

## About Some Semantic Aspect of Onymization

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Semantics has much to do with psycholinguistic processes. This is why, when, e. g. the English onomast Richard Coates wrote about „A speculative psycholinguistic model of onymization” [Coates 2005], he wrote a lot about semantics, meaning and sense. One of the prolegomenas of Richard was: „Most linguists agree that proper names have no sense(s) at all” [ibid., 3]. The author of the paper you are reading belongs to the minority, because he cannot agree with that statement. I will now not repeat the details discussed at other occasions [s., f. i., Bušs 2005a, with references]. I must only remind very shortly, that the ideas of this paper are based on the presumption, that the onyms have both the sense and the conceptual meaning, and the main difference between onyms and common nouns lies in the monoreference of onyms (in the words of Swedish onomast Bengt Pamp [Pamp 1994]). It is right that because of the difference the antics of onyms forms other way as the semantics of common nouns; just that difference in the ways of forming semantics may be the reason, why „proper nouns may have a distinct neuropsycholinguistic representation” [Coates 2005, 3]. My belonging to onomastic minority causes the possibility and the necessity to describe semantic (and in the same way psycholinguistic) aspects of onymisation in accordance with the conception of that minority about semantics of proper names.

As we all know very well, the onymisation is the change of a common noun into a proper name (by onymization every part of speech may become a noun). There are two kinds of onymisation. The most ordinary, most frequently used, one can say trivial kind – that is the naming of some individual item, by evolution or by bestowal, transforming to a name some common noun, which is chosen more or less voluntarily, f. i., *Pumpuri* – a Latvian ononym, name of a part of the resort-town Jūrmala, – the meaning of the corresponding common noun *pumpuri* is ‘buds’. Or an other example – many surnames in different languages are formed by that kind of onymization, f. i., German surname *Busch* or the most common Latvian surname *Bērziņš* (corresponding common noun meant ‘a little birch-tree’), or the Finnish surname *Aalto* (meaning of corresponding common noun – ‘a wave’) a. s. o. Often the voluntariness of the choice is still quite limited, because the chosen common noun has nevertheless **some** connection to the item to be named. Such connection of the appellative used by onymization with the denotate of the new proper name may be most frequent by forming of nicknames, f. i., Latvian *Knābis* (‘a beak’) – a frequent nickname for a man with big, crooked nose. Quite often that type of onymization is used by name-giving to domestic animals or pets, f. i., Latvian *kleksis* ‘a spot, caused by ink’ had transformed to the name for a black cat with white spot at nostrils.

The second kind of onymization – not very rare, but still less common in comparison with the first one: a change of generic term into proper name, which is a name of an item belonging to the class, named by the term (usually by the plural of the term), transformed to that proper name (very complicated definition, the reality is not so complicated), e. g., Latvian *Urga* – the name for a small stream, and the meaning of the corresponding common noun is ‘a small stream’; I have borrowed that example from the paper of Laimute Balode „Geographical Appellatives in Baltic Hydronomy: comparative aspect” [Balode

2005] In that paper from L. Balode we can find a lot of examples from Baltic hydronymy for the above mentioned kind of onymization; it seems really, that such onymization is most common in hydronymy, nevertheless we have quite many examples of other kind too – from the worldwide known deserts *Gobi* and *Sahara* to the many homonyms in Croatian colloquial speech *Grad* (< cr. *grad* ‘city’; we have *Grad* as a even to some extent standardised proper name, f. i., in Split, in many other localities such one informal toponym can be used in colloquialisms) or 7 lake-names *Prūdas* (< lith. *prūdas* ‘pond’) in Lithuania [the last mentioned example s. Balode 2005, 347]. Of course toponyms are not the only proper names formed by that kind of onymization. To mention another example: some linguists speak about the designations for members of a family used in one specific family, f. i., *dad*, *brother*, *granny*, usually transformed to proper names. I am quite of that opinion, and as one of arguments can be mentioned the fact, that usually the same designation for each one member of family is used by all other members of that family irrespectively of the real status of kinship; as classical example can be mentioned the situation, when a Latvian wife call her husband *paps* or *tētis* (or, to mention one recent real usage: before some time I had a conversation – one to one – with my son-in-law, and he say “*mamma* has said”, although the person he speak about, is his wife and my daughter). The semantic and psycholinguistic process in that occasion have an additional nuance, which separate that case from cases as cr. *grad* > *Grad*, *rijeka* > *Rijeka* or lith. *upė* > *Upė*, namely, often there is a deliberate will to use that designation, which is the most natural for a child of that family; we have that motivation may be mostly, still not always. Very similar process (similar to the above mentioned) is the forming of nicknames from designations, which are direct and adequate characterizations of the named person, f. i., latv. *Sīkais* ‘the little one’, *Garais* ‘the tall one’.

The two kinds of onymization are quite different from the semantic point of view, so very different, that one can say each kind needs its own term to be named exactly; maybe the second kind of onymization – the onymization of generic term – can be named: *the direct onymization*. And, if that is direct, the other would naturally be (e. g., cr. *Rijeka* as city) – *the indirect onymization*.

The direct onymization seems to be the most interesting from the point of view of semantics. Just in the connection with the onymization Ricard Coates writes: „...it is not easy to explain how common becomes proper” [Coates 2005, 4]. And, a bit further: „Since it is agreed that lexical items have senses and that proper names do not, what actually happens in becoming proper is that sense is lost” [ibid., 4–5]. Nevertheless I must say once more, it is not agreed that proper names do not have sense, although may be really **most** of the onomasts argued in such a way. And the sharp confrontation of lexical items and proper names is not axiomatic because there are lexicologists and onomasts, who say a proper name is a lexical item too (and I would say the same).

But, what actually happens in becoming proper by the way of direct onymization, is, that the sense and the meaning of the ex-common noun is not lost, this meaning has got, has received some new senses, some new parts of meaning -- in addition to the „old” meaning of corresponding common noun. So, f. i., there is the Lithuanian common noun *upė*, the meaning of that noun is ‘a copious natural stream of water flowing in a channel to the sea or a lake etc.’ (OERD 1996, 1243 s. v. *river*), ‘pastāvīga ūdenstece, kas plūst pašas izveidotā garenā gultnē, uzņemot sava baseina noteces ūdeņus’ (LLVV 8, 85 s. v. *upe*), ‘gamtinė tėkmė, tekanti išgraužta vaga’ (DŽ, 872) or ‘postojannij vodojom s jestjestvennim

techenjijem vodi po razrobotannomu jeju ruslu ot istoka vñiz do ustja' (SSRLJ 12, 1178). In some regions of Lithuania that common noun through onymization has become a hydronym and *Upė* is a name for some (at least 10) smaller rivers[s. Vanagas 1981, 354]; very frequently such process of onymization comes about in the colloquial speech of the inhabitants of the bank of the river, still sometimes the outcome of such process of onymization transforms to a standardised form of toponym too. So, if we have *Upė* with capital letter, as a proper name of a river – where has the semantics of common noun disappeared? It has not at all disappeared, we, the speakers of that one language, know excellently, that this *Upė* as proper name (as hydronym) names a item belonging to the class of items, which can be characterised by word *upė* as common noun, and all the essential distinctive marks, which are reflected in the meaning of this common noun, are included in the meaning of proper name *Upė* too (if we have the direct onymization). We can imagine the meaning of a proper name as a circle; the sema for generic affiliation, which in the case of direct onymization is directly inherited from the corresponding common noun, will take up a half of this circle (that half will not be mathematically very exact, nevertheless it corresponds to the essential nature of semantic processes by direct onymization). The other half of the circle of the meaning will take up onomastic or individualizing semas, e. g., 'the nearest to our village', 'the narrow one', 'the winding one', or 'flowing trough city X', 'the biggest (longest, widest) in the region Y'. Such semas or nuances of meaning do not come into use all at once, and between the nuances are certain hierarchic relations, e. g., the **main** onomastic meaning of the hydronym *Upė* may be mentioned 'the nearest to our village'. It is important that two parts of structure of the meaning of proper name, two halves of the circle of the meaning – the generic part and the individualizing part – have developed in some respects contrary one to other; this contrast of the ways of the developing of semantics may be one of the factors causing different reaction to the common nouns and to the proper names in some neurolinguistic experiments. Namely, the generic meaning, which is in fact inherited appellative meaning, has developed, as any appellative meaning, from the notion about the marks, which are common for all items, which can be named by that appellative. The onomastic part of the meaning of the proper name, exactly on the contrary, has developed from notions about distinctive marks, which separate the denotate of the proper name from all other items, belonging to the same class of items, also, the onomastic meaning has developed from the notion about the individual distinctive marks of that item. Sometimes such notion can be very scanty, it can be formed from only one distinctive mark (e. g., 'located in America' – scanty number of onomastic semas is typical for names of geographical features, located far away from the speaker of that one language). In such a way, many toponyms have absolutely identical semantic structure, identical lexical meaning and such toponyms can be called onomastic synonyms, although they have different denotates [Bušs 2005b].

Another example of direct onymization – what it is like when a common noun transforms into anthroponym. The nickname *Sīkaiš* has been already mentioned. The appellative part of the meaning of that nickname is 'something that is very little' (of course, that nickname can be corresponding to a quite tall person too, but in a such case we do not have the direct onymization), the onomastic part of the meaning of the nickname will be formed from the notion about individual distinctive marks, which help us to separate that one *Sīkaiš* from all other very little things and especially from all other small persons (the onomastic part of meaning of that nickname can be, e. g., 'my neighbour from the second

floor’). The onomastic picture can be complicated by the polysemy of the common noun; the meaning of that noun can be – especially in the colloquial speech – ‘a child’ too, and in such a case the appellative part of meaning of the nickname will be, of course, ‘a child’ too, and the onomastic meaning may be, e. g., ‘belonging to my family, 7 years old, hyperactive’.

As to the Croatian city name *Rijeka* or to the German surname *Busch* – there we have indirect onymization, often this process does not happen spontaneously, often there has been some name-giving person or institution. But in this case too, in indirect onymization, we must not say, that the sense of a common noun is lost. Of course, the conceptual meaning of the name of city *Rijeka* has nothing common with the meaning of Croatian common noun *rijeka*; the meaning of that proper name *Rijeka* consists of the appellative (generic) part ‘a city’ and of the onomastic part ‘in Croatia, at Adriatic sea’ (to tell the truth, that is the meaning of corresponding proper name in Latvian (and, in Lithuanian, too), the structure of the meaning of Croatian *Rijeka* is certainly far more complicated). Nevertheless the meaning of appellative, transformed to onym, is not **lost**, it is transformed to the other quality, from the conceptual meaning it has transformed to the associative meaning and etymologicalizing meaning. Those meanings are not always realized by the usage of word – in the same way as from the meanings of polysemic proper name not all meanings are realised in the same time; nevertheless those meanings – associative meaning and etymologicalizing meaning – are parts of the semantic structure of proper name, formed by indirect onymization: when we speak about the Croatian city *Rijeka*, we often remember something about some river, when we speak in German about the poet Wilhelm *Busch*, we sometimes have some associations about wood or shrub aso., aso.

Consequently – by the process of direct onymization the main meaning of used common noun transforms to the part of lexical or conceptual meaning of new-formed proper name; by the process of indirect onymization the meaning of the common noun is not included in the conceptual meaning of proper name, nevertheless the meaning of the appellative is not lost, it transforms into the associative and etymologicalizing meaning of the new-formed onym.

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## **Apie kai kuriuos semantinius onimizacijos aspektus**

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*Pagrindiniai žodžiai*: bendriniai žodžiai, tikriniai vardai, onimizacija, semantika, reikšmė.

### **Santrauka**

*Onimizacija, arba bendrinių žodžių pavirtimas tikriniais vardais, esti dviejų pagrindinių atmainų: tiesioginė onimizacija (pvz., upė > upėvardis Upė) ir netiesioginė onimizacija (pvz., kroatų rijeka ‘upė’ > miesto vardas Rijeka). Tiesioginės onimizacijos atveju bendrinio žodžio pagrindinė leksinė reikšmė virsta naujojo tikrinio žodžio leksinės reikšmės dalimi; esant netiesioginei onimizacijai, minėtoji reikšmė neįeina į tikrinio žodžio leksinės arba prasminės reikšmės sudėtį, tačiau vis tiek neteisinga būtų sakyti, kad ši reikšmė dingsta, kadangi iš tiesų ji tik transformuojasi, virsdama naujojo tikrinio žodžio asociatyvine reikšme.*

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