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ENGLISH LIVESTOCK VOCABULARY AND ITS PECULARITIES

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Abstract. *The topic* "English livestock vocabulary and its pecularities" *examines how terms connected with animal husbandry and livestock breeding are defined, systematized, and represented in English dictionaries of various types. The study focuses on the linguistic, cultural, and pragmatic aspects of livestock-related vocabulary, considering both general-purpose lexicographic sources and specialized agricultural glossaries. Livestock terminology, being deeply rooted in the rural and economic life of English-speaking communities, reflects not only professional and scientific classifications but also regional, historical, and metaphorical usages. Lexicographic interpretation involves issues such as semantic precision, polysemy, synonymy, and terminological standardization, as well as the balance between scientific accuracy and accessibility for the lay user. The analysis highlights the role of livestock terms in shaping agricultural discourse, their metaphorical extension into everyday English, and the challenges lexicographers face in adequately capturing their dynamic usage. The study contributes to the broader field of terminography, agricultural linguistics, and English lexicography by emphasizing the need for consistent and context-sensitive representation of livestock terminology.*

Keywords: *Lexicography, livestock terminology, animal husbandry, agricultural discourse, dictionary definitions*

Livestock husbandry has been integral to English-speaking cultures for centuries, producing a large body of terminology associated with animal breeds,

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anatomy, health, reproduction, and genetics. While many of these terms are embedded in everyday vocabulary (e.g., *cow*, *calf*, *sheep*), others belong to scientific or technical registers (e.g., *ruminant*, *hybridization*, *pedigree selection*). The lexicographic interpretation of this terminology is vital for clarity in agricultural practice, veterinary science, and international knowledge exchange.

Lexicographic interpretation of animal husbandry terms in modern English dictionaries is highly detailed, including definitions, grammatical notes, usage examples, stylistic labels, and often etymologies. Animal husbandry is defined in the Britannica Dictionary as “a kind of farming in which people raise animals for meat, milk, eggs, etc.” — that is, the breeding of agricultural animals for the production of goods (meat, milk, eggs, etc.). Encyclopedic sources provide an extended interpretation: animal husbandry is “controlled cultivation, management, and production of domestic animals, including improvement of the qualities considered desirable.”

Thus, English lexicography emphasizes that animal husbandry involves the purposeful breeding of domestic animals, the management of their reproduction, and enhancement of their productive qualities. Accordingly, specialized terms in this field encompass designations of various types of livestock, their sex and age categories (male, female, young), as well as processes (e.g., reproduction, fattening, housing).

Let us examine how these terms are represented in authoritative English dictionaries—Oxford, Cambridge, Merriam-Webster, Collins, Britannica, among others—with a focus on definitions, grammatical-stylistic annotations, entry structure, and etymological notes.

Terms for Cattle. The English word cattle designates the species as a whole—domestic bulls and cows. Lexicographically notable is that cattle is a pluralia tantum noun, i.e., it is used only in the plural form. Dictionaries note the absence of a singular: **"Cattle' can only be used in the plural and not in the singular: it is a plurale tantum."**

To refer to an individual animal, expressions like head of cattle are used. Alternatively, gender- and age-specific terms are employed in speech: cow (adult female), bull (adult male), calf (young animal). According to Merriam-Webster, cow is **"the adult female of cattle," and also "any domestic bovine animal regardless of sex or age"** (the second meaning). Thus, cow in contemporary dictionaries has both the narrow meaning of "female bovine" and the broader colloquial sense as a general term for large livestock. Bull is defined as an adult male; it is usually emphasized that a bull is an intact (not castrated) male. For instance, Collins provides: bull – "uncastrated male bovine animal."

The existence of special terms for castrated males used for fattening or labor is also important. Steer is defined as "castrated bull," i.e., a steer used for meat production. In British English, a closely related term is bullock. Merriam-Webster defines bullock as "a castrated bull: steer." However, bullock may also mean "a young bull calf," a meaning labeled as archaic in Collins ("archaic a bull calf"). Dictionaries also include the term ox, which historically referred to any cattle, but in modern English refers to a castrated bull used for draft purposes. For example, Oxford defines ox as "a castrated bull used as a draft animal," with the plural form oxen—noted separately as an irregular plural and the only masculine noun in modern English with the -en plural ending.

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To refer to young bovine animals, the term calf is used. Dictionaries indicate that calf refers to the young of a cow of either sex; the plural form is calves (with the consonant change f→v). A young female that has not yet calved is called a heifer. This is a specialized term, marked “Animal Husbandry” in some dictionary definitions. Merriam-Webster provides a precise definition: “a young cow; especially one that has not had a calf.” Thus, the absence of offspring is a mandatory component in dictionary definitions of heifer. Morphologically, heifer is a countable noun, which is indicated, for example, in the Learner’s Dictionary (marked [C]).

Table-1

English Terms for Sex and Age Categories of Cattle

Term (Eng.)	Lexical Meaning (Rus.)	Lexicographic Annotations
bull	bull (male, uncastrated)	noun, [C] (zoot.)
cow	cow (female)	noun, [C]
steer	steer, castrated bull for fattening	noun, [C], chiefly NAm.
ox	ox, working bull (castrated)	noun, [C], plural oxen
bullock	bullock (young bull; steer)	noun, [C], BrE, archaic
calf	calf (young animal)	noun, [C], plural calves
heifer	heifer (young female cow that has not calved)	noun, [C], specialized

Note: Terms are given according to Oxford, Collins, and Merriam-Webster dictionaries; [C] – countable noun; BrE – British English; archaic – outdated usage.

As shown in the table, English terminology for cattle demonstrates a detailed differentiation of concepts based on sex and reproductive status, which is reflected in dictionary entries. Stylistic labels indicate regional distinctions (with "steer" being primarily a North American term for a castrated young bull, while "bullock" is a Britishism) and the obsolescence of certain synonyms. For example, Collins marks "bullock" as archaic in the meaning of "young bull." Thus, the lexicographic interpretation of these terms reflects both their contemporary relevance and geographical distribution.

Terms for small ruminants: sheep and goats. In English, domestic sheep (sheep) and goats (goat) are also represented by an extensive terminology. The word sheep is used for both singular and plural (as in the Russian “овца/овцы”). Dictionaries usually note that sheep has zero plural: plural = sheep. The gender-specific terms are ram – the male sheep, and ewe – the female sheep. These terms are widely used and recorded without special stylistic labels, but with gender annotation: ram – noun, [C], “an uncastrated male sheep”; ewe – “a female sheep, especially an adult.” A young sheep is called a lamb; this word also functions as a verb (to lamb – to give birth, discussed below). It is noted that lamb may also refer to meat (as a food product, similar to mutton – the meat of sheep). Unlike lamb, mutton refers specifically to the meat of mature sheep and is rarely used to denote the live animal.

Interestingly, mutton is a word of French origin (from mouton), adopted into English during the Norman Conquest. Dictionary entries often include etymological notes; for example, Oxford cites mutton as deriving from Old French moton. This historical and cultural layer of terminology (e.g., sheep vs. mutton, cow vs. beef, etc.) is often noted even in popular linguistic sources, as it reflects the social stratification of the language: names of animals are of Germanic origin, whereas names for their meat are of Romance origin.

The terminology for goats is similar to that used in sheep husbandry: goat refers to the general term for the species or the female goat; buck or billy-goat denotes a male goat; doe or nanny-goat refers to a female goat; and kid designates a young goat. The word buck, in addition to "male goat," also refers to the male of various other animals (such as deer, hare, etc.), and thus dictionaries usually specify the species: buck (goat) – "the male goat; a billy," with the label billy indicating an informal synonym for billy-goat. Similarly, doe refers to the female of several species, including goats, rabbits, and deer; dictionary entries typically provide cross-references to these meanings, marked as "female animal." Kid is a common lexical item for a young goat, but colloquially it also means "child." Dictionaries list this transferred meaning, for example: kid (noun) – informal, child. Morphologically, kid has a regular plural form kids, while goat becomes goats.

A castrated male goat is called a wether – the same term used for a castrated ram. Dictionaries register wether with the annotation Animal Husbandry: "a castrated ram or billy goat." This is a highly specialized term of ancient origin (Old English weðer), preserved solely within the technical vocabulary. Etymological

entries (e.g., wether – Old English, related to German Widder) show that the term dates back to Proto-Germanic times.

It should be noted that some of the terms for sheep and goats also function as verbs: to lamb – "to give birth to lambs" (cf. Merriam-Webster: lamb (v.): to give birth to lambs), and to shear – "to clip (a sheep's wool)." These verbal meanings are typically presented as separate subentries within the same dictionary article, with specification of grammatical category (lamb v.) and marked as "intransitive" (e.g., lamb). These instances illustrate the structural feature of dictionary entries where multiple parts of speech are listed under a single headword (e.g., lamb as both noun and verb). They are often accompanied by usage examples: for instance, OALD cites The ewes lamb in early spring. Stylistically, such usage is neutral and pertains to professional or agricultural contexts.

Equine terminology in English displays particularly rich differentiation by sex and age categories. The general term horse denotes the species as a whole and is defined in dictionaries as "a large equine animal used for riding or draught work." Sex-specific terms include stallion – an adult intact male horse used for breeding, and mare – an adult female horse. Stallion is consistently identified as "an uncastrated adult male horse, especially one used for breeding." In Collins (via Dictionary.com), the definition emphasizes the animal's role in stud service, marked as "especially one used for breeding." The word stud may be used synonymously with stallion, particularly in the sense of a breeding animal, but more often it denotes either the breeding facility (stud farm) or the collective breeding stock. Stylistically, stud in the meaning of a breeding stallion is part of technical equine terminology and is labeled [Breeding] in specialized dictionaries.

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A castrated male horse is called a gelding. Dictionaries provide concise definitions, e.g., Merriam-Webster: “a castrated horse.” This suffices, as the term has no other meanings. Etymologically, gelding is derived from the verb to geld (to castrate), which itself traces back to Old Norse gelda.

Age-related terms include foal – a general term for a young horse of either sex under one year; colt – a young male horse usually under four years; and filly – a young female horse, typically under four years and prior to first breeding. Dictionary entries may offer clarifications: colt – “a young male horse under four years of age” (Oxford); filly – “a young female horse, esp. under the age of four” (Collins). These words follow regular pluralization patterns (colts, fillies). Interestingly, colt historically referred to any foal regardless of sex, and is still used that way in some dialects, but modern lexicography tends to restrict it to males, contrasting it with filly. Foal remains a universal term, and definitions such as that in Cambridge describe it simply as “a young horse” without specifying sex.

For horses of smaller stature, a distinct term pony is used, generally referring to a breed or type rather than a juvenile. Dictionaries define pony as a small horse, typically under 14.2 hands high. This inclusion of a quantitative parameter and unit of measurement reflects conventions in equine classification (1 hand = 4 inches ≈ 10.16 cm). Academic dictionaries rarely mention such specifics, whereas specialized glossaries may include them.

Terminology related to donkeys and mules, closely associated with horse breeding, should also be noted. Donkey refers to the domestic ass, also known by the now-dated or literary term ass. The term ass in the animal sense is rarely used due to its homonymy with vulgar slang meanings (e.g., “buttocks” or “fool”), and

dictionaries typically mark ass (animal) as "dated" or "literary." Sex-specific terms include jack or jackass for a male donkey, and jenny or jennet for a female. A mule is defined as "the offspring of a male donkey and a female horse." Since most mules are sterile, no standard sex-specific terms are commonly used. However, for the reciprocal hybrid (offspring of a male horse and female donkey), the term hinny is employed. These terms are referenced in major encyclopedic dictionaries and specialized glossaries, with explicit reference to their context in animal husbandry.

Swine terminology encompasses a broad lexicon in English. The domestic pig (pig in British and general English, hog in certain dialects—particularly American English, where it refers to a fattened pig) is associated with a range of specific terms. Boar refers to an uncastrated adult male; sow denotes a mature female; and piglet designates a young pig. Specialized terms include barrow—a castrated male pig raised for meat—and gilt, a young female pig that has not yet farrowed. These terms belong to the professional lexicon of animal husbandry and are marked as specialized in dictionary entries. For example, Cambridge labels gilt as "noun [C] (specialized, Animal breeding): a young female pig that has not had babies." In some general-language dictionaries, gilt may be omitted due to its technical nature, but it is consistently included in sector-specific glossaries. The FAO terminology database, for instance, includes gilt and provides multilingual equivalents along with precise definitions.

The term hog in American English frequently denotes a large domestic pig, typically one that is fattened for slaughter. Merriam-Webster defines hog as "a domestic swine especially weighing more than 120 pounds (54 kg)—compare pig."

In British English, hog historically referred to a castrated male (akin to barrow), though this usage is now rare. Lexicographers commonly indicate the regional scope of the term, tagging hog as (chiefly US) or (esp. NAmE) with the meaning "any large domestic pig."

The word swine is an archaic collective noun for pigs; its plural form is invariant (swine). Today, it is infrequently used or appears in formal or ironic contexts. Dictionaries classify swine as [old-fashioned or formal] when used literally, or note its derogatory connotation when applied metaphorically to people. Similarly, pig possesses several figurative meanings: in informal registers, it may describe a person as greedy, slovenly, or unpleasant— "a person regarded as being piglike, greedy, or disgusting." In slang, particularly American, pig is a pejorative term for a police officer, often marked as [Derogatory Slang] in lexicons like American Heritage and Collins. Thus, the entry for pig spans both denotative and connotative meanings, with stylistic labels (informal, slang, derogatory) clarifying usage. This illustrates how a livestock term can accrue diverse social connotations in broader language use; lexicographic practice must delineate these senses and indicate their registers accordingly.

Verbs associated with swine breeding are also recorded: to farrow means to give birth (applied to a sow), and to wean means to separate piglets from the sow (the general term wean applies to the cessation of maternal milk feeding). As a noun, farrow denotes a litter of piglets. Dictionaries such as Merriam-Webster define farrow (n.) as "a litter of pigs." This term is also documented in agricultural glossaries (e.g., at Iowa State University or in FAO resources). Therefore, English dictionaries strive to encompass both general terms (pig, boar, sow) and

specialized vocabulary (barrow, gilt, farrow), frequently marking the latter with labels such as [Tech.] or [Specialist].

Lexicographic aspects of term entries.

Nearly all terms under consideration are nouns; therefore, dictionary entries indicate part of speech (n. for noun) immediately after the headword, along with grammatical information on countability and plural forms. For terms with irregular plurals (e.g., ox – oxen, sheep – sheep, goose – geese), this information appears directly after the part of speech or in a note. For example, the goose entry in Merriam-Webster includes the note “plural geese” right after the transcription. Pluralia tantum words (cattle, poultry) are accompanied by labels such as “plural noun (usually treated as plural)”. In the online Cambridge Dictionary, cattle includes the note “[plural + singular or plural verb]”, indicating syntactic variability: although plural in form, the word may agree with either singular or plural verbs depending on context. This illustrates how the dictionary guides users grammatically.

Many terms have multiple meanings, including figurative ones. Lexicographers differentiate these with ordinal numbering. For example, stallion has only one primary meaning (“adult male horse”), so Merriam-Webster lists it as a single entry. However, horse has several meanings: 1) the animal itself, 2) a device or frame (sawhorse – labeled in the definition), 3) cavalry (archaic, marked as dated or hist.), 4) heroin (slang, marked as slang). These meanings are listed under one headword, each with stylistic labels. This approach is typical of comprehensive dictionaries (e.g., Collins, MW), which document all meanings,

including those unrelated to livestock, whereas specialized glossaries (e.g., FAO agriculture glossaries) focus on the primary domain-specific definitions only.

Stylistic labeling in dictionaries plays an essential role for terms that are obsolete or used figuratively. Previously mentioned examples include: ass (donkey), labeled dated/offensive due to its homonymy with a vulgar meaning; swine (pigs), labeled formal or derogatory; cow, used as a derogatory term for a woman, marked slang, derog. (e.g., cow — "a woman regarded as stupid or annoying, informal derogatory", as found in OED). Thus, livestock-related dictionary entries often include dispreferred figurative uses with appropriate cautionary labels, reflecting the principle of comprehensive description and attestation of usage.

Another important element is **usage examples**. In academic dictionaries (e.g., Oxford, Cambridge), entries typically include one or two contextualized examples following the definition. For instance, for heifer, Cambridge provides: "a dairy heifer is a young cow raised for milk production." Examples often demonstrate collocations such as bull market (a financial term not directly related to the animal), sheep flock, horse racing, pig pen, etc., illustrating the term's combinatory capacity. In the online version of Merriam-Webster, entries include "Recent examples on the web" – excerpts from real-life news sources. For heifer, for example, quotations from newspapers illustrate the term in current usage. This is a relatively recent enhancement in electronic dictionaries, enriching traditional dictionary entries with contemporary citation blocks.

Finally, etymology. For livestock terminology, etymological notes are particularly insightful, as they reveal layers of borrowings in the English language.

A significant portion of the core animal names are of Old English (Germanic) origin: cow (< OE cū), bull (< bula), calf (< cealf), sheep (< scēap), goat (< gāt), horse (< horsa), swine (< swīn). This is documented in the etymology sections of dictionaries, usually following the main definition block under "Word Origin" or "History." For instance, Merriam-Webster notes for cow: "Old English cū 'cow'"; for horse: "Old English hors," followed by links to Old High German hros. Some terms are of Scandinavian origin (stallion < Old French but with Proto-Germanic roots; gelding < Old Norse gelda). A distinct lexical layer comprises Norman French borrowings: beef (< Anglo-Norman boef), mutton (< mouton), pork (< porc), veal (< veau). As shown in materials from the VOA, these words entered English after 1066 and came to denote meat products, whereas the animals themselves retained Anglo-Saxon names. Dictionaries such as the Oxford English Dictionary provide extensive commentary on this. Concise dictionaries often note only the origin source; for example, Merriam-Webster lists beef as: "Middle English befe, from Anglo-French boef, from Latin bov- (bos)," thus indicating the full lineage from Latin bos (ox, cow).

The lexicographic interpretation of livestock terms in English reveals a complex interplay between zoological definitions, historical-cultural connotations, and figurative usages. Authoritative dictionaries aim to reflect every facet: providing exact scientific definitions (e.g., specifying that a cow is a female with offspring, or a heifer is one without), without omitting broader or metaphorical extensions. Grammatical information is obligatory (gender and number, special plural forms), as it is essential for language learners and specialists alike. Stylistic markers (formal, informal, dialect, obsolete, offensive, etc.) serve as warnings

against incorrect usage outside of the appropriate context. Etymological notes serve not only a referential function but also clarify semantic distinctions (e.g., the cow vs. beef, or sheep vs. mutton dichotomies).

Thus, leading English dictionaries (Oxford, Cambridge, Merriam-Webster, Collins, etc.) offer a comprehensive portrayal of livestock terminology. Definitions are clearly and consistently structured, often supported by illustrative examples and cross-references (e.g., the entry for bullock refers to steer, ram to tup in British farming slang, stallion with a note see also stud). Dictionary articles follow a systematic structure: starting with the primary genus-level definition, then moving to specific or figurative meanings. One may conclude that livestock terminology in English is lexicographically interpreted at a high level of detail, reflecting the richness of the term system and the lexicographers' attention to domain-specific vocabulary.

A contemporary understanding of the terminology system of animal husbandry in English is incomplete without considering its lexicographic representation. A dictionary does more than describe terms—it encodes a particular scientific and cultural model underpinning English-speaking professional thought. Attention to definition formats, the types of grammatical and stylistic labels, and the mode of semantic differentiation all indicate a high level of disciplinary structuring in agrarian vocabulary. The structure of dictionary entries fulfills not only an informational but also a normative function: it shapes usage expectations, regulates terminological space, and sets the boundaries for acceptable semantic variation.

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Significantly, the English lexicographic tradition does not limit itself to mere description: it actively delineates register boundaries, marks transitions into colloquial or slang usage, and documents historical shifts within professional vocabulary. Dictionaries thus participate in the evolution of the term system, acting not merely as its reflection, but also as an active tool of its regulation. The analysis shows that behind every lexicographic entry lies not only language but also domain-specific knowledge, translated into verbal form through carefully selected descriptive parameters.

Hence, the lexicographic representation of livestock terminology in the English language serves as an indicator of the maturity of the terminological system as a linguistic object: it reveals the degree of its structural organization, normativity, historical stratification, and readiness for cross-linguistic comparison.

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