Cognitive Onomastics

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> **MIND**, *n. A mysterious form of matter secreted by the brain. Its chief activity consists in the endeavor to ascertain its own nature, the futility of the attempt being due to the fact that it has nothing but itself to know itself with.*
>
> Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary*

Abstract

Proper names exist in the language, while the language exists in the heads of human beings, in their mental lexicons, and emerges as speech in communicative acts. What onymic entities exist in mental lexicon and in what forms – that is the main problem of cognitive onomastics, which makes it a completely new trend in the study of proper names. Entering mental lexicon, due to the processes of conceptualization and categorization, onyms transform into concepts and find their place, forming frames and subframes. Onymic concepts, understood as the unit of information storage, may exist in two forms: active and passive, the former being actualized in the process of their immediate employment in communication, while the latter is applied to the concepts, which are not in the immediate use, only stored in memory depository in the form of embryos of thought. Onymic concepts are connected with other elements of mental lexicon as their organizers, optimizing the functioning of mental lexicon and increasing its effectiveness.

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In comparison with **traditional** onomastics, which investigates proper names in the language and speech, **cognitive** onomastics has to deal with the black box of the human mind and its contents – the **mental lexicon**. The latter may be understood as 'a system, which reflects in the linguistic ability knowledge about words and their mental equivalents; besides, this system fulfils complex functions, connected not only with such linguistic units, but also with corresponding extra-linguistic knowledge representations' (Кубрякова *et al*. 1997).

We suggest that this term is not impeccable – probably **human informative thesaurus** (Залевская 1985) will be better, actualizing the meaning of 'repository of all the knowledge of a human being, which implies integration of verbal and non-verbal knowledge about the world'.

What onymic entities exist in the mental lexicon and in **what** forms – that is the main problem of cognitive onomastics, which makes it a new trend in the study of proper names. The topicality of this research line became evident within the last 20 years: in 1996 O. Jäkel made a report 'Metonymy as a Cognitive Principle in Onomastics', T. Valentine with the other authors published 'The Cognitive Psychology of Proper Names', L.M. Dmitrieva investigated onthology and mental being of the toponymic system in 2002, P. Sjöblom presented 'Cognitive Linguistics and Onomastics: How Company Names Reflect

Subjectivity?' in 2004. In Odessa I.I. Mechnikov National University cognitive onomastic studies started in 2000: general theory being developed by E. Karpenko (Карпенко 2006a, 2006b, 2010), chononymic research – by V. Neklesova (2010), chrematonymic – by A. Tkachenko (2012), zoonymic – by K. Dolbina (2014). The work is supported by younger onomatologists.

At the new 25th International Congress of Onomastic Sciences, held in Glasgow in August 2014, the section of theory of onomastics opened with two reports in the cognitive line: O. Karpenko 'Cognitive Onomastics' and M. Rutkiewicz-Hanczewska 'Semantics of Proper Names. The Structure of the Mental Lexicon of Proper Names' (see Karpenko 2016 and Rutkiewicz-Hanczewska 2016, this volume).

The term **cognition** of Latin origin, in my humble opinion, cannot be translated into English as **knowledge**. More likely, it should be treated as **foreknowledge** – 'a variation of cognitive operations which attend to perception and production of both knowledge and its language representation' (Демьянков 2005: 9). According to J. Fauconnier **cognition** is primarily **a backstage phenomenon** – automatic, unrealized human activity in adjustment to the surroundings (1999: 125). Proper names exist in the language, while the language exists in the heads of human beings, in their mental lexicons, and emerges as speech – in communicative acts, oral or written texts.

Only the units which already exist in the mental lexicon can emerge from it. Cognitive **linguistics** concentrates on the mental lexicon and its structure, while cognitive **onomastics** concentrates on the mental existence of proper names. Cognitive onomastics examines the **input** of linguistic processes (an unknown onym enters the mental lexicon of the person or is created by him) and **output** (the proper name comes out of the mental lexicon for communication or falls out – that is, is forgotten).

Entering the mental lexicon, proper names undergo the processes of **conceptualization** (the process of meaning construction (Evans 2006); in other words comprehension of new information which leads to the formation of the concept (Стернин, Попова 2007: 121)), and the process of **categorization** (classification into all types of units – classes, categories, groups, etc.).

As a result onyms transform into **concepts** and find their place in the mental lexicon, forming frames and subframes. **Onymic concepts** are understood as the units of information storage, 'the units of mental or psychic resources of our consciousness, and the informative structure, that reflects knowledge and experience of the human being' (Карпенко 2006a), or, following Ray Jackendoff, 'a concept is an entity within one's head, a private entity, a product of imagination that can be conveyed to others only by means of language, gesture, drawing, or some other imperfect means of communication' (1992:191).

The essence of the concept, its heterogeneity, is evident. Following Joseph Sternin's guidelines, **the structure of the concept** may be presented like this:

1. An image. A visual component of the concept's structure is formed from perceptual cognitive features (a perceptual image) or figurative features, formed by a metaphorical perception (a metaphoric image);
2. Informative content. It is very close to the dictionary definition of a word.

3. Interpretational field. It embraces the estimation zone (general axiology, as well as aesthetic, emotive, intellectual esteem); encyclopaedic zone (based on experience, general knowledge, etc.); sociocultural zone (connection with traditions, cultural landmarks, etc.). The number of zones is not exhausted (2007:108).

The structure of the onymic concept may deviate from the one mentioned above with respect to a multi-store memory model, consisting of **sensory memory**, **short-term memory** and **long-term memory** (Field 2004). Through sensory memory of a very short duration iconic, echoic and other sensual information finds its way into short-term memory where 'a limited number of items for current processing' are kept. This memory is 'actively engaged in cognitive operations; hence a preference for the term **working memory**'. Long-term memory contains 'knowledge of two types: declarative knowledge which gives us access to facts and procedural knowledge which enables us to perform processes' (Field 2004). According to Richard Gross, long-term memory is subdivided into **episodic memory** ('autobiographical' memory, based on personal experience) and **semantic memory** ('our store of general, factual knowledge about the world') (Gross 2010: 265). Based on this subdivision of memory **levels-of-processing model** includes a **superficial** level, where the surface features of a stimulus are processed; an **intermediate** level, where 'the word is analysed for its sound; a **deep** (semantic) level, at which the meaning of the word is analysed' (Gross 2010: 268).

The application of the above-mentioned psychological computations may enhance our understanding of the mental existence of proper names. By means of sensory memory the exponent of the onym gets into the mental lexicon. By means of short-term memory the onym is conceptualized and categorized. Then it is stored in long-term memory, either episodic or semantic.

Consequently, **the structure of the onymic concept** will have a three-fold character:

1. A verbal field, which is self-explanatory;
2. An informational field, where we shall refer 'autobiographical' and general encyclopaedic information about the entity;
3. A sensory field, where visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic information is stored.

The question arises: where is the place for multi-dimensional evaluative information, which many concepts comprise? Either it is necessary to add one more field, or it may be included into the previous divisions optionally.

Onymic concepts may exist in two forms: **active** and **passive**, the former being actualized in the process of their immediate employment in communication, while the latter is applied to the concepts, which are not in the immediate use, only stored in memory depository in the form of embryos of thought.

Onymic concepts are connected with other elements of the mental lexicon as their **organizers**, optimizing the functioning of the mental lexicon and increasing its effectiveness. The name is like **a label on the bookshelf** (in our mental palace); like **a key on the keyboard**, by pressing of which we open a memory depository to extract certain information – or to fill it. The key *Glasgow* gives us access to encyclopaedic, historical, personal information stored in an individual depository of memory.

Memory depositories, mental shelves – are **frames** in Charles Fillmore's (2011) understanding; they are means of organizing experience and instruments of cognition. We can see these frames only 'with mental eyes', as Leonard Talmy poetically put it.

It is possible to differentiate **10 onymic frames**:

1. anthroponymic, which includes the names of people;
2. toponymic, which includes the names of places;
3. theonymic, which includes the names of gods and demons;
4. ergonymic, which includes the names of groups of people;
5. zoonymic, which includes the names of animals;
6. phytonymic, which includes the names of plants and trees;
7. cosmonymic, which includes the names of natural cosmic objects;
8. chrononymic, which includes the names of events and time periods,
9. chrematonymic, which includes the names of material objects;
10. ideonymic, which includes the names of spiritual objects.

Onymic frames have subdivisions – **subframes**, maybe **microframes** – because they include proper names of different extra-linguistic nature. For instance, the anthroponymic frame embraces personal names, middle names, patronymics, family names, pseudonyms, nicknames, etc.

Each onymic frame consists of three **components**:

1. a real component (we may call it **script**) includes all the proper names from the objective reality, present or historical, e.g. *Simon Taylor* or *Carole Hough*;
2. a virtual component embraces proper names, created by human imagination, e.g. *Alice in Wonderland, Tom and Jerry, The Mentalist*;
3. a sacral component includes all the proper names, which refer to religious beliefs, e.g. *Jesus, Holy Grail, Thor, Vishnu*.

The third component has a specific dual character, since personal religious beliefs are true to the believer and, consequently, all the proper names referring to them are real, while religious beliefs of others are not real, relevant proper names included.

Thus, mental existence of the onomasticon in a language is realized through a sum of the mental lexicons of all the native speakers. Each lexicon contains proper names 1) universally known, 2) known to groups of people, 3) known only to the owner of the mental lexicon.

Such an ethnic mental lexicon consists of individual mental lexicons, the structure of which is concentric, and is grouped around the Ego of its owner. It consists of several (likely four) concentric **circles**:

1) the 1st, closest circle contains proper names, that are really dear to the person: parents, spouses, children, friends, cats, soccer teams, universities, etc.;

2) the 2nd circle includes those proper names, with whose referents the owner is personally acquainted or is personally interested without being **too** emotionally involved: former students, classmates, neighbours, ex-lovers;

3) the 3rd circle embraces the names of referents of no personal importance to the owner: some book I've heard about or read, a resort my friend visited, and the like;

4) the 4th circle consists of the unknown: proper names we do not know yet or have already forgotten. It is a sea of the unknown, from which we extract the names we need and into which we release what we do not need any more.

The nature and functioning of the mental lexicon and its organization only start opening their mysteries to onomatologists. New projects are launched – the amazing **Cognitive Toponymy Project** in Glasgow University, together with the Universities of Copenhagen and St. Andrews (2014). Hopefully, the black box of our mind will open its onomastic secrets to the aspiring (and inspiring) investigators of proper names.

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