



NOMINATIVE AND SEMANTIC PROPERTIES OF ONOMASTIC UNITS

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Abstract

This article analyzes the nominative function and semantic structure of onomastic units as an interconnected system. The research used a combination of lexical-semantic, onomasiological and contextual analysis methods. The results showed the stability of referentiality, motivation and semantic layers in proper nouns. The work makes a scientific contribution to the modeling of onomastic meaning.

Keywords: Onomastics, nomination, proper noun, semantics, motivation, referentiality, context.

Introduction

Onomastic units are a layer of language that not only satisfies the need for naming, but is also inextricably linked with social experience, cultural memory and discursive practice. Although the nominative nature of proper nouns is often imagined as a simple act of “naming”, modern onomastic research shows their internal content, motivational mechanisms and context-dependent semantic activity as separate problems. In this sense, onomastic units operate simultaneously between two poles: one is a nominative function aimed at distinguishing and identifying the referent, and the other is a semantic resource stored in the structural, historical and associative layers of the name. A consistent clarification of the relationship between these two poles, especially on the basis of onomastic material in Turkic languages, including Uzbek, is still not theoretically interpreted in a uniform way.

Main Part

The problem of the study is that the semantics of proper nouns is often described in two extreme approaches: on the one hand, they are evaluated as “semantically



empty” signs, only as a means of reference; on the other hand, it is customary to assign meaning to each name, confusing the historical-etymological foundations of the name with its speech-functional meaning. Such opposing approaches create a need for a model that shows that nominative and semantic features are a single system. In particular, it is relevant to determine the degree of motivation, the stability of semantic layers, and the boundaries of meaning components that are reactivated in the context of Uzbek anthroponyms, toponyms, and other onomastic types.

The purpose of the article is to characterize the nominative function and semantic structure of onomastic units as interrelated phenomena, and to propose practical criteria for their analysis. This goal was achieved through the following tasks: first, to clarify the nominative properties of proper nouns based on the criteria of referentiality and identification; second, to distinguish the layered structure of onomastic semantics from the point of view of motivation, etymological basis, and speech-associative activity; third, to show the influence of context on the activation of onomastic meaning and to provide a balanced explanation between semantic “emptiness” and “redundant meaning”. The scientific novelty of the study is that the semantic description of proper nouns is not limited to only etymological explanations, but rather consistently models the layers of meaning that are formed in the conditions of the nominative act, social practice, and discourse; as a result, descriptive criteria are developed that allow harmonizing the Uzbek onomastic material with the general theory of onomastics[1; 2].

The research methodology was based on a comprehensive approach, since onomastic units are simultaneously an element of the linguistic system, a cultural sign, and a communicative tool. The theoretical basis was chosen from the concepts put forward in the theory of nomenclature and onomastic semantics; they allow us to distinguish the referential function, sources of motivation, and semantic status of a proper noun [3]. At the first stage of the analysis, the lexical-semantic method was used, which considered the features of proper nouns as a general category, that is, their relationship with the appellative lexicon, and the issues of preservation or extinction of semantic components. This method served to determine the place of the onomastic unit in the language system, especially semantic changes during the transition from a common name to a proper name in the naming process.



In the second stage, onomasiological analysis was the main tool, and the types of motivation were distinguished by the question “what content is expressed by what name”. The onomasiological approach is convenient for showing the internal logic of the act of nomination, the reasons for choosing a name, and the semantic trace of these reasons [4]. In the third stage, contextual analysis was used, and it was observed how the onomastic unit activates meaning in a real text or speech situation, and what additional semantic colors it creates through pragmatic emphasis and stylistic function. The contextual approach made it possible to examine whether a proper noun can be a means of characterization, evaluation, or typification in discourse, not limited to “just reference” [5].

As empirical material, the forms of anthroponyms, toponyms and names of cultural objects in the Uzbek language, consolidated in open sources, as well as onomastic uses found in literary and journalistic texts, were analyzed. When selecting the material, priority was given to collecting random examples, and units whose motivation was relatively clear, as well as semantic activation in the context, were given priority. A comparative method was also used to generalize the results: the criteria emphasized in the theory of Russian and general European onomastics were compared with Turkic onomastic traditions; this ensured that the definitions did not remain only in the local framework [6; 7]. Such a combination of methods was in accordance with the purpose of the study and made it possible to substantiate referential criteria in explaining the nominative function, and a layered model in describing the semantic structure.

The results of the study showed that the nominative and semantic properties of onomastic units are two functional-content directions that do not negate each other, but rather complement each other. As a first result, it was clarified that the nominative essence of a proper noun is interpreted as an “identifying sign”: the main function of a name is to distinguish a referent, to stably identify it in a certain communicative space. In this case, the nominative function, as a rule, relies on referential connection rather than on appellative meaning, but this does not mean that semantic components are completely lost. On the contrary, nominative stability is often strengthened by a certain degree of preservation of the semantic basis in social memory, since even if the motivation for naming is forgotten, the cultural recognition of the name continues. The second result is related to the layered structure of onomastic semantics, and three main layers were



distinguished. The first layer is the etymological-semantic basis, that is, the lexical unit from which the name historically originated and its initial motivation. This layer is particularly evident in toponyms and the ancient layer of anthroponyms: the basis for naming was a sign of a natural object, a profession, a clan name, or an attribute. The second layer is the socio-onomastic meaning, which is formed by the degree of recognition of the name in society as a means of indicating “who” or “where”, prestige, historical associations, images in collective memory. The third layer is the layer of discursive-pragmatic activation: the same name can take on an additional semantic load in different texts for purposes such as irony, generalization, heroization, or stereotyping. The separation of these three layers limits the view that “a proper noun is semantically empty”, since emptiness refers only to the absence of an obligatory appellative-descriptive meaning, but does not deny the existence of a layered semantic resource.

The third result showed that the degree of motivation has a different effect on nominative stability. Names with strong motivation, for example, toponyms with a clear appellative basis or nicknames with a transparent meaning, are more prone to semantic reactivation in speech: they easily evoke figurative imagery, stylistic play, or evaluative components. Names with a blurred motivation or that have gone into the historical layer, on the contrary, function more as “pure identifiers”, but even in this case, semantic traces are preserved through the socio-onomastic layer, for example, connotations associated with the name of a certain historical person or place. Thus, the predominance of the nominative function does not mean the absence of motivation, but rather a decrease in the degree of direct activation of motivation in speech mechanisms. The fourth result clarified the mechanism of the context “turning on” onomastic semantics. In a literary text, a proper noun often serves not only as a one-time reference, but also as a short-code character designation, a clear historical-cultural representation of the environment, or an intertextual reference. In the journalistic style, names often serve to express an institution, school, direction, or event through metonymic transfer; in this process, the denotative referent of the onomastic unit expands, and the name becomes a carrier of a “broader social content.” As a result, it was substantiated that in analyzing an onomastic unit, it is not enough to rely only on lexical origin, but also to take into account the discourse, genre, and communicative purpose in which it is used. The results obtained show that it is



possible to combine the referential approach and the semantic approach in a compromise model when describing the essence of onomastic units. The identifying function of a proper noun has been repeatedly emphasized in linguistics, which is based on the relative stability of the connection between the onomastic sign and the denotata [6]. However, an interpretation limited to reference alone is inadequate, especially in the analysis of uses in real speech, since discourse transforms onomastic unity into a stylistic and pragmatic resource. From this point of view, there is a conceptual similarity between Superanskaya's views on the social recognition of proper nouns and the connection of the name with the cultural environment and the socio-onomastic layer that we have distinguished [4]. However, in this article, this layer was presented as a separate semantic level and its distinction from both the etymological basis and discursive activation was consistently established; this distinction allows for a semantic explanation in practical descriptions, even in cases where the origin of the name is unknown. The results of onomasiological analysis show that the concept of "motivation" in the theory of nomenclature should not be interpreted one-sidedly. Kubryakova's approach, emphasizing the cognitive mechanisms of conceptual selection and naming in the nomenclature process, encourages us not to equate motivation with only the etymological reason [3]. In our results, motivation was also manifested in two directions: the first direction is a historical-etymological reason, and the second is re-"motivation" in communicative practice, that is, the name acquires a new semantic emphasis in the context. Therefore, it is appropriate to consider motivation not as a permanent sign, but as a system of relations that activates differently in different layers.

The classification of proper nouns, their historical layers and connection with national-cultural factors have been extensively analyzed in the Uzbek onomastic school [1; 2]. This study, without denying the results of this direction, focuses on re-posing the question "what is the meaning of a name" in a layered model. Because in many descriptions, the etymological explanation prevails, and the semantic activity of the name in the current speech environment remains in the background. However, in artistic and publicistic discourses, onomastic units often create new meanings through secondary nomination, metonymy and connotative transfers; This is especially evident at the intersections with pragmatics and text linguistics [5]. The discourse-pragmatic layer that we have distinguished serves



to theoretically strengthen this connection: it systematically substantiates the fact that the semantic potential of a proper noun depends not only on history, but also on the conditions of use. In the international onomastic tradition, including Van Langendonck's proposal to view the grammatical and semantic properties of proper nouns as interconnected, while interpreting the proper noun as a "center of referentiality", it also takes into account its semantic-pragmatic expansion in the speech environment [7].

Our results are consistent with this approach, but it was shown that the issue of the blurring of motivation and the connotations stored through social memory in the Uzbek language material is of particular relevance. Also, in Russian linguistics, onomastic semantics is often analyzed by separating the "basis of naming" and the "functional load of the name" [4; 6]. This article confirmed that this separation is also effective in the description of Uzbek onomastic units, but in addition, it strengthened the explanatory power of the model by separating the socio-onomastic layer as an independent level. The results open another important issue theoretically: the view that "a proper noun is semantically empty" should not be accepted as an absolute judgment, but should be understood within a limited framework, that is, within the framework of the fact that a proper noun is not a mandatory carrier of an appellative-descriptive meaning. Although a proper noun is often sufficient to indicate "who" and "where" in a communicative task, it carries additional meanings in cultural and discursive contexts. Thus, the balance between semantic "emptiness" and semantic "overfilling" is brought under methodological control through the layered model we have proposed: the etymological layer provides a historical explanation, the socio-onomastic layer organizes collective associations, and the discursive layer determines the pragmatic task within the text. This, in turn, also provides clear criteria for practical areas such as lexicography of onomastic units, text analysis, and work with cultural heritage.

Conclusion

The study substantiated the fact that the nominative and semantic properties of onomastic units are an interconnected system: the identifying nominative function of a proper noun does not mean the absence of a semantic resource, but requires a layered organization of semantics. It was clarified that onomastic semantics is



manifested in the layers of etymological basis, socio-onomastic recognition and discursive-pragmatic activation, and it was shown that the level of motivation determines which of these layers prevails. The results emphasize the need to combine “reference” and “meaning” in a single model when describing proper nouns, instead of contrasting them; this approach can serve as a theoretical and practical basis for a systematic analysis of Uzbek onomastic material, the creation of onomastic dictionaries, and a consistent interpretation of the functional load of names in textual studies. In the future, a promising direction is to study the dynamics of connotative activation of onomastic units in different genres quantitatively and qualitatively through the possibilities of corpus linguistics, as well as to study modern nominative strategies in connection with social pragmatics on the example of urbanonyms and ergonyms.

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