

PROPER NAMES AS VERBS: A REFLECTION OF CULTURE AND SOCIETY

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Abstract: This study examines the linguistic and cultural significance of proper names, their functions, and their influence on language and society. Scholars such as Vilkuna, Binyong, and Boldyrev have explored the interaction between literary and real-world naming conventions, the gender specificity of names, and the role of proper names as identification markers. The research also highlights the complexities of translating proper names and their cultural specificity, as discussed by Cameron and Nord. Additionally, the paper investigates the institutionalization of verbs derived from proper names, reflecting linguistic evolution and cultural impact. The findings reveal how names not only serve as unique identifiers but also carry historical, cultural, and linguistic significance across different societies.

Keywords: proper names, onomastics, cultural references, name translation, linguistic identity, cognitive linguistics, language evolution, gender-specific names, literary influence.

According to the Finish scholar Vilkuna from a cultural point of view, names used in literature and names in general interact with each other to some extent. According to them a proper name coined for the purpose of a literary piece of work can affect the popularity and adoption of new names into the calendar, for example, Wendy as a name from works of literature is occasionally used for real individuals. This can be illustrated in Persian literature: names like Sohrab and Esfandiyar.

Binyong believed that in some languages most first names are gender-specific and thus identify or express the sex of the referent. There is a sharp conventional distinction between male and female names, and in some countries, it is even forbidden by law give a female name to a male.¹

Boldyrev denoted the two most important criteria for proper names which are their uniqueness and that they function as the identification marks of individuals. In other words, a name signifies an individual being or has unique reference; it is monoreferential. Thus, names serve to identify persons by singling them out from among other persons.²

He judged the criterion of the uniqueness of personal names as questionable due to the fact that several different persons can have not only the same first name but also the same family name.³ Consequently, the combination of first name and family name is not a hundred-percent unique element. As this onomastic scholar pointed out, the traditional view has been that a first name is more individualizing, even though some first names are much more common than many family names. First names are usually regarded as main names; family names originally belonged to

¹ Burridge, Kate "New Standards in a Glorious Grammar: Review of The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language by Rodney Huddleston and Geoffrey K. Pullum (eds)". Australian Book Review. Wiley, 2002.

² Cameron K. "English Placenames". London. 1961.

³ Cameron K. "English Placenames". London. 1961.



the category of additional names. First names can still be chosen quite freely whereas we traditionally receive our family name by inheritance.

He also added that personal names are connected to language use and according to our general onomastic knowledge. It's not difficult to distinguish conventional names from common nouns or other proper names even when they are not within a context. Proper names differ from common nouns not only orthographically and referentially, but also morphosyntactically and semantically.⁴

In highlighting the problems concerning the translation of names, scholars like Cameron usually subsume the issue under a discussion of culture-specific references, where names are seen as culture-specific items and as such are approached in terms of the complexity of translating cultural patterns.⁵ Nord believes that although the issue of cultural specificity in the translation of names is undeniable, there are also other aspects of names that should be considered when translating them.⁶

Christiane Nord also stated that in the real world, proper names may be non-descriptive, but they are obviously not non-informative: If we are familiar with the culture in question, a proper name can tell us whether the referent is a female or male person (Alice—Bill), maybe even about their geographical origin within the same language community or their age.⁷ She explained this by stating that some people name their new-born child after a pop star or a character of a film that happens to be fashionable.

As it is obvious, proper names are both linguistic and cultural products. One aim of compiling verbs from Proper Nouns in a diachronic perspective is to obtain a picture – however limited – of the time they were coined. Indeed, in order to be used as a verb and institutionalized as such, beyond all the other criteria which apply to any neologism (gap in vocabulary, new reality, etc.), a proper name needs to be sufficiently known within a linguistic community so as to ‘stick’, and its main properties need to be salient enough so that they can be selected by this community to create a verb. As a result, when we look back at the institutionalization of verbs from Proper Nouns, it gives an image of some of the features of the culture and society in which they are used.

The analysis of the country of origin of each Proper Noun, for instance, shows the links between English-speaking countries and other countries around the world. Apart from the expected United Kingdom (UK) and United States of America (USA), a large number of different countries (40) are present in the data, most of which appear to have a relatively low influence on English culture(s) as the majority (57%) have only one entry in the data set. This includes English-speaking countries such as Canada, Australia or Ireland. This observation is probably linked to the methodology of the OED which appears to favour the two main English standards for their sources. It is also possible that the influence of British and American cultures spread more widely around the English-speaking world and, as a result, British or American

⁴ Cameron K. “English Placenames”. London. 1961.

⁵ Collier, Mark; Manley, Bill. How to Read Egyptian Hieroglyphs. University of California Press. 2003.

⁶ Neufeldt, Virginia. Webster's new world dictionary of American English. 3rd college edition. New York: Prentice Hall. 1991.

⁷ Neufeldt, Virginia. Webster's new world dictionary of American English. 3rd college edition. New York: Prentice Hall. 1991.



PNs are more salient to the linguistic communities. Together, the UK and the USA account for more than half of the entries of the present data set.

Other countries which count more than five entries are: France (9), Germany (10), Ancient Greece (11), Italy (5), the Bible (8) and Greek mythology (5). The last two origins may be curious at first sight, but it is quite impossible to pinpoint a specific country for these two themes as the Bible has been translated very often, and Greek mythology has been a literary theme through history, and especially during the Renaissance.⁸

Even though it is not surprising that European countries, Antiquity and Christianity stand out, in order to determine the influence of foreign cultures on the English language and English-speaking societies, more data should be gathered. First, a differentiation between the varieties of English would probably show differences between countries and cultures in Proper Nouns verb usage.

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5. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ergonym>

⁸ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ergonym>