PHYTONYMS USED IN ENGLISH FOLK MEDICINE

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Abstract

This article examines the phytonyms employed in English folk medicine—medicinal plants and their application throughout history, their relevance in modern research, their nomenclature, and etymological analysis. It highlights the role of plants in folk healing practices and analyzes ancient written sources on phytotherapy in Britain. The etymology, traditional usage, and pharmacological features of these plants are explored from the perspective of intercultural linguistics.

Keywords: Phytonym, medicinal plants, English folk medicine, etymology, folk healing, phytotherapy, phytochemistry, intercultural linguistics.

Introduction

Since ancient times, humanity has sought healing through the blessings of nature. In particular, medicinal plants have played a significant role in people's lives. The British people have also used various herbs to treat illnesses since ancient times. This article analyzes some of the well-known plants used in English folk medicine, their etymology, mentions in historical sources, and their place in modern medicine. Additionally, a comparative analysis of plant names in Uzbek and English reveals cultural linguistic similarities and differences.

Discussion and Results.

Humans have used medicinal herbs to treat diseases since they first began to benefit from nature's resources. Around 3–4 thousand years ago, written works describing the healing properties of plants appeared in India, China, and Ancient Egypt. In Uzbekistan, cultivating medicinal plants, producing quality herbal products, and enriching the local flora with new introduced plant species contributes to increasing plant diversity and supporting acclimatization efforts. The main goal of growing and cultivating medicinal plants is to avoid harming the natural environment, meet the needs of the pharmaceutical industry, grow them under controlled conditions, and domesticate plants previously unknown in the country's medical practice. In conclusion, natural herbs and the medicines derived from them are considered safe and effective for patients. As such, selecting medicinal plants, introducing new species, and establishing plantations to expand local biodiversity are vital tasks today.

In the United Kingdom, herbal medicine is also widely used, though it sometimes sparks debate among the public. This is primarily because herbal remedies are often used without the knowledge of healthcare professionals—doctors, nurses, or pharmacists. They are usually distributed by herbalists who may not have formal university education and are often unlicensed health practitioners. Currently, national regulation in the UK is broadly aligned with the systems of other EU member states, though herbal remedies are still considered part of alternative and traditional medicine. Historically, the famous "Chelsea Physic Garden" in London served as a central institution for herbal medicine and as a training center for apothecaries. Nicholas Culpeper's *Herbal* and John Gerard's *The Herball, or Generall Historie of Plantes* are considered some of the most significant written sources summarizing the medicinal uses of plants [1, p.13].

Britain has a documented history of using medicinal herbs dating back to the Anglo-Saxon period. Three significant manuscripts from the 10th century survive in England: *Old English Herbarium*, *Bald's Leechbook*, and *Lacnunga*. The *Old English Herbarium* lists 185 plants, of which 140 have Anglo-Saxon names. For instance, *Achillea millefolium L.*, known in English as yarrow, had the Anglo-Saxon name "gearwe." It was used for treating abdominal pain, digestive issues, fevers, headaches, snake bites, and urinary complaints. Modern research has found that yarrow contains several anti-inflammatory compounds, partially confirming its traditional use [2, p.28].

A similar manuscript in Welsh, written after 1382—*Llyfr Coch Hergest* (The Red Book of Hergest)—is a large parchment collection. It preserves prose and poetry from Welsh tradition, including the *Mabinogion* tales. A significant portion of the book, *The Physicians of Myddfai*, describes herbal remedies compiled by a family of physicians whose lineage lasted over 500 years in Wales.

One of the most famous English herbalists (and astrologers) of the 17th century was Nicholas Culpeper (1616–1654), also known as "The English Physician." His *Culpeper's Herbal* remains widely popular and often rivals Gerard's work in influence. However, Culpeper's harsh criticism of orthodox medical practitioners led to tensions with many physicians. He described native British plants that could be used to "preserve the health of the body" and heal various ailments. He is also known for *A Physicall Directory* (1649), an English translation of the Latin *Pharmacopoeia Londinensis* from 1618 [3, p.6].

In recent decades, the discovery that the therapeutic properties of plants are linked to specific molecules has led to the development of phytochemistry—a field of research focused on studying the chemical structures of compounds in plants. Once isolated and analyzed, some of these compounds are turned into drugs or chemically modified for medical use. Examples of such purified plant-based medicines used in modern medicine include:

Elderberry (*Sambucus nigra*).

In Uzbek: *Qoraqarag'at*. The scientific name *Sambucus* derives from the ancient Greek σαμβύκη (*sambúkē*), a type of musical instrument made from the plant's branches. The English name *elderberry* comes from the Anglo-Saxon word *aeld*, meaning "to burn" or "fire," since the hollow stems were used to blow air into fires [4, p.448].

In Uzbek, *qoraqarag'at* is derived from the Uzbek adjective *qora* ("black") and the Tajik noun *qand* (a kind of sweet or small fruit), referring to a small, tart, juicy, dark-colored berry from a wild shrub growing in mountainous regions [5, p.272]. The fruits and flowers are traditionally used to treat colds, flu, and various infections.

Chamomile (*Matricaria chamomilla*).

In Uzbek: *Moychechak* or *Romashka*. The word *chamomile* comes from the Greek χαμαίμηλον (*chamaimēlon*), meaning "earth apple," due to the apple-like scent of the plant [6].

The Latin genus name *Matricaria* is related to the Latin word *matrix* (womb), as this plant was traditionally used in herbal medicine to treat menstrual cramps and sleep disturbances [7]. Today, chamomile is widely recognized for its calming effects and is often used to relieve anxiety, insomnia, and digestive issues.
In Uzbek, *moychechak* is a traditional name derived from Persian: *moy* (oil) and *chechak* (flower).

Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*).

In Uzbek: *Bibariya* (also *razmarin*). The Latin name *Rosmarinus* is believed to come from *ros maris*, meaning "dew of the sea," possibly referring to the dew-like appearance of this coastal plant. Over time, it came to be associated with the Virgin Mary, hence the English name "Mary's rose" and the Uzbek name *bibariya*. Various legends explain this connection. Traditionally, rosemary was used to improve memory, blood circulation, and as an antioxidant [8, p.96].

Conclusion.

In conclusion, the plants used in English folk medicine are of great interest not only from a historical perspective but also from scientific and linguistic viewpoints. The cultural and etymological analysis of phytonyms helps us understand their place in people's lives and their relevance in modern medicine. Such analyses enrich intercultural linguistics and contribute to integrating traditional knowledge with scientific approaches.

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