



Personal and Place Names in English Phraseology

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Keywords: *phraseological unit, proper name, personal name, place name, cultural-linguistic.*

Introductory observations

Naming an entity is one of the basic speech acts. People and places, pets and hurricanes, rock groups and festivities, institutions and commercial products, works of art and shops are given a name (L e h r e r 1994). The act of naming serves to illuminate the entities that play a role in people's daily life. Proper names is the object of onomastics (i.e. the science of names). They have been investigated by linguists with different approaches and concerns (S e a r l e 1975; H o u g h 2000; T s e 2004; A n d e r s o n 2007). It is generally agreed among linguists (S l o a t 1969; C a r r o l l 1983; L a n g a c k e r 1991) that proper names are a universal linguistic category.

Proper names constitute a system, which varies across cultures and provides a reflection of the society of which they are the expression. They are linguistic items fulfilling a referential function. According to Lyons, "Proper names are to be regarded as the most 'substantial' – the most truly 'nominal' – of the expressions in a language" (L y o n s 1969, 337).

The present paper is concerned with proper names in English phraseology. The proper names in phraseological units are of great importance in communication, where they are signs of cultural, linguistic, geographical, ethnic and social identity. They can offer an insight into the interplay between culture and language in phraseology. As observed by Taylor (2002), proper nouns tend to be culturally loaded and they may carry connotations of international, national or local character. They are observed in numerous phraseological units of biblical, mythological, popular culture, etc. origins.

The aim of the present paper is to explore the linguistic-cultural aspects of phraseological units containing personal and place names. The material was selected from *Oxford Dictionary of Phrase, Saying and Quotation* (2006) edited by Susan Ratcliffe. This unique reference book explores the links between quotations, sayings and phrases which have become part of the common wisdom. The *Oxford Dictionary of Phrase, Saying, and Quotation* illuminates an overall view of the figura-

tive language, by bringing together over 10,000 quotations, proverbs, and phrases. The corpus I am referring to consists of 270 examples (125 examples with personal names in phraseological units and 145 examples with place names in phraseological units). In the analysis below, glosses will be added to each phraseological unit, explaining archaic or unusual usages of words, and indicating the circumstances in which the phraseological unit may be used.

Theoretical prerequisites

Phraseology as a complex area of the linguistic system is a developing field of research and has attracted interest from many sides. The linguistic attention has been paid to the semantic, syntactic and textual properties of phraseological units, to different approaches of their synchronic and diachronic description, and to cultural specificity.

The term ‘phraseology’ originated in Russian studies which developed from the late 1940’s to the 1960’s (C o w i e 1998, 4). In linguistics, the term ‘phraseology’ describes the context in which a word is used. This often includes idioms, phrasal verbs, and proverbs. “Phraseology is a fuzzy part of language. Although most of us would agree that it embraces the conventional rather than the productive or rule-governed side of language, involving various kinds of composite units and ‘pre-patterned’ expression such as idioms, fixed phrases, and collocations, we find it difficult to delimit the area and classify the different types involved” (A l t e n b e r g 1998, 101). Linguists have provided various definitions of phraseological units and various criteria to classify them. My working definition is that proposed by Gläser: “A ‘phraseological unit’ is a lexicalized, reproducible, bilexemic or polylexemic word group in common use, which has relative syntactic and semantic stability, may be idiomatized, may carry connotations, and may have an emphatic or intensifying function in a text” (G l ä s e r 1998, 126). To put in other terms, phraseological units can be characterized by certain specific features, which distinguish them from free word combinations. When defining a phraseological unit, we can most often mention the following qualities: figurativeness, expressiveness, multi-word character, collocating nature, transformational defectiveness and idiomatic character.

Phraseological units reflect the nature of the human conception of the world, work, human relationships, i.e. they always proceed from the subjective human experience. According to Moon, they can have various functions in discourse: informational, evaluative, situational, modalising and organizational (M o o n 1998, 217–240). Teliya et al. (2002) exemplify that phraseological units can be a rich issue of cultural information, encoding worldviews shaped over generations. They propose a number of procedures for identifying and describing cultural components of meaning. The scholars distinguish cultural semes (i.e. components of lexical meanings that reflect encyclopedic backing knowledge), cultural concepts (i.e. more abstract culture-specific meanings like the English ‘conscience’ and ‘honour’), cultural connotations (i.e. cultural information linked to the interpretation

of a phrase, as in many metaphors), cultural background (i.e. ideological associations), and discourse stereotypes (i.e. associations with well-known texts and standard ways of talking).

It is not possible within the scope of a single article to give an account of the whole field, and the focus of this paper is restricted to the cultural aspects of phraseological units with personal and place names.

Personal Names in English Phraseological Units

An overview of the personal names involved in the phraseological expressions indicates the following types of sources:

The Bible

(1) **Doubting Thomas** (a persona who refuses to believe something without incontrovertible proof; a sceptic from the story of the apostle *Thomas*, who said that he would not believe that Christ had risen again until he had seen and touched his wounds; from the Bible (John)) (ODPSQ, 40)¹.

(2) **Judas kiss** (an act of betrayal; Judas Iscariot, the disciple who betrayed Jesus, after the Bible (Matthew) ‘And he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he: hold him fast’) (ODPSQ, 465).

(3) **The mark of Cain** (the stigma of a murder, a sign of infamy; the sign placed on Cain after the murder of Abel, originally as a sign of divine protection in exile) (ODPSQ, 301).

(4) **Abraham’s bosom** (heaven, the place of rest for the souls of the blessed; Abraham the Hebrew patriarch from whom all Jews trace their descent; from the Bible (Luke) ‘And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom’) (ODPSQ, 208).

Mythological figures

(5) **Cupid’s dart** (the conquering power of love; Cupid the Roman god of love, son of Mercury and Venus, represented as a beautiful naked winged boy with a bow and arrows) (ODPSQ, 272).

(6) **Invita Minerva** (lacking inspiration; Latin – Minerva (the goddess of wisdom) unwilling) (ODPSQ, 228).

(7) **Pandora’s box** (a thing which once activated will give rise to many unmanageable problems; in Greek mythology, the gift of Jupiter to Pandora, ‘all-gifted’, the first mortal woman, on whom, when made by Vulcan, all the gods and goddesses bestowed gifts; the box enclosed all human ills, which flew out when it was foolishly opened) (ODPSQ, 365).

(8) **Bow down in the house of Rimmon** (pay lip-service to a principle; sacrifice one’s principles for the sake of conformity; Rimmon – a deity worshiped in ancient Damascus) (ODPSQ, 405).

(9) **Achilles’ heel** (a person’s only vulnerable spot, a weak point; from the legend of the only point at which Achilles could be wounded after he was dipped into

¹ The examples taken from *Oxford Dictionary of Phrase, Saying and Quotation* are marked by the letters ODPSQ.

the River Styx, his mother having held him so that his heel was protected from the river water by her grasp) (ODPSQ, 432).

Figures of Greek and Roman Antiquity

(10) **Brave men lived before Agamemnon** (to be remembered the exploits of a hero must be recorded; English proverb, early 19th century, from Horace) (ODPSQ, 380).

(11) **Appeal to Caesar** (appeal to the highest possible authority; particularly with allusion to the Bible (Acts), in which Paul the Apostle exercised his right as a Roman citizen to have his case heard in Rome, with the words ‘I appeal unto Caesar’) (ODPSQ, 197).

Popular Culture

(12) **Darby and Joan** (after a couple mentioned in an 18th-century ballad) (ODPSQ, 176).

(13) **Pleased as Punch** (after Mr. Punch, from the traditional children’s puppet show ‘Punch and Judy’) (ODPSQ, 336).

(14) **Colonel Blimp** (after a character in newspaper cartoons created by David Lowe in the late 1930s) (ODPSQ, 136).

(15) **Morton’s fork** (a situation in which there are two choices or alternatives whose consequences are equally unpleasant, from *John Morton* (c. 1420–1500) Archbishop of Canterbury and minister of Henry VII; *Morton’s fork* – the argument (used by Morton to extract loans) that the obviously rich must have money and the frugal must have savings) (ODPSQ, 77).

Real People

(16) **The Jersey Lily** (the actress Lillie Langtry, (1853–1929); born in Jersey, she was noted for her beauty and became known as ‘the Jersey Lily’ from the title of a portrait of her painted by Millais) (ODPSQ, 5).

(17) **The Corsican ogre** (Napoleon I (1769–1821), Emperor of France, in reference to his Corsican birthplace) (ODPSQ, 182).

(18) **Pascal’s wager** (the argument that it is in one’s own best interest to behave as if God exists, since the possibility of eternal punishment in hell outweighs any advantage in believing otherwise; Blaise Pascal 1623–62) (ODPSQ, 192).

(19) **Homeric laughter** (irrepressible laughter, proverbially like that of Homer’s gods in the *Iliad* as they watched Lame Hephaestus hobbling) (ODPSQ, 221).

Literary Texts

(20) **Hamlet without the Prince** (a performance or event taking place without the principal actor or central figure, from an account given in the *Morning Post*, September 1775, of a theatrical company in which the actor who was to play the hero ran off with the innkeeper’s daughter, when the play was announced, the au-

dience was told 'the part of Hamlet to be left out, for that night') (ODPSQ, 2).

(21) **Beauty and the Beast** (characters in a fairy story by the French writer for children *Madame de Beaumont* (1711-80), translated into English in 1757) (ODPSQ, 35).

(22) **Elementary, my dear Watson** (remark attributed to Sherlock Holmes, but not found in this form in any book by Arthur Conan Doyle (ODPSQ, 237).

(23) **Frankenstein's monster** (something which has developed beyond the management or control of its originator; *Frankenstein* the title of a novel (1818) by Mary Shelley whose eponymous main character constructed and gave life to a human monster) (ODPSQ, 365).

The collected phraseological units exemplify the usage of both: very common names (e.g. *Jack of all trades*, a person who can do many different kinds of work (ODPSQ, 1)) and the members of British culture (e.g. *The Nelson touch*, a mastery or sympathetic approach to a problem by the person in charge, supposedly characteristic of Nelson's style of leadership (ODPSQ, 256)). In this case, denotational and connotational meanings are established extracting salient pieces of information from the world knowledge associated with each phraseological unit.

The examination of place names revealed interesting aspects as well.

Place Names in English Phraseological Units

An overview of the place names involved in the phraseological expressions indicates the following types of sources:

Places in the UK

(24) **London particular** (a dense fog affecting London) (ODPSQ, 487).

(25) **Shipshape and Bristol fashion** (with all in good order; Bristol a city and port in the west of England; originally a nautical expression) (ODPSQ, 317).

(26) **A Canterbury tale** (a long tedious story; one of those told on the pilgrimage to the shrine of St Thomas at Canterbury in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*) (ODPSQ, 174).

(27) **Have kissed the Blarney stone** (be eloquent and persuasive: a stone, at Blarney castle near Cork in Ireland, said to give the gift of persuasive speech to anyone who kisses it; the verb to blarney 'talk flatteringly' derives from this) (ODPSQ, 426).

(28) **Fight like Kilkenny cats** (two cats from Kilkenny in Ireland, which, according to legend, fought until their tails remained) (ODPSQ, 60).

Eastern Countries Related to the British Colonial Past

(29) **Delhi is far away** (warning that unexpected events may intervene; an Indian proverb, deriving from the response of the 14th-century Sufi mystic Nizamuddin Aulia to a threat from the Sultan of Delhi: the Sultan died before arriving home) (ODPSQ, 62).

(30) **Lombard Street to a China orange** (great wealth against one ordinary object, virtual certainty) (ODPSQ, 65).

Places Related to Classical Heritage

(31) **New Jerusalem** (the abode of the blessed in heaven; from the Bible (Revelation) ‘And I, John, saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven’) (ODPSQ, 208).

(32) **The Tower of Babel** (a tower built in an attempt to reach heaven, which god frustrated by confusing the languages of its builders so that they could not understand one another; from the biblical story (Genesis), which was probably inspired by the Babylonian ziggurat, and may be an attempt to explain the existence of different languages) (ODPSQ, 252).

(33) **Rome was not built in a day** (used to warn against trying to achieve too much at once) (ODPSQ, 327).

(34) **A Carthaginian peace** (a peace settlement which imposes very severe terms on the defeated side; referring to the ultimate destruction of Carthage by Rome in the Punic wars) (ODPSQ, 330).

Places on the Continent

(35) **La Belle France** (the country of France, especially viewed in a nostalgic or patriotic manner) (ODPSQ, 182)

(36) **A castle in Spain** (a visionary project, a daydream unlikely to be realized; the expression is recorded from late Middle English, and it is possible that Spain, as the nearest Moorish country to Christendom, was taken as the type of a region in which the prospective castle-builder had no standing) (ODPSQ, 231).

(37) **See Naples and die** (implying that after seeing Naples, one could have nothing left on earth to wish for; Goethe noted it as an Italian proverb in his diary in 1787) (ODPSQ, 457).

Concluding remarks

Many units express evaluation (often disapproval or criticism what concerns phraseological units with women’s names). Considering the names in phraseological expressions, we can note a predominance of place names over personal names in the corpus under investigation. Furthermore, male names predominated over female names, and first names over family names. To sum up, the personal and place names involved in phraseology are historically, socially or culturally prominent in British culture.

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Asmenvardžiai ir vietovardžiai anglų kalbos frazeologizmuose

S a n t r a u k a

Pagrindiniai žodžiai: *frazeologinis vienetas, tikrinis daiktavardis, asmenvardis, vietovardis, kultūrinis-lingvistinis.*

Esybės įvardijimas – vienas iš pagrindinių kalbos aktų. Tikriniai vardai yra onomastikos objektas. Mokslininkai sutaria, kad tai universali lingvistinė kategorija. Tikriniai vardai sudaro sistemą, kuri yra skirtinga įvairiose kultūrose ir susijusi su apibūdinamos visuo-

menės specifika. Taigi jie atlieka referentinę funkciją. Straipsnio objektas yra anglų kalbos frazeologizmuose minimi tikriniai vardai – kultūrinio, lingvistinio, geografinio ir etninio identiteto ženklai.

Straipsnio tikslas yra ištirti lingvistinius ir kultūrinius frazeologinių vienetų su asmenvardžiais ir vietovardžiais aspektus. Medžiaga rinkta iš žodyno *Oxford Dictionary of Phrase, Saying and Quotation*. Sukaupta 270 pavyzdžių: 125 asmenvardžiai ir 145 vietovardžiai.

Laikomasi nuomonės, kad frazeologinis vienetas yra atkuriamas leksikalizuota bilekseminė arba polilekseminė žodžių grupė, kuriai būdingas reliatyvus sintaksinis ir semantinis stabilumas, galimybė turėti konotacijų ir tekste atlikti emfatinę funkciją, idiomų vartojimas. Frazeologinio vieneto sąvoka plati, į ją įeina idiomos, patarlės ir kt.

Atlikus tyrimą paaiškėjo, kad frazeologiniai vienetai su asmenvardžiais siejami su šiais šaltiniais: Biblija, mitologija, graikų ir romėnų antika, populiariąja kultūra, realiai egzistavusiais asmenimis, literatūriniais tekstais. Frazeologiniai vienetai su vietovardžiais susiję su vietovėmis Anglijoje, Rytų šalimis, kurioms svarbus Didžiosios Britanijos vykdytos kolonizacijos periodas, klasikiniu paveldu išsiskiriančių kraštų ir įvairių vietovių Europoje pavadinimais.

Apibendrinant galima teigti, kad anglų kalbos frazeologiniuose junginiuose asmenvardžiai ir vietovardžiai yra vartojami atsižvelgiant į istorinį, socialinį ir kultūrinį aspektus. Frazeologinis vienetas atspindi žmogaus pasaulio suvokimą.

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S u m m a r y

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Naming an entity is one of the basic speech acts. The act of naming serves to illuminate the entities that play a role in people's daily life. Proper names is the object of onomastics. It is generally agreed among linguists that proper names are a universal linguistic category. Proper names constitute a system which varies across cultures and provide a reflection of the society of which they are the expression. They are linguistic items fulfilling a referential function. The proper names in phraseological units are of great importance in communication, where they are signs of cultural, linguistic, geographical, ethnic and social identity. The present paper is concerned with proper names in English phraseology. The aim of the present paper is to explore the linguistic-cultural aspects of phraseological units containing personal and place names. The material was selected from *Oxford Dictionary of Phrase, Saying and Quotation*. 270 examples have been drawn for the present analysis (125 examples with personal names in phraseological units and 145 examples with place names in phraseological units). The research proved that the personal names involved in the phraseological expressions indicate the following types of sources: the Bible, mythological figures, figures of Greek and Roman Antiquity, popular culture, real people, and literary texts. The place

names involved in the phraseological expressions indicate the following types of sources: places in UK, eastern countries related to the British colonial past, places related to classical heritage, places on the Continent. To sum up, the personal and place names involved in phraseology are historically, socially or culturally prominent in British culture.

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