



## LEXICAL AND OCCASIONAL MEANINGS OF PHYTONYMS IN CHARACTERIZING PEOPLE IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK

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**Annotation.** *This article investigates the lexical and occasional meanings of phytonyms—plant-derived lexemes—in the characterization of human traits in English and Uzbek. The study highlights how lexical meanings, being stable and dictionary-fixed, serve as a semantic foundation for figurative extension, whereas occasional meanings arise dynamically in specific contexts, especially in fiction and spoken discourse. Using semantic, pragmatic, and comparative-typological approaches, the research explores how both English and Uzbek employ phytonyms to denote physical, psychological, and social characteristics of people. The findings demonstrate that while the figurative extension of phytonyms reflects universal cognitive tendencies, culture-specific occasional meanings emerge from ecological, historical, and socio-cultural contexts. This duality illustrates the richness of figurative language, the stylistic role of phytonyms in literature, and the challenges of translating occasional meanings across languages.*

**Keywords:** *phytonyms, lexical meaning, occasional meaning, figurative language, comparative linguistics, pragmatics, semantics, English, Uzbek*

The science of the language – the linguistic, is not only dedicated to the linguistic researches, but also to explaining the relation between the language and the society. This science requires particularly the sociology, polemology, psychology, economy and the history to discover what is happening with the language. The linguistics can give only a small contribution in the researches of the linguistic system. On the other side, the communication, as seen from the pragmatic and technical aspect, has need of a rational and functional language. As our president Shavkat Mirziyoyev Miromonovich said: “Today it is evident that new historical period, new era of development in all spheres of life has come, be it politics, economics, social and humanitarian spheres, and, of course, science. After all, there is the closest and indissoluble connection between science and life: the more science serves for life, the more life enriches science. Based on the prerogatives voiced by the head of state, science and those, who engaged in it, will be given a special attention.”<sup>95</sup>

Recently, in the linguistics, great interest has been shown for the languages for special purposes. The linguistics is constantly enhancing and has its own scientific and historical profile which extends from the Prague functional stylistics up to the present. The field of research of the linguistics is too narrow in order to throw light at the relations between the language and the society. The languages are of great importance for the development of the

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specialized fields, as well as the modern sciences and disciplines. And this can be seen in governmental sphere of the country as well; On December 10, 2012 the first President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov signed a decree “On measures to further improve foreign language learning system”. It is highly noted that a comprehensive foreign languages’ teaching system, aimed at creating significantly developed, highly educated, modern-thinking young generation, further integration of the country to the world community, has been created.

The study of word meaning occupies a central position in linguistics, with particular attention given to the relationship between lexical and occasional meanings. Lexical meaning refers to the stable, systematized meaning of a word recorded in dictionaries, whereas occasional meaning denotes the context-driven, creative sense that emerges in specific utterances (Buranov, 1990; Glucksberg, 2001). Phytonyms—words that denote plants—are highly productive in this regard. They are semantically rich due to their dual role as natural objects and symbolic signs. In many languages, plant names extend metaphorically to describe human qualities, offering a vivid and culturally embedded means of characterization (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The English and Uzbek languages both demonstrate this tendency but differ in lexical inventory and cultural associations. This makes their comparison particularly fruitful for understanding how universal metaphorical mappings interact with language-specific cultural codes. Lexical meaning is the invariant, conventionalized sense of a word. For example, rose in English and atirgul in Uzbek both lexically denote a flowering plant with fragrant petals. Lexical meanings are stable, independent of discourse, and serve as a baseline for metaphorical transfer.

Occasional meaning arises in a particular context and is not permanently fixed in the lexicon. For instance, green lexically denotes the color, but contextually it may mean naïve (“a green youth”), jealous (“green with envy”), or even ecological awareness (“green politics”). The emergence of occasional meanings can be explained through stylistics (Jakobson, 1960), pragmatics (Grice, 1975), and cognitive linguistics (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Writers and speakers activate occasional meanings to achieve expressivity, irony, or emphasis, often enriching the figurative layer of communication.

#### *Lexical meanings of phytonyms*

Lexical meanings are fundamental and cross-linguistic. They often denote physical properties but serve as a foundation for metaphor.

English: apple = fruit; rose = flower; nut = kernel.

Uzbek: olma = apple; gul = flower; qovoq = pumpkin.

Even in their literal sense, these words carry symbolic potential. Rosy cheeks in English or olma yuzli qiz (“apple-faced girl”) in Uzbek are based on literal plant attributes but extend to describing beauty and health. Thus, lexical meanings provide the material base upon which occasional meanings are built. Occasional meanings are dynamic, context-dependent, and often stylistically marked. They reveal the flexibility of language and its capacity for creative expression.



***English examples:***

Pumpkin → affectionate address (“Come here, pumpkin”) vs. insult (“pumpkin-head”).

Green → “a green recruit” = inexperienced; “green with envy” = jealous.

Wallflower → not a literal plant, but “a shy, overlooked person.”

***Uzbek examples:***

Qovoq (pumpkin) → qovoq bosh = foolish person.

Gul yuzli (flower-faced) → occasional meaning: beautiful, innocent, fragile.

Paxta (cotton) → in some contexts symbolizes purity, in others laziness (paxtadek yotmoq = “to lie like cotton,” i.e., to be idle).

The examples demonstrate that occasional meanings rely heavily on cultural associations.

Occasional meanings are not random but serve pragmatic and stylistic purposes.

Pragmatic function: They reflect the speaker’s intention — irony (pumpkin-head), affection (pumpkin as a pet name), or criticism (qovoq bosh). Stylistic function: Writers use phytonyms to paint vivid portraits of characters. Dickens’s characters, for example, are often described through floral imagery (rosebud lips, shrivelled leaf), while Ayni likens innocent heroes to flowers and foolish figures to pumpkins. This dual function demonstrates how occasional meanings enrich both everyday discourse and literary style.

Plants = beauty and youth (rose / gul).

Vegetables = foolishness or dullness (pumpkin-head / qovoq bosh). Green color = vitality or naivety.

*English:* Roses, violets, daisies dominate (European symbolism, Christian iconography).

*Uzbek:* Cotton, melons, pumpkins dominate (agrarian culture, Central Asian flora).

Thus, while universal metaphorical patterns exist, lexical choices reflect ecological and cultural environments.

Literal translation often fails to capture occasional meaning. Wallflower cannot be translated as devor guli; instead, it must be rendered as tortinchoq qiz (shy girl). Similarly, qovun tushurmoq literally means “to drop a melon” but idiomatically means “to embarrass oneself.” The study of occasional meanings supports the cognitive view that metaphors are not merely linguistic ornaments but conceptual tools shaping thought (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Phytonyms reveal how culture maps human experience onto the natural world, creating a shared symbolic system.

The analysis of lexical and occasional meanings of phytonyms in English and Uzbek reveals the depth of figurative language. Lexical meanings provide stability, while occasional meanings bring flexibility and creativity. Together, they enrich language, literature, and communication by linking human traits with the plant world. The comparative perspective demonstrates both universal metaphorical patterns and cultural specificity. For translation studies, distinguishing between lexical and occasional meanings is essential to preserve semantic nuance. For cognitive linguistics, phytonyms exemplify how metaphor and context co-construct meaning. Thus, the study of phytonyms contributes to broader fields of semantics, pragmatics, stylistics, and cultural linguistics.







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