

## WHAT IS A DEMONONYM? SCOPE, SIGNIFICANCE, AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

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**Anotatsiya:** Ushbu maqola “demononim” tushunchasi, uning ta’rifi va qo‘llanish chegaralariga bag‘ishlangan. Demononim – diniy, mifologik, folklor yoki adabiy kontekstda yovuz ruh, jin yoki salbiy baholangan g‘ayritabiiy mavjudotga berilgan atoqli ot sifatida talqin etiladi. Maqolada demononimlarning onomastikadagi o‘rni, semantik jihatlari, nomlash strategiyalari, madaniy kodlar bilan aloqasi hamda ularning turli xalq madaniyatlaridagi o‘rganilish holatlari (Bolgariya, Perm, Angliya va boshqalar) misollar asosida tahlil qilinadi. Shuningdek, demononimlarning funksional vazifalari (individuallashtirish, legallik berish, tabu, apotropik) va boshqa mifonimlardan farqlanishi yoritiladi.

**Аннотация:** Данная статья посвящена понятию «демононим», его определению и границам употребления. Демононим рассматривается как собственное имя злого духа, демона или другого отрицательно оцениваемого сверхъестественного существа в религиозном, мифологическом, фольклорном или литературном контексте. В статье анализируются место демононимов в ономастике, их семантические особенности, стратегии наименования, связь с культурными кодами, а также примеры из народных культур (Болгария, Пермь, Англия и др.). Отдельное внимание уделяется функциональным аспектам демононимов (идентификация, легитимация, табу, апотропейность) и их отличию от других видов мифонимов.

**Abstract:** This article explores the concept of the *demononym*, its definition, and its scope of usage. A demononym is interpreted as the proper name given to a demon, evil spirit, or similarly negatively perceived supernatural being within religious, mythological, folkloric, or literary contexts. The study examines the role of demononyms in onomastics, their semantic aspects, naming strategies, connections to cultural codes, and their manifestations in various folk cultures (e.g., Bulgarian, Perm, English). The article also highlights their functional roles—such as identification, legitimization, taboo expression, and apotropaic use—and discusses how they differ from other types of mythonyms.

**Kalit so‘zlar:** demononim, mifonim, onomastika, mifologiya, yovuz ruh, nomlash strategiyasi, semantika, apotropik funksiya, tabu, lingvomadaniyatshunoslik

**Ключевые слова:** демононим, мифоним, ономастика, мифология, злой дух, стратегии наименования, семантика, апотропейная функция, табу, лингвокультурология

**English keywords:** demononym, mythonym, onomastics, mythology, evil spirit, naming strategy, semantics, apotropaic function, taboo, linguistic cultural studies

In English-language literature on onomastics, the term *demononym* is not as widely used or established as terms like *anthroponym* (personal name), *toponym* (place name), or *theonym* (name of a deity). This term is mostly used within the contexts of mythology, folklore, religious studies, or literary analysis. Etymologically, it consists of two parts: *demon* (from Greek *daimon* – originally meaning a spirit or divine power, later carrying a negative meaning – demon, evil spirit) and *onym* (from Greek *onoma* – name). Therefore, in general, a *demononym* refers to a proper name given to a demon, i.e., a supernatural being perceived as an evil spirit or devil.

The fact that this term is not included in all major explanatory or onomastic dictionaries in English indicates its relatively narrow usage. Nevertheless, some sources and studies do provide definitions or descriptions of the term. I.A. Podyukov and S.V. Khorobrikh, for example, define it as “proper names of demons (demononyms) featured in the local mythological texts...” Here, a demononym is specifically explained as a “proper name of a demon.” In some classifications of onomastics, demononyms may fall under the broader category of *mythonyms* (names of mythological characters), or even *theonyms* (if a demon is considered a “fallen” deity, such as Lucifer).

In her article “Onomastics,” Carole Hough reviews various classifications of proper names. Although she does not use the term *demononym* explicitly, she notes that names of supernatural beings form a distinct category, which aligns with the concept of the term.

Like any proper name, the primary function of a demononym is to identify and differentiate a specific demonic entity (e.g., Asmodeus) from others (e.g., Beelzebub) or from the general class of demons (e.g., devil, imp, succubus).

This term is usually applied to:

- Canonical or apocryphal demons and devils in Abrahamic religions (e.g., Satan, Lucifer, Beelzebub, Lilith).
- Names of evil spirits, demons, and devils in various mythologies and folklore traditions (if the entities have specific names).
- Names of demonic characters in literary works (especially fantasy or horror genres), either created by the author or borrowed from folklore (e.g., Tolkien’s Balrog—though this may resemble a species name—or Lovecraft’s Cthulhu, which can be interpreted as a kind of wild, demonic force).

There is some debate as to whether names of nature spirits (e.g., water nymphs, forest spirits) or mythical creatures with negative traits can be considered demononyms. This largely depends on whether such entities are perceived as “evil” or antagonistic within their cultural contexts.

In both English and Uzbek, demononyms often show anthropocentric traits. They may:

- Derive from human names (less common but found in folklore),
- Reflect human fears, flaws, or societal concepts (e.g., *Nightmare*—originally an evil spirit that torments sleepers; *Gremlin*—a spirit that sabotages machinery).

It is important to distinguish between a demononym (e.g., *Asmodeus*—a proper name) and generic terms indicating types of demons (e.g., *devil*, *imp*, *succubus*).

In conclusion, a *demononym* is a proper name given to a demonic, evil spirit, or similarly negatively connoted supernatural entity within a religious, mythological, folkloric, or literary context. Its primary function is to individualize and distinguish the entity. It often emerges through cultural naming traditions shaped by human perceptions and fears.

In global philology, research specifically focused on demononyms is not extensive. One such work is Iliyana Garavalova’s article on “The Semantics of Demononyms in Bulgarian Folk Culture.” The article emphasizes several key aspects:

- **Semantic approach:** Garavalova treats demononyms not just as identifiers but as carriers of cultural codes, meanings, and evaluations.
- **Naming strategies:** She identifies several naming types in Bulgarian folklore:
  - Descriptive names indicating physical traits, behavior, harmfulness, or habitat (e.g., fast walker, water-dweller, dark one);
  - Euphemistic names avoiding the real name out of fear (e.g., “them,” “the good ones” in an ironic sense);
  - Deformational tabu names—intentional mispronunciations meant to weaken the spirit’s power.
  - Cases where demononyms are derived from human names, revealing cultural boundaries and fears embedded in naming conventions.

According to Garavalova, demononyms also serve:

- **Apotropaic functions:** Names used to repel or ward off the spirit;
- **Taboo functions:** Euphemisms used to avoid invoking dangerous beings directly.

This shows that demononyms reflect the worldview, beliefs, and societal structures of the culture they belong to, and they reveal how humans explain or confront the unknown through names.

Similarly, L. Teshebaeva defines demononyms as “names of mythological demonic characters” and treats them as a subcategory of *mythonyms*. Her article

includes examples from English and Uzbek folklore, but does not label all character names directly as demononyms. Instead, she uses more specific terms like *giant* or *spellonym* (for witches). This brings up the issue of how broadly or narrowly the category of demononym should be defined. Some characters (e.g., evil giants, goblins, or witches) might be included depending on classification criteria.

Another important study by I.A. Podyukov and S.V. Khorobrikh focuses on demononyms in the mythology of the Perm region. The study looks at names given to spirits inserted into victims by witches to cause illness. This specific group of demononyms is used for:

- **Identification and differentiation** from other spirits or demons;
- **“Legalization” of the spirit’s presence** in the human body.

Interestingly, many of the 67 demononyms identified retain features of personal names, showing their anthropocentric nature. The tradition reflects the binary cultural opposition of self vs. other, highlighting that demononyms are not just linguistic units, but significant cultural phenomena.

Finally, D.D. Ryabkova’s article directly addresses the issues of studying demononyms within the broader framework of mytho-onomastics. Her research, based on English folk tales, focuses not only on naming but on the *functions* of demononyms in the text—such as characterization, atmospheric creation, plot development, expression of horror, and emotional impact on the reader. This functional approach complements the identification and cultural-role aspects discussed by Podyukov, Khorobrikh, and Garavalova.

Because Ryabkova’s work uses English folklore, it helps clarify and enrich classifications provided in earlier research (e.g., by Teshebaeva). The mention of “research problems” in the article title suggests that theoretical or methodological issues—like defining the boundary between demononyms and other mythonyms—are also discussed. This supports the view of demononyms as a complex phenomenon that can be studied from various cultural and theoretical perspectives.

In conclusion, although the term *demononym* is not widely used in general onomastics, it is a significant concept for naming evil spirits, demons, and other negatively valued supernatural beings in religious, mythological, folkloric, and literary traditions. Formed from the Greek *daimon* (spirit) and *onoma* (name), its primary function is to individualize and distinguish. However, as demonstrated in the works of Garavalova, Podyukov, Khorobrikh, and Ryabkova, demononyms also serve semantic, ritualistic, and cultural functions, reflecting anthropocentric thinking and dualistic worldviews. Studying them within the frameworks of mytho-onomastics and linguistic-cultural studies offers valuable insight into how different cultures perceive, fear, and classify the supernatural through naming.

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