MORPHOLOGICAL AND SEMANTIC ASPECTS OF EPONYMS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10002510

ARTICLE INFO

Qabul qilindi: 04-October 2023 yil
Ma'qullandi: 08- October 2023 yil
Nashr qilindi: 14- October 2023 yil

KEY WORDS

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ABSTRACT

The term eponym has been used in literature to denote different linguistic phenomena: (1) a lexeme derived from a personal name; (2) the name from which such a lexeme is derived; (3) the person whose name is thus used; (4) any proper noun that has become a common noun, esp. brand names, e.g. xerox, Kleenex (sometimes also called 'proprietary eponyms') (cf. McArthur 1992). Lexemes treated as eponyms in this paper are those that have been formed from names of people, real of fictitious, by any of the word-formation processes.

1. Introduction

The term eponym has been used in literature to denote different linguistic phenomena: (1) a lexeme derived from a personal name; (2) the name from which such a lexeme is derived; (3) the person whose name is thus used; (4) any proper noun that has become a common noun, esp. brand names, e.g. xerox, Kleenex (sometimes also called 'proprietary eponyms') (cf. McArthur 1992). Lexemes treated as eponyms in this paper are those that have been formed from names of people, real of fictitious, by any of the word-formation processes.

The paper will attempt to give some insight into the morphological patterns of eponymous lexemes and their semantic relationships with base words.

2. Morphological aspects

In the analysis of the corpus the following word formation processes were found: conversion, suffixation, composition, clipping, blending, acronymy and backformation. The word formation processes are given in the order of their frequency in the corpus, all of them quite productive in modern English (the distinction between frequency and productivity of a given word formation rule is based on Kastovsky 1986).

Conversion

The largest number of non-terminological eponyms in the corpus are conversions. The input units are exclusively proper nouns and, typically, conversion produces common nouns: béchamel, biro, bobby, casanova, John Bull, leotard, macadam, Mae West, praline, quisling, raglan, shrapnel, Xanthippe. There are a few examples where them orphosyntactic class of the input unit changes: borkv, boycottv, braillev, burkev, guillotinev, lynchv, mentorv, ritzv, silhouettev, thomasv, zoev. They seem,

however, to have gone through two cycles of conversion: proper noun > common noun > verb, rather than to have been formed directly from personal names as the corresponding common nouns typically appear in their dictionary definitions.

In some cases the base is respelled: Duns > dunce, Philbert > filbert, Macintosh > mackintosh, Plessis-Praslin > praline, Stroganov > stroganoff. The output units become potential input bases for further wordformation processes: boycotter; dieseling,dieselize, dieselization; duncical, duncish, duncishly; lyncher; Jezebelian, Jezebelish; Jonahesque; mentorship; John Bullish, John Bullist, John Bullishness, John Bullism; ohmic; Shylockian, Shylocky, shylockv, shylocker.

Suffixation

Next to conversion, suffixation is the most productive process, particularly in scientific terminology, notably in biology, chemistry and mineralogy. The vast majority of suffixations are names of plants, bacteria, chemical substances and minerals. As such, the suffixes used to form these lexemes are of restricted productivity. Examples include: arfvedsonite, goethite, greenockite, pickeringite, saussurite; begonia, dahlia, dieffenbachia, fuchsia, gardenia, macadamia; curium, einsteinium,rutherfordium; galvanize, pasteurize.

To list but a few suffixes:

– ite:

- [forming nouns] minerals: allanite, arfvedsonite, dawsonite,
- fergusonite, goethite, greenockite, pickeringite, saussurite
- [n] explosives: dunnite
- [n] chemical substances: austenite, lewisite

All of the above are of the pattern: personal name + – ite. Most often, these are names of mineralogists, geologists or (al)chemists, but sometimes also names of mine officials, financiers, politicians, rulers (alexandrite < Alexander I of Russia, willemite < Willem I, 'the Silent',

- stephanite < Stephan, Archduke of Austria), or otherwise important
- people (goethite, pinkeringite).

–ia:

- [n] plants: begonia, claytonia, dahlia, dieffenbachia, fuchsia,
- gardenia, macadamia.
- [n] bacteria: babesia, borrelia, Erwinia, listeria
- –ium:
- [n] chemical elements: curium, einsteinium, rutherfordium
- –ella:
- [n] bacteria: brucella, Salmonella

–a:

- [n] plants: allamanda, weigela–ine:

[n] chemical substances: brucine, nicotine

- [adj] (characteristic) of: Benedictine, Ursuline
- Some of the other productive suffixes:
- –ize:

- [v] to subject to a process denoted by its originator: boswellize,
- bowdlerize, galvanize, mesmerize, pasteurize
- –ism:
- [n] principles, doctrines or practices: buddhism, calvinism, chauvinism, Darwinism, Rastafarianism, spoonerism
- [n] disorders: daltonism, masochism, sadism
- –ic:
- [adj] in the style of: Platonic, pyrrhic, quixotic, Sapphic
- –esque:
- [adj] in the style of: Jordanesque, Heath-Robinsonesque,
- Kafkaesque
- –ist:
- [n] supporter or follower: Blairist, Rappist
- –ite:
- [n] supporter or follower: Clintonite, hussite

Composition

Composition proves, as elsewhere in English, very frequent and productive. Here are some examples: boysenberry, loganberry, youngberry, sarrusophone, saxhorn, saxophone, sousaphone, daguerreotype, greengage.

Clipping

Although clipping does not operate frequently on personal names (except in naming scientific measurement units), several examples have been found: bawbee [<Sillebawby], farad [<Faraday], gal [<Galileo], gat [<Gatling], knickers [<Knickerbocker], strass [<Strasser], torr [<Torricelli]

Blending

gerrymander [< Gerry + (sala)mander], tarmac [< tar + Mac(Adam)], tawdry [< (Sain)t Audrey], Di-namite [< Di(ana) +(dy)namite]

Acronymy

MiG (also Mig, MIG) [<M(ikoyan) i G(urevich)], Todd-AO [<(Mike)Todd +A(merican) O(ptical C

Back-formation

mentee < *mentv < mentor < Mentor

3. Semantic aspects

It is generally accepted that personal names have no sense but only reference (Allerton 1987). It is through the formation of eponymous lexemes that they undergo a process of ‘sense-acquisition’. This process appears typically to involve metonymical and metaphorical transfer ofmeaning. For example, metonymy in The plane taxied along the tarmac; or metaphor in She’s a real Cinderella. However, an important theoretical

paradox arises. If personal names have no sense, what is it that metaphor

and metonymy operate on? It seems that for a personal name or, indeed, for any proper noun, to become a common noun, it is necessary for extralinguistic knowledge to become part of speakers’ linguistic knowledge. What members of a given linguistic community know about the person serves as a resource bank from which, in accordance with the speakers’ needs, salient components are drawn to serve as

building blocks of sense construction. For example, Zoë Baird was a nominee of President Bill Clinton for Attorney General accused of avoiding paying taxes on the payments made to domestic help. From her first name a verb was formed through conversion, zoe, with the meaning 'to accuse a person of avoiding paying taxes (esp. a person being considered for confirmation by a Senate hearing)'. It is in the early stages of the development of an eponymous lexeme that speakers are aware of its eponymous origin. However, if the
lexeme becomes established, with the process of its institutionalization (see Bauer 1983) in the lexicon there's a tendency for this awareness to be gradually lost. Even if this awareness is retained, it constitutes a speaker's encyclopedic knowledge or is, at best, part of the associative meaning of the lexeme. Metaphor proves to be less productive than metonymy. Examples: casanova, catiline, Cinderella, Croesus, dunce, everest, houdini, Ishmael,maverick, mentor, Nimrod, pinkerton, quisling, Romeo, Shylock, Xanthippe

Metonymy is extremely productive. It includes **INVENTION IS INVENTOR, DISCOVERY IS DISCOVERER** and similar metonymies: inventor, discoverer, breeder, manufacturer: béchamel, colt, diesel, Granny Smith, herdic, macadam, mackintosh, McIntosh, praline, shrapnel, strass, Tom Collins, winchester, zeppelin

A special subtype comprises tribute-paying eponyms, typically in scientific
registers:

in the honour of a scientist, e.g. all units in science that are named after scientists: ampere, angstrom, bel, gauss, henry, hertz, joule, tesla in the honour of an influential or respectable person: alexandrite, bignonia, goethite, paulownia, pickeringite, pompadour, willemite, whewellite

Once an eponymous lexeme is established, the original simple
metaphors/metonymies may undergo further metaphorical/metonymical
transfer: metonymy > metaphor: sandwich originally meant only 'two slices of bread with other food between them' (by metonymy from the fourth Earl of Sandwich) and
then by multiple metaphorical transfers 'any kind of food resembling a sandwich' and 'anything resembling a sandwich' in expressions such as: a sandwich cake, a sandwich board, a sandwich man, a sandwich course, sandwichv. Other examples: Derby, Mausoleum, Pullman, silhouette. metonymy > metonymy: tarmac is 'a mixture of tar and very small stones, used for making the surface of roads', named through metonymy after its inventor, J.
L. McAdam. By further metonymy the meaning was extended to 'an area covered with tarmac' and yet further to 'a runway'. Other examples: diesel, valentine. metaphor > metaphor: the first sense of burke 'to murder smb. by suffocation' came into existence by means of metaphorical transfer and was later extended to 'to suppress or get rid of smth./smb. by some indirect manoeuvre'.

Other examples: Jehu, Romeo.

The analysis of the corpus shows that the registers particularly rich in eponyms are: science, medicine, fashion, cookery and weaponry, the reasons for which probably lie in the sociolinguistic need to label new entities in these ever-improving fields. This is in accordance with the fact that most recorded eponyms entered the English language in the 19th and 20th centuries, reflecting the rapid scientific and technological development of the period. New eponyms are being formed all the time as there seems to be no restrictions on the productivity of eponymous formations.

Theoretically, any personal name can be used as a common noun but many of these never become established. They remain at the level of nonceformations or soon fade away and as such never enter dictionaries.

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