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Pensare l'Antropocene: prospettive linguistiche, letterarie e artistiche

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The semantic motivation of common names of wild mushrooms in English

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Per citare l'articolo
Marco Bagli, «The semantic motivation of common names of wild mushrooms in English», *Publifarum*, 41, 2024, p. 12-33.

Abstract

This paper explores the semantic motivation behind the common names of wild mushrooms in English, focusing on how these names reflect cultural attitudes and ecological knowledge. Using data from the *Galloway Wild Foods* blog, the study categorizes mushroom names based on extra-linguistic features such as their colour, shape, and habitat. The findings illustrate how naming practices reveal human perception of the natural world and the complex network of relationships between humans and other-than-human entities. By analyzing the linguistic and cognitive processes behind mushroom naming, the paper contributes to understanding how language may influence environmental awareness and human-nature interactions. Ultimately, the paper sheds light on the extent of human agency on the environment, which is the hallmark of the Anthropocene.

Riassunto

Questo articolo esplora la motivazione semantica alla base dei nomi comuni dei funghi selvatici in inglese, concentrandosi su come tali nomi riflettano atteggiamenti culturali e conoscenze ecologiche. Utilizzando dati provenienti dal blog *Galloway Wild Foods*, lo studio categorizza i nomi dei funghi in base a caratteristiche extra-linguistiche come il colore, la forma e l'habitat. I risultati illustrano come le pratiche di denominazione rivelino la percezione umana del mondo naturale e il complesso intreccio di relazioni tra esseri umani ed entità non umane. Analizzando i processi linguistici e cognitivi alla base della denominazione dei funghi, l'articolo contribuisce a comprendere come il linguaggio possa influenzare la consapevolezza ambientale e le interazioni tra esseri umani e natura. In ultima analisi, l'articolo fa luce sulla portata dell'azione umana sull'ambiente, una caratteristica distintiva dell'Antropocene.

1. Introduction

The present paper illustrates a selection of names for fungi in English and their semantic motivation. The rationale behind this exploratory study is to reveal the set of practices and beliefs encapsulated in the names of wild species, so to underpin the complex network of relationships that exist between the human and the other-than-human through language. The concept of Anthropocene is broad: it originated in geology, but it is currently used in a vast array of disciplines to describe the era in which human activity has become so relevant to influence the geological record (CARRUTHERS 2019, MISSIROLI 2022). The effects of human activity on the ecology of our planet, such as land-alteration and resource exploitation, are phenomena that have characterised our relationship with the environment since at least the Neolithic

Age (LARSEN 2023 and references therein). As Missiroli notes, we must accept the geological Anthropocene as the condition in which both human and other-than-human beings live today (2022: 124). In this paper, I follow a deliberately broad definition of the Anthropocene as an era "during which human activity is considered to be the dominant influence on the environment, climate, and ecology of the earth" (OED, Anthropocene). Thus, an investigation into English naming practices of wild fungi reveals the attitudes of English speakers towards the environment, which in turn contribute to a larger definition of the Anthropocene.

Fungi are one of the five kingdoms of life. They are distinct from plants and animals, and they have shaped human evolution in surprising ways. For example, yeasts are responsible for the leavening of bread and the production of alcohol; penicillin originates from a mould that likely changed the global assets during WWII, allowing American soldiers to recover more quickly than their counterparts (QUINN 2013); truffles (both black and white) and Japanese matsutake rank among the most expensive foods worldwide (BONE 2011). According to recent theories, fungi may also have played a major role in religious practices, thanks to entheogenic components contained in species such as *Amanita muscaria*, *Psylocibe lanceolata*, and *Claviceps purpurea* (RODRIGUEZ ARCE and WINKELMAN 2021, CAMILLA 2022).

The discipline that deals with the relationship between humans and mushrooms is ethnomycology. A fundamental text in this tradition of research is Wasson and Wasson (1957), who first observed a differential reaction to mushroom consumption across cultures. While Mediterranean cultures tended to be more open and actively looked for wild mushrooms (such as Italy and France), other countries were more sceptical and avoided mushrooms (such as the United Kingdom and the United States). The former cultures were defined as mycophilic, the latter as mycophobic. The consequences of this differential attitude may be envisaged at different levels in contemporary society and culture. In Europe, many of the major mycophilic countries have specific legislation and guidelines regarding mushroom picking, while the UK lacks specific legislation and guidelines (COMANDINI and RINALDI 2020). From a lexicographic point of view, both French and Italian have a vast vocabulary at their disposal to refer to wild mushrooms, and both languages display considerable levels of internal linguistic variation (CHAUVIN-PAYAN 2004, TAFINI 1994, ARIETTI 1978). The

situation in English is dramatically different: compared to other European linguistic systems, English displays a considerable dearth of traditional, vernacular names. Most of the current English names were introduced in the late twentieth century, and the British Mycological Society has a set of protocols that regulates the coinage of new common names that are proposed, reviewed, and introduced yearly (BIGGAM 2016, footnote 2; see also the British Mycological Society website https://www.britmycolsoc.org.uk/field_mycology/english-names, last accessed 18/12/23).

Recently, the practice of foraging is becoming more and more popular in the United Kingdom (ŁUCZAJ, WILDE, TOWNSEND 2021). Professional foragers organise guided forays with the aim of teaching and recognising wild food commodities, as well as offering support in the recognition of wild species that are suitable for human consumption. Their practice is spread through social media and online blogs, in which they advertise their activities. One of the first foragers and a driving force behind this movement is Mark Williams, author of the blog Galloway Wild Foods. His activity spans more than two decades, and in his blog, he offers recipes and suggestions on how to consume wild delicacies.

The present paper aims at retrieving a list of names from the online blog Galloway Wild Food, with the aim of analysing the semantic motivation underlying the naming of the different species, as well as investigating this fascinating albeit understudied aspect of British vocabulary. The importance of studying the conceptual strategies used to name the different fungal and natural species is discussed in Section 2. Section 3 illustrates the methodology adopted to retrieve the data, while Section 4 illustrates the findings. Finally, Section 5 offers some concluding remarks.

2. Names and naming

Giving names to natural species is a form of exerting control over the natural world: the botanical nomenclature is one of the oldest forms of naming, with the first examples dating to Ancient Egypt (PAVORD 2005). Pre-industrialised societies relied almost completely on the local flora for their daily needs, thus making the ability to distinguish and recognise different wild species an essential skill for survival (HALL

2003). This is particularly evident in the case of wild mushrooms, where toxic species abound. The nomenclature should be standardised and accessible, and it should be shared among the different individuals in the speaking community. This is even more important in medical contexts to readily identify the cause of poisoning: the lack of vernacular names in the UK urged mycologists to devise coherent names to avoid misinterpretation and motivated the development of individual naming systems following the appearance of several field guides for the recognition of wild mushrooms in 2005 (British Mycological Society website).

The names contained in the lexicon of a language represent a relevant gateway onto the cultural preoccupations of the linguistic community that uses and circulates the names (KASTOVSKY 1992: 291), and the names of wild species encapsulate local ecological knowledge (BAGLI 2021, TOMEI 2008), which in turn is fundamental in understanding complex human environmental dynamics and in developing effective environmental practices (BROWN 2019). Cognitive semantics literature maintains that the lexical forms of a language contain semantic material that reflects the speakers' worldview and cultural preoccupations (GEERAERTS 2010, 223). Thus, investigating the names of wildlife species is revealing of a society's attitudes towards nature, which exemplify the relationship between human and other-than-human entities. The set of practices and beliefs that guide naming strategies may in turn be interpreted as a fundamental human activity.

A fundamental principle in lexicology states that a language contains names for the entities that speakers find worthy of being named (KASTOVSKY 1992: 291). On the contrary, lack of specific names may signal lack of interest or absence of the entity. Thus, in an eco-linguistic perspective, the study and promotion of names of wild species may enhance the possibilities of safeguarding them and their habitats, and it is deemed as fundamental in building a healthy relationship between speakers and wildlife, thus allowing for the creation of cultural systems in which biodiversity is protected (SKUTNABB-KANGAS and HARMON 2018, MAFFI 2005). The disappearance of linguistic diversity unfortunately is comparable and connected to the disappearance of biodiversity (KRAUSS 1992). Thus, the development of new names for mushrooms in English, and their recent frequent usage, advocate for a reconsideration of this area

of the lexicon, which promises to promote a new relationship between English speakers and the wild areas they inhabit, especially, but not exclusively, in the UK.

2.1. Names and figurativity

The encyclopaedic knowledge encapsulated in names of wild species is motivated by close observation, and it encodes information about local ecology, morphological characteristics of the species, and metaphorical conceptualisations. Within Conceptual Metaphor Theory, these pieces of information may be regarded as belonging to the Idealized Cognitive Model of the fungus. The theoretical notion of ICM was first discussed in cognitive semantics by Lakoff (1987): it contains both encyclopaedic notions and cultural beliefs about a specific domain. The selection of a salient aspect of an ICM to identify the entire domain may be regarded as a conceptual metonymic process. Metonymy is a cognitive process in which a conceptual entity, called the vehicle, provides mental access to a distinct conceptual entity, the target, which is in the same ICM (RADDEN and KÖVECSES 1999: 21). Following this claim, Jäkel (1999) convincingly analysed a corpus of German family names in terms of metonymic motivations, thus establishing a link between naming practices and metonymical semantic processes. For instance, surnames such as *Klein* 'short,' *Schön* 'pretty', *Braun* 'brown,' are interpreted as cases of the metonymic mapping SALIENT QUALITY FOR PERSON. Onomasticians distinguish between names and nouns: names (like personal names and place-names) designate individual items, whereas nouns (like plant or mushroom names) designate classes of items[1]. Nonetheless, the underlying metonymic process that motivates these naming strategies seems to be the same, as the categories of semantic motivation emerging from the current analysis are related to their referents through metonymic relations. For example, the colour of the cap of a mushroom may be more salient than other characteristics of the species, and thus be selected from the ICM and be encoded in the name, as in the case of e.g., *yellow stainer*, while other characteristics may be more salient in the case of other species (such as the habitat or the gills). Crucially, there is also another level of figuration that may be encoded in the names. The salient aspect selected to identify the species may bear a metaphorical relationship with the fungus, which may be revealing of cultural beliefs and assumptions. In the discussion that follows, I divide the common names of fungi that

emerge from the blog into different categories of semantic motivation, based on the relevant aspect that is selected and highlighted by the name, following Bagli (2021).

3. Data and methodology

The linguistic data that I analyse in this paper emerge from an online blog authored by Mark Williams, who runs *Galloway WildFood* blog (https://gallowaywildfoods.com/). Williams has been a forager for more than a decade, and he is a dedicated activist in the promotion of all types of wild food. His blog consists of different sections concentrating on various commodities, including fungi. I selected the webpages categorised under the heading "fungi" and I used the software LancsBox to automatically download the content into a .txt file format. Secondly, I manually cleaned the dataset from the headings of the website (such as indexes, links, and advertisements). In so doing, I tagged the names in the blog by inserting a keyword after the first occurrence of any name. In the second stage of the research, I ran a corpus analysis to retrieve the Frequency of each name. When it was possible, I calculated the Frequency at a generic level of the category, roughly corresponding to the taxonomic level of genus. For instance, the name *hedgehog mushroom* (properly referring to the species *Hydnum repandum*) may be further specified by pre-modifiers such as *terracotta hedgehog mushroom* (*Hydnum rufescens*) or *depressed hedgehog mushroom* (*Hydnum umbilicatum*) to identify different species in the genus. In this case I calculated the overall occurrence of the general level name *hedgehog* mushroom, without distinguishing between the more specific types for the sake of Frequency. In the Results section however I considered the pre-modifiers if they granted consideration in more than one category, and I list them in Table 2 (see next section). Furthermore, when the modifier is used to distinguish a different genus (such as in the case of *puffballs*), I report the different occurrences between brackets. Considering the explorative nature of this study, I selected a small portion of names for further discussion. The total number of names identified in the blog was 144, and I chose to consider only 25% of names (i.e., 36 names). The names reported in Table 1 are the 36 most frequently mentioned names in the dataset. The scientific names reported in the table were identified in the dataset.[2]

N.	common name	scientific name	Frequency
1	chanterelle	Cantharellus spp.	285
2	cep	Boletus spp.	113
3	bolete	Boletus spp.	95
4	honey fungus	Armellaria spp.	72
5	fly agaric	Amanita muscaria	64
6	hedgehog mushroom	Hydnum spp.	57
7	hen of the woods	Grifola frondosa	56
8	scarlet elf cups	Sarcoscypha austriaca	50
9	oyster mushroom	Pleurotus ostreatus	48
10	blewit	Lepista / Clitocybe spp.	39
11	puffball (9 giant)	Lycoperdon perlatum (Calvatia gigantea)	37
12	horse mushroom	Agaricus arvensis	34
13	parasols (10 shaggy)	Macrolepiota procera (Cloro-phyllum rhacodes)	33
14	waxcap fungus	various genera	27
15	velvet shank	Flammulina velutipes	21
16	blusher	Amanita rubescens	19
17	dryad's saddle	Cerioporus squamosus	17
18	clouded agaric	Clitocybe nebularis	16
19	death cap	Amanita phalloides	16
21	russula	Russula spp.	16
20	chicken of the woods	Laetiporus sulphureus	16
22	angel wings	Pleurocybella porrigens	15
24	yellow stainer	Agaricus xanthodermus	14
23	penny bun	Boletus edulis	14
25	deceivers (6 amethyst)	Laccaria spp. (amethystina)	13
26	jelly ear fungus	Auricularia auriculae	13
28	field mushroom	Agaricus campestris	11
27	porcini	Boletus edulis	11

29	purple webcaps	Cortinarius violaceus	10
30	amanitas	Amanita spp.	10
32	charcoal burner	Russula cyanoxantha	9
31	funeral bell	Galerina marginata	9
33	cauliflower fungus	Sparassiss crispa	9
35	panther cap	Amanita pantherina	8
34	destroying angel	Amanita virosa	8
36	brittlegill	Russula spp.	8

Table 1. List of common and scientific names.

Table 1 illustrates the list of names retrieved from the dataset and ordered according to their Frequency in the text. The first column reports the ranking of the names, the second column lists the common names, the third their scientific equivalents, while the fourth and last column contains the Frequency of each item.

Finally, I attributed each name to a category based on the relevant aspect of the Idealised Cognitive Model of the species that was selected in the name. The categories that emerged from this operation are *colour, effect, gills, habitat, shape, texture,* and *usage*. The category "*borrowings*" was added to include those names that do not originate within English, but are currently used and accepted, such as *chanterelles* (from French), *boletes* (from Latin) or *porcini* (from Italian). I now turn to a discussion of the different categories and names.

4. Results

Table 2 reports the distribution of the names across the categories.

category (N)	names
colour (18)	*honey fungus, blewit, blusher, clouded agaric, deceiver (amethyst), purple webcaps, charcoal burner, panther cap, yellow stainer, russula, scarlet elf cup, terracotta hedgehog mushroom, snowy waxcap, crimson waxcap, parrot waxcap, ballerina waxcap, pale chanterelle, amethyst chanterelle*
effect (3)	*death cap, funeral bell, destroying angel*
gills (2)	*hedgehog mushroom, brittlegill*
habitat (3)	*horse mushroom, field mushroom, meadow waxcap*

shape (13)	*hen of the woods, scarlet elf cup, oyster mushroom, puffball, parasols, dryad's saddle, angel wings, jelly ear fungus, cauliflower fungus, penny bun, depressed hedgehog mushroom, horse mushroom, ballerina waxcap*
texture (4)	*velvet shank, waxcap, webcap, chicken of the woods*
usage (1)	*fly agaric*
borrowings (6)	*amanita* (Latin)*, bolete* (Latin)*, cep* (French)*, chanterelle* (French)*, porcini* (Italian)*, russula* (Latin)

Table 2. Categories of semantic motivation.

The first column in Table 2 illustrates the categories that emerged from the analysis followed by the total number of names that each contains (N), while the second column lists the names. The category that contains the highest number of names is *colour*, followed by *shape*, *borrowings, texture, effect* and *habitat, gills*, and finally *usage* with only one example. The categories highlight different aspects of each fungus, and each reflects an attentive observation of the species. Some names are assigned to more than one category, as multiple semantic factors may intervene in the motivation of the same name, and some names at the level of genus may have pre-modifiers to distinguish different species by selecting other aspects. For instance, the name *russula* has been assigned both to colour and to borrowings; while the genus name *hedgehog mushroom* has been assigned to gills, but the more specific *terracotta hedgehog mushroom* is listed under *colour.* Although some names appear in more than one category, I discuss different possible categorisations for each name only once in the text, without repeating the discussion in multiple paragraphs.

4.1. Colour

The names in the category of *colour* highlight the chromatic aspect of the fungus as the most relevant for the identification. The name *honey fungus* (*Armillaria mellea*) refers to the colour of the cap, which typically has brown-yellow tones. The English name may be a calque from the scientific name. In the dataset, the name (syntactically modified through adjectivisation) may also refer to other species in the same genus: the *ringless honey fungus* identifies *Armillaria tabescens*, while the *dark honey fungus* identifies *Armillaria ostoyae*.

The name *blewit* is one of the few vernacular names that originated in English. Its first occurrence in the OED dates to 1830. It derives from the adjective *blue*, the distinctive colours of species in the genus *Lepista* (for instance, *Lepista nuda*). The attribution of this popular name to the genera *Lepista* and *Clytocibe* reflects a case of synonymity in the taxonomy: according to recent molecular investigations, the genus *Lepista* belongs to the genus *Clytocibe* (MONCALVO *et al.* 2002). The English origin of this name suggests a longer than usual tradition in the consumption for this mushroom, which despite the unusual colour of the flesh is appreciated by many foragers.

The names *blusher* (*Amanita rubescens*) and *yellow stainer* (*Agaricus xanthodermus*) are motivated by the tendency of the flesh of these mushrooms to turn respectively pink and yellow after manipulation (either picking or cutting). Both scientific names of these fungi reflect this distinctive trait. The name *clouded agaric* may also be considered a calque from its scientific name *Clytocibe nebularis*, which is motivated by the colour of the cap, reminiscent of the grey colour of the clouds. The name *purple webcap* (*Cortinarius violaceus*) also refers to the distinctive colour of the cap of this fungus. The name *webcap* instead describes a fine veil that is commonly found in young specimens of this genus, and for this reason it is also part of the category *texture.*

A charcoal burner is a person who produces charcoal, thus offering the motivation for the name *charcoal burner* (*Russula cyanoxantha*), a generally dark-capped edible mushroom that may display considerable variation in colour, which is described as "a mix of blue and yellow but often includes violet, grey, brown and green tints" (HARDING 2013: 82). Finally, I assigned the name *panther cap* (*Amanita pantherina*) to this category because the disposition of the scales on the cap forms a white and brown spotted pattern, reminiscent of the spots on the coat of the same animal.

The name *deceiver* (*Laccaria spp.*) does not explicitly refer to a specific hue, but in fact refers to the ability of this mushroom to *deceive* the forager by frequently changing colour and hue of the cap. The different colorations of this fungus may depend on weather and habitat, thus making it particularly difficult to be recognised. Six occurrences out of 13 are modified by *amethyst* (*Laccaria amethystina*), thus making the reference to colour explicit. Other modifiers include *bicolour* (*Laccaria bicolor*) and *twisted* (*Laccaria tortilis*).

4.2. Effect

The names in this category are consistent in warning human beings against the deadly poisonous effects of the consumption of these fungi. The names in this category are not descriptive of the aspect of the mushroom, but they are still motivated by the metonymical mechanism EFFECT FOR CAUSE: the name of the mushroom encodes the effects of its ingestion.

The name *death cap* (*Amanita phalloides*) describes one of the deadliest fungi present in nature. The list of its victims gets longer each year, and according to Wasson (1972) it possibly includes notable cases such as the Roman emperor Claudius. The other two names in this category are *funeral bell* (*Galerina marginata*) and *destroying angel* (*Amanita virosa*), both of which convey an almost poetic reference to death. The name *funeral bell* refers to the specific manner of ringing the bells after a person's death, thus instantiating another level of metonymic relationship: death is not referred to directly, but through one of its consequences, namely the tolling of a bell. The name *destroying angel*, similarly to *funeral bell*, does not refer to death directly. It is motivated by a metonymy: the death of the consumer is signalled through one of the angels that, according to the Bible, is sent by God to announce imminent destruction. The reference to the angel may further be motivated by the colour of the mushroom, which is completely white.

4.3. Gills

The names in this category are motivated by the type of gills of the mushroom. These are *hedgehog mushroom* and *brittlegill*. The first name refers to mushrooms in the genus *Hydnum*, whose characteristics gills are shaped like spines (cf. It. *spinello* or *spinarello*, TAFINI 1994). The semantic motivation underlying this naming strategy is a conceptual metaphor that maps a salient characteristic of the animal onto the mushroom. The dataset contains also other types of hedgehog mushrooms, each of which is further specified through a salient characteristic. The *terracotta hedgehog mushroom* (*Hydnum rufescens*) has a distinctive red brick colour; the *depressed hedgehog mushroom* (*Hydnum umbilicatum*) instead refers to the umbilicate cap, which grants it the inclusion in the category *shape*. Notably, the dataset contains two

occurrences of the name *shingled hedgehog mushroom*, which describes *Sarcodon imbricatus*, a fungus of a different genus displaying the same distinctive type of gills.
The name *brittlegill* is a generic name for mushrooms in the genus *Russula*, one of the most numerous genera of fungi. The name describes the characteristic tactile sensation of their gills: the adjective *brittle* is glossed by the OED as "hard but liable to break easily" (OED, *brittle*, 1.a).

4.4. Habitat

The category habitat contains names that are motivated by the preferred place of growth of the mushroom: *horse mushroom* (*Agaricus arvensis*) and *field mushroom* (*Agaricus campestris*). These are mushrooms that are commonly found in meadows and grassy fields (cf. It. *prataioli,* TAFINI 1994). The scientific names refer to this characteristic, as both *arvensis* and *campestris* mean "pertaining to the fields" (Langenscheidt Latin Dictionary). The reference to the *horse* in the name of *Agaricus arvensis* may be motivated by their sharing of the same habitat with this animal. Alternatively, the OED and the quotations reported seem to suggest that it may be a reference to the size of the mushroom (see OED, *horse mushroom*), which advocates for inclusion in the category *shape*.

4.5. Shape

The semantic motivation underlying the names in the category *shape* is metaphorical: the overall shape of the entire fungus is understood in terms of a similar known object, sometimes showing considerable levels of creativity and unusualness.
The name *hen of the woods* (*Grifola frondosa*) identifies a mushroom whose structure does not correspond to a prototypical mushroom structure, rather it consists of a mass of interwoven flat lobed fronds that grow from the ground, thus forming a shape that is reminiscent of a hen. As Williams explains, "they [: *Grifola frondosa*] particularly like to nestle – like a broody hen – in the gaps between buttress-like roots" (https://gallowaywildfoods.com/hen-of-the-woods-identification-edibility-distribution-ecology/).
The name *scarlet elf cup* (*Sarcoscypha austriaca*) also defies the prototypical shape of a mushroom and resembles a small cup growing on rottening wood. The reference to

vivid red grants this name also a place in the colour category. Fungi have often been associated to magical and supernatural entities: this name suggests that this mushroom is used by elves as a cup.

The name *oyster mushroom* (*Pleurotus ostreatus*) is motivated by the resemblance of the mushroom to an oyster, suggested also by its Latin name (*ostreatus* means "related to oysters"). This mushroom grows from the trunk of trees as brackets in overlapping tiers. Both the irregularity of the shape of the cap and its grey colour provide the physical basis for the metaphorization.

The name *puffball* describes the round shape of a group of fungi which emit spores through a small hole in the cap, hence the reference to the *puff*. The common name *puffball* with no pre-modifier usually identifies *Lycoperdon perlatum*, but it may also refer to *Calvatia gigantea* with pre-modification as in *giant puffball*. Neither species of mushroom displays a clear morphological distinction between the cap and the stalk, thus resembling a ball.

The name *parasol* may also refer to two distinct species of mushrooms that share the same prototypical shape with a long stalk and a large cap, thus allowing for the conceptualisation as a parasol, literally "something that screens or protects as if from the rays of the sun" (OED, *parasol* 1). In the dataset, this name is used either with no pre-modifier in reference to *Macrolepiota procera*, or with the pre-modifier *shaggy parasol* in reference to *Clorophyllum rhacodes.*

The name *dryad's saddle* is another name that bears reference to supernatural beings. In classical Greek mythology, the *dryads* are nymphs that inhabit trees (OED, *dryad* 1). The attribution of this name to the category of shape is motivated by the noun *saddle*, which metaphorically describes the bracket form of the mushroom as a saddle growing from the trunk of trees, on which dryads ride.

The mushroom *angel wings* (*Pleurocybella porrigens*) is another example of bracket fungus whose common name displays a reference to supernatural beings, albeit in a Christian cultural background. This mushroom has a distinctive flat cap that resembles a wing, and its bright white colour may motivate the conceptual association with angels.

The name *jelly's ear* (*Auricularia auriculae-judae*) identifies a mushroom that grows on the trunk of trees and whose texture, shape, and position are reminiscent of an ear.

The case of this name is particularly relevant, to the extent that this is one of the few names that Williams comments on. The Latin name of this species highlights the cultural association between this fungus and the Christian myth of Judas, who hanged himself from a tree after having betrayed Jesus. Thus, a possible variant of this name is *Judas' ear*. In fact, another variation of the name is *Jew's ear*, which, as the OED notes, is "probably […] a mistaken rendering of post-classical Latin *auricula Judae* Judas's ear (although this is apparently first attested later: 1576 or earlier)." (OED, *jew's ear*, etymology). The association of this mushroom to Christian mythology is motivated by the preferred habitat of this species, which is frequently found on the elder, on which "Judas Iscariot was reputed to have hanged himself" (OED, *jew's ear*, etymology). As Williams notes, "I generally introduce it as *jelly ear* in the first instance, to avoid misunderstandings", as the traditional name violates the standards of political correctness with its reference to Judaism (https://gallowaywildfoods.com/jelly-ear-fungus-edibility-identification-distribution/).

Another mushroom that owes its name to its distinctive unregular shape is the *cauliflower fungus* (*Sparassis crispa*). It consists of flattened and wavy lobes that emerge from the ground in an entangled globe. According to Williams, its shape is so peculiar that it is "unmistakable" (https://gallowaywildfoods.com/cauliflower-fungus-identification-habitat-distribution/).

Finally, the *penny bun* is a common name for *Boletus edulis*. According to the OED, this binomial expression may also refer to "A bun which costs a penny" (OED, *penny bun*). The association between the two may derive from the shape and colour of the cap, which in young specimens resembles that of a loaf of bread.

4.6. Texture

A few of the names highlight the texture of the mushroom as its distinctive characteristic. The name *velvet shank* (*Flammulina velutipes*) derives its name from the texture of the stalk of this mushroom, reminiscent of velvet. The description of the stalk as *shank* suggests a personification metaphor, according to which the lower part of the body of the mushroom is conceptualised as the lower part of the body of a human being.

The name *waxcap* also refers to the soft feeling that arises from touching the cap of these mushrooms. This name identifies a collection of different mushrooms that belong to the genera *Cuphophyllus* and *Hygrocybe* and share the same set of characteristics. In the dataset, these are further specified with premodifiers that grant them inclusion also in other categories. These are: *meadow waxcaps* (*Cuphophyllus pratensis*) with reference to its preferred *habitat; snowy waxcaps (Cuphophyllus virgineus), crimson waxcaps* (*Hygrocybe punicea*), and *parrot waxcap* (*Hygrocybe psittacina*) with reference to the colour of the cap, while the *ballerina waxcap* (*Hygrocybe calyptriformis*) derives its name both from the pink colour, typical of ballerinas' tutus, thus granting it inclusion also in the colour and in the shape category. Finally, I attributed the name *chicken of the wood* (*Laetiporus sulphureus*) to this category because the texture of its flesh resembles that of chicken. According to Williams "Tender cuts are excellent in pies, stews, currys etc – a genuine textural substitute for chicken!" (https://gallowaywildfoods.com/chicken-of-the-woods-edibility-identification-distribution/).

4.7. Usage

The category of usage only contains the name *fly agaric* (*Amanita muscaria*). The English name reflects the scientific name, and it refers to the usage of this mushroom to kill flies in households due to its poisonous properties. This venomous mushroom has been used as a fly-killer in central Europe since at least the 13th century, when Albertus Magnus published *De Vegetalibus* and described such use in current Slovenia (CRUNDWELL 1987), and the same usage has recently been documented (LUMPERT and KREFT 2015). Although the same usage has not been ascertained in the UK, and the name is likely a calque from its Latin name, the semantic motivation that underlies it is that of usage against pests.

4.8. Borrowings

The final category includes names that do not share a semantic motivation, rather, they share a foreign origin. The names in this category are direct borrowings from other languages, such as Latin, French, and Italian. The Latin names permeated English through mycology: these are *bolete, russula* and *amanita.* These names correspond to

the scientific names of the genera of the mushrooms they identify. Both *bolete* and *russula* have undergone a process of lexicalisation and have been listed in the OED recently (in 2004 and 2011, respectively). The noun *amanita* is not present in the OED, but it is used quite consistently in the dataset.

The name *porcini* is always used in the dataset in its plural form. Although the OED lists it in its Italian singular form (i.e., *porcino*), it reports both forms and specifies that this noun is mainly used in the plural form in English. This name refers exclusively to *Boletus edulis* in English. Notably, the borrowing from Italian suggests that this lexical item was borrowed in the scenario of food and cooking, as attested from the OED heading "Cookery" of the entry, which lists it as a specialised term in this jargon.

Another borrowed name for the same mushroom is *cep*. According to the OED (*cèpe*, n.), this noun may refer to any type of mushroom in the genus *Boletus*. In the dataset, Williams uses it exclusively to refer to *Boletus edulis*. It must be noted that the OED's entry reports as the headword the French spelling *cèpe*, which has not been updated since 1972. The first attestation in English reported dates to 1865. English also received via French the name *chanterelle*, whose first attestation is in 1777. The OED glosses this name as exclusively referring to *Cantharellus cibarius*, but in the dataset it is used to refer to a wider set of mushrooms through pre-modification. Thus, for instance, the *winter chanterelle* is *Craterellus tubaeformis*; the *pale chanterelle* is *Cantharellus pallens;* and the *amethyst chanterelle* is *Cantharellus amethysteus*. These two last names were also listed in the category *colour.*

5. Discussion and conclusion

The present paper has presented a survey of the most frequent common English names for wild species of fungi, as emerging from a collection of blog posts specifically dedicated to this subject, authored by professional forager Mark Williams. It has proposed a classification of the semantic motivation underlying common names. The theoretical assumptions that have driven this investigation are embedded in cognitive linguistics, more specifically Conceptual Metaphor Theory, according to which the selection of a salient aspect in a given domain to refer to the entire domain may be analysed as a conceptual metonymy.

The most common linguistic type is the name *chanterelle*, a borrowing from French, which refers to a mushroom currently considered a delicacy in fine-dining restaurants. The second most frequent type of name is *cep*, followed by *bolete*. Both names refer to fungi in the genus *Boletus,* thus making *Cantharellus spp.* and *Boletus spp.* the most common mushrooms in the dataset. As Williams himself states in the blog, "if ceps are the king of the mushroom world, then chanterelles are undoubtedly its queens" (https://gallowaywildfoods.com/chanterelle-identification-distribution-edibility/).

Despite the traditional alleged mycophobia of British culture, the names retrieved from the blog and the subsequent analyses show that fungi are represented in English lexicon, and some of these names pre-date the early 2000s. Further research should undertake a historical approach to retrieve the first attestations of the names that did not undergo a process of lexicalisation, and for which there is no entry in the OED. Although this was not the main aim of the paper, I provided the dates of first attestation when possible.

The semantic categories that emerged from the analysis suggest different types of relationship between humans and other-than-human life forms. The promotion of these names may encourage future generations to establish a more meaningful connection with the fungal world, which is paramount for its conservation (BROWN 2019, SKUTNABB-KANGAS and HARMON 2018). The categories that contain the highest number of names are *colour* and *shape*, thus suggesting that the physical observation of wild species is paramount for the coinage of their names. Other categories that encapsulate physical aspects of mushrooms are *gills, habitat,* and *texture*. The encoding in the names of this knowledge is discussed as a metonymical relationship between a salient characteristic of the specimen and its general name. This type of knowledge is revealing of an attentive observation of specific mushrooms, and it serves the scope of identification of the different species. Although British culture did not traditionally consume wild mushrooms, the names given provide useful indications about the aspect of fungi. This knowledge however does not arise from a long-standing oral tradition (as in mycophile countries), rather from an ad-hoc intervention by mycologists in the 20th century.

Other semantic categories encapsulate a warning towards the consumption of poisonous species (i.e., *effect*): the names in this category are not descriptive of the

species, and therefore do not reflect any salient physical feature of the mushroom. I understand them as a metonymic relationship of the effects of consumption, which are highlighted to identify the cause. These names serve the scope of warning against usage of the species as food.

The category *usage* encodes information about a traditional usage of the mushroom. Further research should assess whether the usage of *Amanita muscaria* to kill flies was in use in the British Isles, or if this name was simply a calque from Latin. Finally, the category *borrowings*, despite being a lexical (and not semantic) category, is also revealing of cultural attitudes towards fungi in the British Isles. Some of the names entered English via French, because of gastronomic attitudes imported from over the Channel during the 18th century (BERTELSEN 2013: 48). Other names in this category are borrowed from Latin, thus suggesting a different way of introduction into English, i.e., scientific observations. Finally, the lexical item *porcini* also testifies to the introduction of this word in the English lexicon via gastronomic habits.

The practice of naming wild entities often encapsulates cultural attitudes and beliefs towards the named species. In the case of mushrooms in English, there is a strong bias towards physical observation, thus making most English common names descriptive, and a potentially useful resource towards the identification of the species. The reason of this bias towards the physical description may be tied to the traditional mycophobia of the culture that developed them: there are not many traditional uses to be encoded in the names. It should be stressed however that the physical characteristics of the species are frequently used in names disregarding the presence of traditional uses, as a survey of plant names reveals (BAGLI 2021).

The impact of humans on the environment is the hallmark of the Anthropocene. The study of common names of wildlife is a study of the ecological knowledge and environmental awareness encoded therein. The cultural knowledge encapsulated in the lexicon exemplifies the intricate ways in which human languages define and conceptualise wildlife. The retrieval and critical assessment of these conceptualisation processes illustrates the relationship between humans and other-than-human life forms. A deeper and more meaningful relationship with wildlife is key to building healthier and more resilient communities while respecting and promoting biodiversity.

The contribution of linguistic practices towards this goal should not be underestimated.

Acknowledgments

This publication is part of the R&D&i project PID2020-118349GB-I00 funded by MICIU/AEI/10.13039/501100011033 (Spain).

Much of the literature cited in this paper was accessed during my short visit at the University of Glasgow in May 2023, which was funded by the University of Genova (Fondi per la Ricerca Accademica 2023). I would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments on the first draft of this article.

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[1] I would like to thank one of the anonymous reviewers for this helpful suggestion and distinction.

[2] I report the identification of the species as emerging from the dataset under analysis. In some cases, I further verified the identifications of the mushroom through other sources: WildFoodUK (https://www.wildfooduk.com/) and in the CollinsGem field guide (Harding 2013). Although the identifications were verified, the list of names should not be understood as a substitute for a professional field guide to the identification of wild mushrooms. The aim of the article is to discuss names of mushrooms from a linguistic point of view. The identification of different species is often difficult, and extreme care is necessary to identify a species, especially if it is for consumption.