



# LINGUISTIC AND ONOMASIOLOGICAL OBSERVATIONS ON THE NAMES OF THE SLAVIC MYTHICAL CREATURES FROM THE LOWER MYTHOLOGY (IN THE CONTEXT OF BULGARIAN, CZECH, AND RUSSIAN)


Elka Petrova<sup>1\*</sup>, Boryan Yanev<sup>2</sup>


## ABSTRACT

Generally, mythology refers to the primary worldview system of a particular community. Under this approach, myths are formed due to a collective understanding of the nature of the world. In pagan culture, the concept of the universe's structure was based mainly on the characteristics of gods and heroes, their inherent functions and qualities, and their relationships. Lower mythological creatures are less influential on world order but are closer to humans. Aside from reflecting on his daily activities, aspirations, and fears, they also reflect on the phenomenon of being - the social and personal difficulties individuals face daily. In this paper, the ideas of connection between language, cultures and myths through complex analysis present the essence and characteristics of the mythical Slavic beings. Also included in the study is a comparison of mythological creatures from Bulgarian, Czech and Russian linguistic cultures to clarify their role within the linguistic culture of representatives from southern, western and eastern Slavic languages.


**Keywords:** Creatures, languages, cultures, linguoculturology, myths

---

<sup>1\*</sup>The Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv, Faculty of Philology, Tsar Asen St., 24, Plovdiv, Bulgaria, e-mail: elka.petroff@gmail.com,  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2364-9000>

<sup>2</sup>The Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv, Plovdiv, Bulgaria,  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0138-5160>

**\*Corresponding Author:** - Elka Petrova

\*The Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv, Faculty of Philology, Tsar Asen St., 24, Plovdiv, Bulgaria, e-mail: elka.petroff@gmail.com,  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2364-9000>

**DOI:** - 10.31838/ecb/2023.12.si5.033

## **I. Introduction**

The Low Slavic mythology is more than a collection of mythological characters, plots, and motifs; it is a cultural code from which the heritage of Bulgarian, Czech, and Russian linguistic cultures can be understood. The mythical Slavic creatures reflect the objective reality of human consciousness in antiquity, occupying their specific place in the Slavic culture, way of life, traditions, psychology, and worldview of today. In addition, language, which has preserved traces of the various stages of the mythological integration of nature and society by human consciousness, is fundamentally a myth with multiple layers. By analysing and comparing mythical creatures found in the various Slavic cultural areas, it is possible to trace their significance in modern culture and the worldviews of the speakers of the given language, in addition to studying their role in developing the moral values of the people.

The present study **aims** to clarify the peculiarities of the mythical creatures from lower Slavic mythology and, accordingly, to determine their place in the linguistic culture of the representatives of the Slavic languages' southern, western, and eastern subgroups through a comprehensive analysis.

The following aims must be completed to achieve the set problems:

1) Outlining the theoretical foundations of the research via a brief presentation of current trends, conceptual platforms, and terminological apparatus in anthropocentric linguistics, linguoculturology, ethnolinguistics, onomastics, and mythology.

2) Completing a comprehensive analysis of the mythical Slavic creatures according to the Bulgarian, Czech, and Russian criteria. Among the factors that determine the topicality and practical application of the research are the increased interest in national-distinctive mentalities expressed in language within modern linguistics and the desire of scientists to reconstruct how objective reality was reflected in ancient consciousness.

Among the factors that determine the **topicality** and **practical application** of the research are the increased interest in national-distinctive mentalities expressed in language within modern linguistics and the desire of scientists to reconstruct how objective reality was reflected in ancient consciousness.

## **II. Theoretical Framework**

Due to the unique characteristics of the characters within lower mythology, a specific algorithm for

complex analysis is necessary, which is based on the theoretical and methodological foundation of linguistics, folkloristics, ethnolinguistics, and onomastics scientific disciplines (L.N. Vinogradova, J. Bartminski, S. Vorkachov, V. Karasik, V. Maslova, etc. ), ethnolinguistics (A. Ufimtseva, E. Carsenat), and ethnolinguistics (L.N. Vinogradova, J. Bartminski, S. Vorkachov, V. Maslova, etc.).

### **II.1. Language, Myth, linguoculturology and ethnolinguistics**

A myth is an ancient, unique aspect of human consciousness, a method of preserving traditions in an objective reality that is constantly changing, perceiving the surrounding environment, and unravelling one's personality. Many elements that make up modern man's everyday life are only possible to comprehend with an understanding of their mythological basis. A natural extension of this idea is Gerhard Bellinger's assertion that mythology is an irrevocable prerequisite for understanding man and human culture (Bellinger, 2008, p. 5). Traditionally, mythology has been regarded not only as a particular means of analysing the world in which we live but also as a collection of legends, beliefs, and traditions (in addition to keeping information concerning the strange creatures that reside between the world of humans and the realm of gods). It is closely related to language as a reliable and universal means of storing cultural information. In addition, language always serves as a means of connecting generations and transmitting collective non-linguistic experiences.

In our opinion, the relationship between mythology and language is exceptionally well summarised in the words of V. Mokienko:

"Language, which has preserved traces of the various stages of the mythological assimilation of nature and society by human consciousness, is essentially a multi-layered myth. Peeling back layer after layer of this myth, we gradually penetrate the depths of the ancient worldview and get an opportunity to look at the life of our ancestors with our own eyes" (2007, 200).

In one way or another, many current scientific directions that study the relationship between language and culture are influenced by the theory of Sapir and Whorf. As well as a synthesis of anthropology, ethnography, psychology, and cognitive studies, these currents are a synthesis between philosophy, anthropology, ethnography, psychology, and cognitive studies. Considering all

this, modern cultural and scientific disciplines cannot be distinguished clearly.

Our understanding of linguoculturology is as follows: a scientific discipline that studies language as a cultural phenomenon describes its interaction with personality and culture and considers the nation's and community's spiritual values from a synch and a diachronic perspective. For our study is crucial that ethnolinguistics is an academic field that studies how language plays a role in the emergence and function of culture, its thinking and creativity, and its religious and ritual practices. Ethnolinguistic studies reveal folklore stereotypes in a diachronic manner. Additionally, these mythological representations contribute to forming a particular picture of the world and provide a rich basis for comparing the characteristics of various cultures.

## II.2. Mythology and onomastics

The meaning of a name has been of interest to people for centuries because they believe that giving a name is not just an aesthetic act but a symbolic, spiritual, and cultural act. Throughout history, proper names have allowed people to communicate information about their historical personalities, epic events, specific ethnic territories, and ways of life and beliefs. The most common definition of onomastics or onomatology is the study of the etymology, history, development, functioning, and distribution of proper names (Carsenat, 2013). The mythological system viewed in the context of onomastics - as a set of names of mythical beings and objects, in the words of Olga Sklyarenko, is not an "onomastic field" - a flat proprietary space composed of equal and independent elements, but an "onomastic

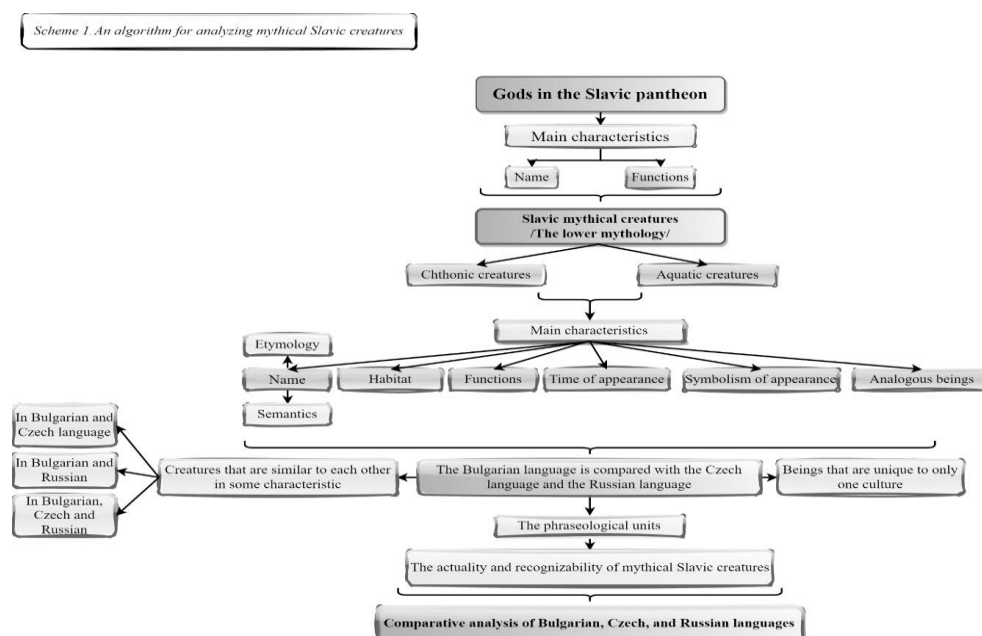
pyramid" consisting of hierarchically related elements (Sklyarenko, 2017, p. 126).

## II.3. The nomination's specifics

In most cases, the methods of nomination in the mythological lexicon are connected with the influence of two opposite trends. On the one hand, in the absence of denotation, the sign must assume a characterising function. To define the mythological concept, the native speaker must connect it with other concepts (for example домовой (Russian)– the one connected with the home; polednice (Czech)– the one associated with the field). In this way, a significant part of the mythological vocabulary has a transparent motivation. On the other hand, one of the specific features of this class of words about modernity is their isolation in language. No real world exists in mythological beings, and the corresponding vocabulary is characterised by its "exotic" characteristics and functional specificities. As mental constructs, their denotations are not physically represented. It is also common for their corresponding lexemes to be peculiar "constructions" that do not fit into the framework of linguistic reality. The names of mythical creatures can be formed based on primary and secondary nominations.

## III. Methodology

In light of the diversity in science regarding the systematisation and survey of mythical Slavic beings, we propose an author's algorithm that allows us to study the unique characteristics of these beings and track their image development on a diachronic and comparative basis (see Scheme 1).



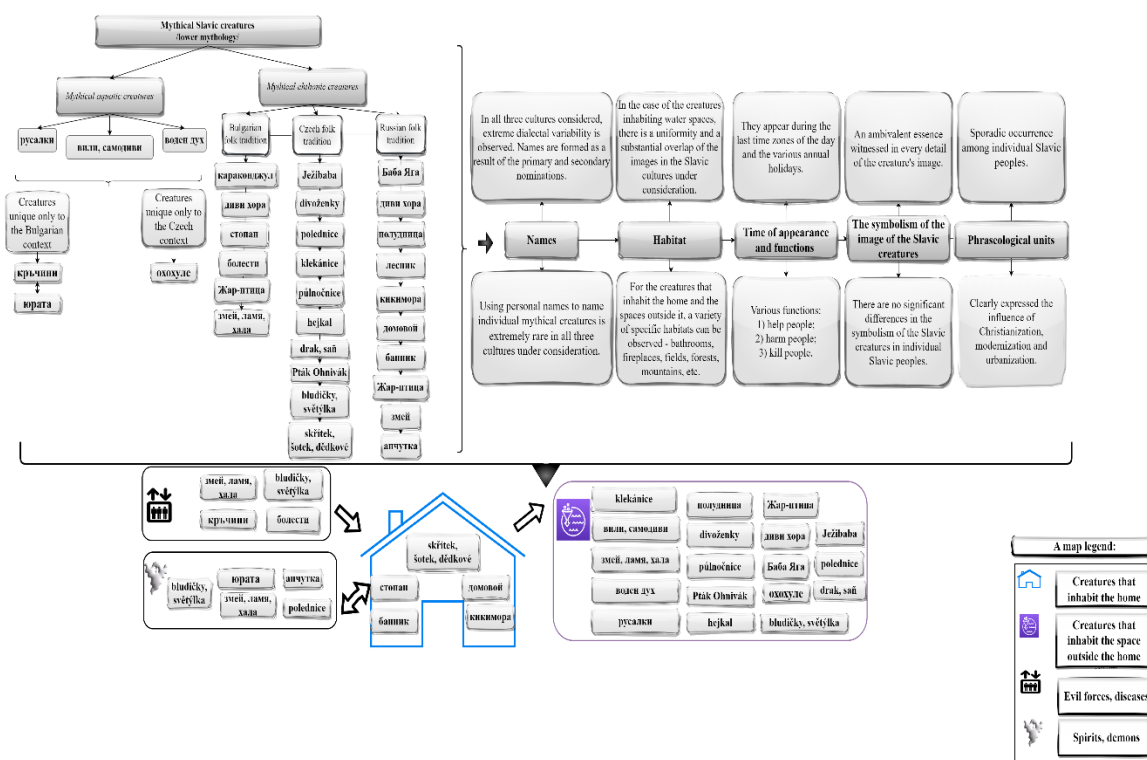
By using the term lower mythology in this study, we acknowledge the existence of higher mythology, but only at a certain point in the evolution of Slavic culture. First, our algorithm should examine the names, characteristics, and functions of the primary gods of the Slavic pantheon, followed by creatures originating from ancient Slavic beliefs and modern folklore cultures in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, and Russia. The classification algorithm we have developed focuses on the areas in which mythical creatures are directly related, namely aquatic and chthonic creatures. The second element of our classification algorithm is the area in which mythical creatures are directly related – aquatic and chthonic beings. As part of our analysis of mythological creatures belonging to one of the two groups identified by us, we will apply the following indicators: name, habitat (specification of whether the creature

appears in a forest, lake, river, or home), functions, timing, symbolism in appearance, and analogues in other cultures. Our analysis of phraseological units has been given particular emphasis in light of the importance of phraseological units in the study of mythical creatures. Additionally, it is natural for the relationship between language and mythology to be most evident in its peculiar core - a language's lexical-phraseological fund. People transmit cultural information to the next generation through phraseological units.

#### IV. Results

The scope of the present scientific research does not allow us to present the analysis of each mythical creature in detail. Our observations have been summarised in a systematised format - see Scheme 2.

Scheme 2. A generalised analysis of mythical Slavic creatures based on the compiled algorithm



We observed that the mythical creatures we analysed did not exhibit any degree of individualisation. Personal names are scarce in Bulgarian, Czech and Russian, which can be attributed to man's fear of the power of the word. People have always attempted to give mythical characters euphemistic names to appease these unknown evil forces. It is evident from the limited number of phraseological units that have as a component a

mythical Slavic creature from Slavic mythology that Christianization had a significant impact on Slavic culture, as rituals, traditions, and characters were not only transformed and reinterpreted but the mythological representations of the Slavic people were also displaced about the daily vicissitudes. The linguistic analysis of mythical Slavic beings demonstrates that not only a complex approach is necessary, but also a specific approach is required for each group of creatures, as the particularities of

individual creatures force researchers to extend their frame of reference beyond their set boundaries.

The study was carried out with the support of the "Scientific and Project Activity" Division at the Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv, within the "Young Scientists and postdoctoral researchers – 2" framework program.

### **References**

1. Bellinger, G. (2008). *Mythological dictionary*. Sofia: Prozorets.
2. Carsenat, E. (2013). Onomastics and Big Data Mining. *Computers and Society*.
3. Mokienko, V. M. (2007). *Образы русской речи: историко-этимологические очерки фразеологии* [Images of Russian speech: historical and etymological essays phraseology]. Moskow: Nauka.
4. Sklyarenko, O. (2017). *Ономастический этюд: «Апеллятивные мифонимы» (типологические параллели)* [Onomastic study: "Appellative miphonimy" (typological parallels)]. Odessa.