other domains. The theoretical approach of this investigation is based on the concept of interpretation, as an arbitrary thought activity of a man, which is directed to new knowledge (Panasenko, 2016). The term "language interpretation" is understood to mean a cognitive activity based on conceptual derivation, which manifests itself in the evolution of the content from the original concepts through the confirmation of the connection between the corresponding cognitive domains (Boldyrev & Aleksikova, 2010).

The change of the content is the cause of the concept "conceptual net", which explains the mechanisms of meaning formation. This network contains four types of spaces: a generic space, two input spaces and a blend (Fauconnier, 1997). Between the input spaces, the conceptual connections are formed by the choice of features that can be considered integrative for any conceptual field. These features form the possibility of the concept for interpretation.

It is necessary to note that the comparison of two thematic areas is based on the analogy of some of their characteristics or properties (Boldyrev, 2014). That is, interpretation presupposes a degree of ontological affinity.

The variety of features of the interpretation objects leaves the presence of different formats of knowledge interpretation:

- the format of perception;
- the format of observation;
- the format of function;
- the format of operational experience;
- the format of function, etc. (Panasenko, 2016).

In this article, the format of perception plays a special role. The perception of the perceived feature has a psychological reason and, by and large, means the perception of the feature by the sensory organs (Gamezo, 2001). The visual sense is considered particularly strong. The visual perception provides relevant information about a large spatial area of our environment.

# 2. Problem Statement

The current stage of research of the language system is focused on the study of the specifics of language as one of the cognitive subsystems and the role that is actually a fact of language forms in conceptualization. The analysis of the interpretive potential of language units allows taking a fresh look at the structure of lexical categories. In addition, there are currently not enough studies in this area based on the German language.

# 3. Research Questions

As an empirical material of this work, compounds were chosen. The composition as a way of word formation means the connection of independent words to a new word. This type of word formation is very

old in the German language and still plays a big role (Stepanova, 1953). The structure of the compounds indicates the presence or absence of the so-called "head" of the compound. In the case of presence, this compound word is called "the determinative composite". This is a compound in which a subordinate or subordinate relationship arises between the connected words (Kessel & Reinmann, 2005).

The formation of secondary values of animal names as part of compound nouns occurs through cognitive mechanism of metaphors, metonymy and metaphtonymy.

Metonymy is a cognitive process in which one conceptual entity, means, provides mental access to another object, target, in the same domain (Kövecses & Radden, 1998). Metonymy is a way of building an image. The mechanism of metonymic reinterpretation is the transfer of the names of phenomena, objects and their signs in accordance with contiguity or in a broader sense - in accordance with their relations in space and time. Metonymy draws attention to an individual trait that allows the addressee of speech to identify an object, distinguish it from the region of the observed and distinguish it from other objects that exist with it (Arutiunova, 1990).

In modern cognitive science, it is customary to define a metaphor as a (main) mental operation, as a way of cognizing, categorizing, conceptualizing, evaluating and explaining the world (Chudinov & Budaev, 2007). J. Tailor notes that metaphor proves to be good example of imaginative schematic operations because it allows us a glimpse of the creation of meaningful structure via projections and elaborations of image schemata (Johnson, 1987). A metaphor makes us attend to some similarities, often a novel or surprising, between two or more things. This observation leads to a conclusion concerning the meaning of metaphors (Davidson, 1978).

The term metaphthonymy was coined by Goossens less than 20 years ago. He defines its status as cover term which should help to increase our awareness of the fact that metaphor and metonymy can be intertwined (Goossens, 2003). In metaphthonymy, both associative relationships are found in similarity (the interaction of two conceptual concepts related to different conceptual spaces) and in adjacency (the interaction of two conceptually close entities within the same conceptual space). Moreover, the elements of the sphere have a source of metonymic expansion or metonymic basis. Metaphthonymy is found in models that can be schematically represented in the form of schemes: (A instead of B) + (A is B) = X, where (A instead of B) is a scheme of conceptual metonymic connections, and (A is B) is a scheme of conceptual metaphorical connections. Metaphthonymy "X" arises as a result of conceptual metonymic connections with metaphorical (Sharmanova, 2016).

## 4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is the analysis of the possibility of forming the secondary meanings of bird names as a part of compound nouns.

## 5. Research Methods

- During the research the following methods were used:
- method of dictionary definition analysis;
- method of contextual analysis;

- method of component analysis;
- method of comparative analysis.

## 6. Findings

### 6.1. Names of Plants

The source domain 'bird' and target domain 'plant' determine the outer vector of interpretation. Among the names of plants containing an element *Vogel* in the structure, names *Vogelmiere* (*Stellaria media*), *Vogelmilch* (*Ornithogalum*) and *Vogel-Nestwurz* (*Neottia nidus-avis*) were discovered. It seems interesting that the latter names have matching Latin equivalents, which emphasizes the motivation for the nomination. For example, plant name *Vogelmilch* is defined by the color of the flowers (Figure 01).

The most obscured is the motivation of the nomination of the name *Vogelmiere*. The name in Latin is determined by the presence of white flowers in the plant, resembling stars, and the word «*Miere*» is absent in modern German and may not be etymologically related to the concept of '*star*'.

It is also very important that the format of perception can be organically combined with other formats of interpreting attributes (Figure 02).

To confirm this statement, we can consider the name of plant *Schwalbenwurz* (Vincetoxicum). Its Latin name Vincetoxicum comes from the two roots "vincere" (conquer) und "toxicum" (poison) and means a plant that acts as an antidote. The German name is a metaphorical transfer: flying seeds with a fluff resemble the flight of a swallow. The fluff on the seeds acts as a perceptual attribute of interpretation, and the similarity of the trajectory. The flight speed of the swallow and the seeds of the plant affect the observation format.



**Figure 01.** Daisy    **Figure 02.** Geese

Among the perceptual signs, we should note the color and texture, i.e. the quality of the plant shell; however, the form became the dominant perceptual attribute. Metaphorical transfer based on a common color is carried out in the name *Gänseblume* (Bellis). Another motivating attribute of the name *Gänseblume* was the place where the plant grew in the meadows where geese graze is done, which is why the plant served as their means of nutrition. In this case, the transfer of the attribute is carried out through metonymy. However, since in reality there is a close interaction of the above motivational signs, it seems correct to talk about the metaphor-metonymy interaction.

The transfer of the animals attribute by the name *Adlerfarn* (Pteridium aquilinum) occurs indirectly. The vascular bundles in the rhizome are located so that on the cross section they resemble a federal eagle.

The name *Kuckucks-Lichtnelke* (Lýchnis flos-cúculi) is the result of interpretation by the observation format because the plant begins to bloom at a time when a cuckoo can be heard in the meadows (Sebald, 1989).

### 6.2. Names of Animals

The source domain 'bird' and target domain 'animal' determine the inner vector of interpretation because birds belong to the animal world.

Let us turn to the name *Buttervogel* or *Schmetterling*. The last name is associated by many people with noun *Schmetten*, denoting in the Eastern middle German dialect *Sahne*. Thus, both names show a definite connection with dairy products (Figure 03). This fact explains the dictionary of the Grimm brothers (das Deutsche Wörterbuch von Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm). According to popular superstition, witches took the form of butterflies and plundered the supply of butter and milk, however, there is a reason to believe that the names can become a perceptual sign of "yellowish color". Thus, the interpretation of these names of animal occurred either in the observation format or in the perception format (Figure 04).

The sign "color" would allow transferring in the name *Krähenscharbe* (Phalacrocorax aristotelis), because the bird is black in color, like a crow.



**Figure 03.** Swallow    **Figure 04.** Swallowtail wing

*Schwalbenschwanz* (Papilio machaon) contains a direct indication of that part of the animal's body that allows transferring of the attribute. If the swallowtail calls *Schwalbenschmetterling* (swallow + butterfly), then for a correct interpretation, deep knowledge of entomology would be necessary that the butterfly has short black tails that look like the tail of a swallow (Bellmann, 2003). In this case, the attribute by which the transfer was carried out was 'form' and 'color'.

### 6.3. Human Names

The two discovered names of a person are not similar, since one of them is the proper name of a folklore character, and the second one is a common name.

The compound noun *Eulenspiegel* (joker) is literally translated as *owl + mirror*. Several ways of interpretation of the name *Eule* are due to several interpretations of the meaning of the compound name.

The name *Eulenspiegel* belongs to the hero of the medieval German epic, while they also note the possibility of the existence of his real prototype, which lived in Saxony in the village of Knetlingen (Götzinger, 1885).

There are 4 hypotheses explaining the meaning of this onyme:

1) a direct translation of the low German concepts of *ulen* with the meaning '*fegen*' (revenge, clean) and *spegel*, which means white fur around the back of the animal's body in hunting jargon [duden.de];

2) the metaphorical meanings of the word *Spiegel* as 'capable of revealing to fools their true guise' and the word *Eule* as a symbol of wisdom, which can be interpreted as a wise but malevolent mockery of human stupidity;

3) naming by resemblance to the face of an owl;

4) an owl as a representative of gloomy night images, and a mirror as a tool of scammers and charlatans (Wunderlich, 1984).

Each hypothesis involves certain formats and cognitive interpretation mechanisms. Omitting the first hypothesis, since it does not contain a name of an animal, we note that the second and fourth ones show interpretation through metaphor because the word *Eule* has secondary meanings and a rich associative background, namely as a symbol of wisdom and, on the other hand, as a nightly gloomy inhabitant (Figure 05, Figure 06).

In this case, the interpretation is carried out according to the observation format through conceptual derivation, in which, using a conceptual metaphor; a transfer is made from the animal world to the sphere of abstract concepts.



**Figure 05.** Clumsy girl      **Figure 06.** Elephant

The second example is the compound noun *Elefantenküken* (clumsy teenager). Perceptual characteristics don't play a role, since the composite does not include meaning 'large size', which means that the first part is interpreted using the observation format based on 'clumsy movements'. The second component has a secondary meaning 'young inexperienced girl', so the total value is made up of signs 'clumsy' + 'young'.

### 6.4. Names of artifakts

The examples of this group can be divided into two groups according to the value of the components: *name of animal + body part, name of animal + kind of activity* and *name of animal + artifact.*

The word *Schwalbenschwanz* described above has another meaning *scherzhaft veraltend 'Frack'* [duden.de]. Obviously, in the formation of this meaning of the word, the cognitive mechanisms of metaphor and metonymy participate in their integration, which allows detecting metaphthony. For clarity, let's consider the following scheme:

**Table 01.** What can the word *Schwalbenschwanz* mean:

| | **metaphor →** | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **metonymy ↓** | | **bird** | **clothes** |
| | **the whole** | swallow (1) | *black dress coat* (3) |
| | **the part** | *swallow tail* (2) | black dress coat tail (4) |

The first meaning of the word *Schwalbenschwanz* is 2, the second meaning is 3, but the formation of the secondary value takes place in two stages: first, through the cognitive metaphor, there is a transfer from the "bird" area to the "clothing" area, and then through the metonymy, the complete garment is named in its part. It is important that the word *Schwalbe* in the secondary value of the composite also has a secondary value, since the tail does not belong to the bird, but to the coat. Assuming that the tailcoat would be called *Schwalbe,* so in this case, the formation of a secondary meaning would occur through the cognitive mechanism of metaphor.

The next examples *Vogelscheuche (scarecrow)* and *Taubenflinte (pigeons gun)* does not contain a secondary value of the bird name because the marked things, what serve to scare away the birds or to shoot them.

### 6.5. Names of body parts

The following four examples are designations of parts of the human body that have common features with the corresponding parts of the body in animals. However, in contrast to the above-described example with the word *Schwalbenwurz*, in this case only the mechanism of metaphor functions, since compound nouns denote not the whole person, but only his part, so there is not the metonymic transfer PART-WHOLE.

The words *Adlerauge (keen eye), Rabenhaar (black hair)* and *Straußenmagen (digestion of an ostrich)* denote the part of human body, in this case, the names of animals in the composition of the compound noun do not receive a secondary value, because they indicate only the belonging of a given part of the body to a specific animal. The second value of the bird name would be possible, if there were the second values of the bird names in the language, for example, *Adler – keen person,* so *Adlerauge – the eye of the keen person.*

The last example in this group *Taubebherz (soft heart)* is the most interesting because denotes not a physical characteristic, but a character trait. The heart in this case acts in its secondary meaning as a source of kindness. The last examples show only metaphorical transfer from source to target, but now we can see the transfer of the meaning of the word *heart,* when it belongs to a bird and to a person.

**Table 02.** What can the word *Taubenherz* mean:

| **metaphor →** | | |
|---|---|---|
| | **bird** | **human** |
| **heart (1)** | *heart of pigeon* (1) | heart of human (3) |
| **heart (2)** | kind heart of pigeon (2) | *kind heart of person* (4) |

## 7. Conclusion

The interpretation of bird names in complex nouns is carried out through various formats, the most common of which is the perception format. Actual material showed the possibility of implementing external and internal interpretation vectors. Some examples illustrate various ways of understanding the interpretation of a bird name's meaning. Thus, the study of the interpretive potential of animals as part of compound nouns is a wide field for research.

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