

**THE DEFINITION OF PROPER NAME AND ITS PERSPECTIVES****Svetlana CORCODEL***Catedra Traducere, Interpretare și Lingvistică Aplicată*

Numele proprii au constituit subiectul unor discuții filozofice din cele mai vechi timpuri. S-au făcut mai multe încercări de a stabili o clasificare a acestora. Cea mai importantă categorizare este cea care se bazează pe natura ontologică a referentului desemnat de numele propriu. Ea este utilizată în lexicografie și în onomastică.

De regulă, numele proprii nu se integrează în nomenclatura dicționarilor limbii, care au drept scop eliminarea numelor proprii, deoarece acestea din urmă se referă la ceva unic, la un obiect specific, deși există și dicționare de nume proprii.

Totuși, ar fi o greșală afirmația despre absența studiilor cu referință la numele proprii. Fără îndoială, există o serie de probleme cu care se confruntă lingviștii, începând cu delimitarea unei categorii gramaticale a numelor proprii, definirea numelor proprii, raporturile dintre dicționare și limbă și terminând cu problema relațiilor dintre sens și referință în cadrul numelor proprii.

Ne-am propus să studiem numele proprii din perspectiva definirii acestora în diferite surse lexicografice considerând că este deosebit de importantă, discuțiile rămânând însă deschise.

According to an article from the “International Journal of Lexicography” [1] lexicographic definitions, irrespective of whether they are traditional phrases or more ambitious sentence definitions, can be classified according to which of two “perspectives” they adopt. The more common type, “referent-based definitions” (RBDs), defines the definiendum from the perspective of the entity to which they refer. The other type, “anthropocentric definitions” (ACDs), by contrast are written from the perspective of a person, ACDs can be divided into two groups according to the presence or absence of the second person pronoun.

**What are the perspectives of the definition?** Human beings refer to entities in the external world, or referents, using linguistic signs. Linguistic signs, or dictionary head words, are defined by people called lexicographers. These definitions are read by other people called dictionary users. Lexicographic definitions are therefore all written and read from a human perspective.

However, the actual process of defining is a little more complicated. Compare the following two definitions of the headword watch:

- 1) a small clock to be worn, esp. On the wrist, or carried [2];
- 2) a small clock that you wear on your wrist or carry in your pocket [3].

The two definitions are similar in that they can both be called “analytical definitions”, consisting of the genus proximum (clock) and the differentiae specificaе. They are strikingly different, however, not merely because the tone of (2) is rather conversational, using the second person pronoun you, but because the structures of the postmodifiers contrast sharply. In (1), the genus word corresponds to the subject in the infinitive clause. In (2), on the other hand the antecedent corresponds to the object of the verbs in the relative clause, the grammatical object of which is the second person pronoun. Consequently, the two verbs in each post-modifying clause wear and carry, are in the passive voice in (1), but in the active voice in (2). In this article definitions like (1) are termed “referent based definitions”, while those like (2) are called “anthropocentric definitions”. As clearly shown in the two ostensive definitions quoted above, lexicographic definitions are more like explanations than definitions.

The RBD is a definition in which the genus word corresponds to the subject of a postmodifier. Postmodifiers can be finite and nonfinite clauses (or both). Finite clauses are usually relative clauses as in (3) and (4), while nonfinite clauses include infinitive clauses, as in (1), ing participle clauses, as in (5), and –ed participle clauses, as in (6). It must be emphasized that the RBD does not necessarily contain a passive construction (4, 5 and 8). Postmodification by prepositional phrases is also very common; (7) corresponds directly to (8):

- (3) handgun: a gun that is held and fired with one hand;
- (4) handicap: a thing that makes progress difficult;
- (5) handbook: a small book giving useful facts;
- (6) handsaw: a saw used with one hand only;

(7) ukulele: a musical instrument like a small guitar with four strings;

(8) a musical instrument that looks like a small guitar and has four strings.

The ACD, on the other hand, is a definition in which the genus word corresponds to the object of the verbs in the postmodifier, which is usually a relative clause, while the subject of the postmodifier is a personal agent.

It should be mentioned that the ACD and the RBD definitions mainly apply to noun entries.

In verb entries, the definition perspective corresponds to the implied subject of the superordinate verb(s) used in the definition. Traditional phrasal definitions very often fail to make explicit their implied subjects. As a conclusion to the analysis of verb definitions, in the article from *The International Journal of Lexicography* it was said that: "There is an urgent need for more research on the definition perspective, which will require a detailed re-examination of dictionary definitions. User research is also essential."

This is a very true statement, for proper name definitions too because these weren't of much interest for lexicographers. The grammatical construction of their definitions leaves much free space for further analysis whether by lexicographers or simple dictionary users.

After the research done in the field of proper names and their use in lexicography it was made the conclusion that proper names were researched in the field of philosophy, linguistics, and onomastics etc.; thus lexicographical deviation was left behind. Even more, many dictionary editors did not introduce them at all or they could be found in separate divisions at the end of the dictionary (under the heading Geographical names, Personal names) we have such examples in the *American Heritage Dictionary* and the "Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary". Many sources state that proper names are not included at all in the dictionary, though these are bearers of a huge amount of information and also these are words present in our vocabularies (words of a language) here, we may ask ourselves: why would these words miss from any dictionary entry? The *Encyclopedia Americana* [4, p.729] states that: "the lexicographic word is not necessarily the same as a linguistic word or unit. A word is variously defined by linguistic on the basis of its form and function. It is described as "a minimum free form" or a "segment of a sentence bounded by successive points at which pausing is possible". As every language has its own sentence structure, the word is a language specific unit. The scope of the lexicographic word is much wider than this. A lexicographic word need not be minimum, or free."

Berg [5, p.85] calls Dictionary 'a list of socialized linguistic forms'. But all the linguistic forms do not find a place in a dictionary. In order to be included in a dictionary a linguistic form has to have an independent entity, both formal and semantic.

As it was mentioned above, some of these are introduced in special divisions, still most of the dictionary editors considered them to be necessary in a dictionary entry.

**The problem of introducing proper names in lexicographical sources:** Zagusta [6, p.117-118] states that Proper Names are regarded by lexicographers as those words (lexical units) which are customarily or at least habitually used in reference to single individual entities in order to distinguish them from other members of their own class of entities. Considered from this point of view, it is quite logical that the unique objects of reference of these words are so preponderant that if the lexicographer indicates proper names in his dictionary at all, they usually bring a strong encyclopedic element with them. If the lexicographer decides to avoid any encyclopedic elements, it is possible to treat proper names in a more general way: in those cases it suffices to indicate only their function (ed. Mens' given name; family name, place name; etc). But short explanatory (encyclopedic) glosses are usually expected by the user of the dictionary (such as the situation of a place etc.).

Few personal names show a variation: but there are exceptions, as for example Eng. Charlemagne, Ger. Karl der Grobe. But not a small number of the traditional Christian names belong here: for instance, Eng: Charles, German Carl, Italian Carlo. Most important are place names which belong here (for example French Paris, Italian Parigi).

Laurence Urdang in the article "The Uncommon Use of Proper Names" states that: "I concern myself with the basic question of whether Proper Names are ... words that are properly entries in a dictionary" [7, p.30]. In coming to consider monolingual English dictionaries, not all dictionaries include proper names in their main word list, the most notable being Merriam Webster series in which, typically the main A-Z section omits main entries for real people and places except in certain circumstances.

Laurence Urdang touches the question of what criteria characterize a dictionary entry. Linguists are not entirely sure: some of them refer scornfully to proper names entries as "encyclopedic". Many believe that it

is not the function of a dictionary to provide cultural information, but that is often unavoidable if one is to convey the sense of a word to a dictionary user. The proper adjective Shakespearian, aside from its denotative association which one considered to be one of the greatest writers in any language, carries with it no special connotative overtones; Miltonic, on the other hand in addition to its denotative association with John Milton, a major English poet, conjures up the connotative associations of “majesty” and “Classical reference”.

If dictionary entries are to be selected on the basis of frequency, then a strong case should be made for the inclusion of, say, Washington, London, Frankfurt, and thousands of other names that appear frequently in all forms of writing and speech. We come to the conclusion that frequency is not a prime factor; though it undoubtedly plays an important role in selecting which improper nouns are to be listed.

Linguists have long and consistently maintained that language is essentially a spoken means of communication; on that ground one cannot support the notion that only words that are not capitalized may be listed for even the most adroit phonetician cannot identify an initial capital letter, and the spelt form of a word cannot therefore be said to be relevant to its selection as a dictionary entry. In any event, proper adjectives and adverbs are usually spelt with initial capitals in the real world. If the editors at Merriam~Webster struggled with this problem, the result of their labours reflected in the Third International, demonstrates that they arrived at the wrong conclusion: every word is entered in small letters, with “usu cap” or “cap” added. The one exception was God, presumably in the fear of divine retribution. It would be difficult to justify sufficient frequency for “Washington” unless it appeared in a letterhead employing modern design; more often, one is tempted to venture, it is spelt with capitals throughout, as “WASHINGTON,” which is likely to appear in timetables, road signs, etc.

It is possibly correct to say that, in some contexts, syntax can be used to distinguish a proper from an improper noun. But grammar is ancillary to the lexicographer’s task, and the parts of speech given in dictionaries are a mere convenience in organizing and phrasing the definitions: they serve no specific function that can be characterised as “lexical”. Consequently, one would be sore put to justify the exclusion of proper names solely on grammatical grounds.

Having examined frequency, form and function it would seem that the only remaining character is **meaning**. That would prove a very tenuous argument indeed, for most of the dictionaries under consideration contain etymologies, and, if the etymology of a proper adjective and adverb must indicate its referent, then some form of definition of the proper noun must appear in the etymology. As that is usually the case, one should accuse lexicographers of being ashamed of the information they are offering: if not, why relegate it to etymology. As that is usually the case, one could accuse lexicographers of being ashamed of the information they are offering: if not, why relegate it to the etymology, as if trying to hide it? The OED incorporates information about Freud in its entry Freudian, and has Freudian slip as a subentry; Webster’s Third International enters Freudian, gives information about Freud in its etymology, and relegates Freudian slip to a citation:

**Freudian**.... adj. Often cap [Sigmund Freud 1939 Australian neurologist, founder of psychoanalysis + E -ian] 1: of, relating to, or according with the theories or practices of Sigmund Freud and his system of psychoanalysis...**2a:** in psychoanalytical readily interpretable terms... **2b:** SEXY, SMUTTY...-**freudianism**... n -s usu cap.

This is of no help whatsoever, for it fails to define Freudian slip.

Although Webster’s Third might be justifiably criticized for failing to provide any definition for the common phrase, Freudian slip, that is not the issue here. More to the point is the absence of Jesus, Jesus Christ, or Christ as an expletive, and the total absence of anything but a passing specific reference (in the etymology) to Jesus Christ.

Metaphor is to be considered, perhaps, as an adjunct to meaning. On this point, dictionaries differ. Those that allow proper names as main entries tend to define them with their characteristics so that users who encounter a metaphoric reference to someone as “an Einstein” are able to define what that means; those that deny proper names as headwords define a selection of metaphoric references to real or fictional people somewhat indifferently. Thus, the Third International has entries for Einstein (“genius”), and Crusoe (“solitary castaway”), with their origins in the etymologies; but common metaphors like Lady Macbeth, Hitler, and Caruso are totally absent. If the policy is to omit proper names, one might expect more felicitous treatment of metaphor; those dictionaries that include proper names need neither bludgeon users with obvious information about the characteristics of their subjects nor be concerned about a sudden increase in the popularity of the metaphoric use of a name, provided that the definitions are adequate to the purpose.

Thus, we may say that many of the dictionary definitions are constructed on the criteria mentioned above being concise in form but large in meaning. An entire imagine after through the the definitions and analysing them grammatically we come to several conclusions:

- The same head word is very often defined differently as far as the definition perspective is concerned. This is proof that all the lexicographical sources examined are all very different.
- There is much room for further improvements in the semantic descriptions of these dictionaries.

A conclusion would be that proper names – however selective their coverage might be – should be considered as much a part of the language as improper names and other words spelt with a small initial.

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