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Anthroponymy and Pragmatics. Proper Names: Levels and Functions

Abstract

Starting from the framework established by Eugen Coșeriu with respect to the levels of language, this paper examines proper names on three functional planes with corresponding stages of competence and speech evaluations. Thus, on the universal level, names are *rigid designators*; they are non-deictic, devoid of lexical meaning, and display a designative function. This is the level of general naming. On the historical level, names are "embedded"; they develop idiomatic (language-specific) content. This is the level of conventional naming, on which names fulfil an idiomatic function. On the individual level, names are meaningful expressions, describing bearers by means of "clusters of definite descriptions". This is the level of unconventional naming, of the nominal mark which renders the denotatum unique. The linguistic content of this level consists of the meaning of the name, and the functions developed by it are textual and emotive: the participation of the name giver in the discourse by means of an act of novel linguistic creation (see the instance of nicknames, bynames, usernames, various anthroponymic phrases, etc.). To reach the above-mentioned aims, the paper uses the theoretical tools specific to anthroponymy, pragmatics, and related fields: text theory, speech act theory, and philosophy of language.

1. Introduction

Onomastics can be considered the common denominator of all the other fields of language, because before one can refer to a being or an object, that entity must bear a name. Anthroponymy, a subfield of onomastics, deals with the study of personal names and analyses them from the viewpoints of different methodologies. The pragmatic approach to proper names is focused on establishing the functions triggered by using names in speech. To this end, the analysis of proper names also pays attention to extralinguistic elements such as the sender (i.e., the name giver), the receiver (i.e., the name bearer), and the communication intention underlying the performance of onymic speech acts.

The unprecedented spread of anthroponymic investigations in Romanian onomastic research and beyond is a symptom of the increasing interest manifested in anthroponyms, especially in unofficial names, by various language schools. One of the explanations for the dynamic of anthroponymy lies in the prevalence of the socio-economic factor as opposed to other factors, such as the paradigmatic shifts resulting from people's movement from one geographical space to another with effects on conventional and unconventional names alike.[1] Thus, the achievement of economic well-being has led to changes in language, particularly in name choice. The emigration of Romanians determined the substitution of the traditional system of naming with an imported one, which has proven its applicability in the host countries and in Romania. In local anthroponymic phrases, the place of everyday, "autochthonous" names was taken by exotic, incongruous names, some of which may even be a source of laughter. The aforementioned aspects refer equally to both categories of anthroponyms, those registered legally (recording individuals' existence in birth certificates), and those given outside institutional contexts.

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[1] For matters related to linguistic means of identifying a referent, see Felecan (2014b):

(...) in contemporary naming practice one can distinguish *two linguistic mechanisms of nominal referential identification*:

– a 'natural' one, which occurs in the process of *conventional, official, canonical, standard* naming and results in *conventional/official/canonical/standard anthroponyms*, and

– a 'motivated' one, which occurs in the process of *unconventional, unofficial, uncanonical, non-standard* naming and results in *unconventional/unofficial/uncanonical/non-standard anthroponyms*. (p. 19)

In this respect, the interest in the topic under discussion is centred on unconventional anthroponyms (UA), unofficial names which are not record-ed in legal documents. The practice of giving unconventional names is old and permeates all levels of social life regardless of age, sex, and social status. Moreover, nowadays one can notice the proneness of the term *anthroponym* to undergo semantic extension, as it encompasses formerly appellative units, collocations, phrases which, due to their extended use in varied extralinguis-tic contexts, are deappellativised and become onymised instead. Thus, the inventory of proper names in a language is enriched as a result of the recon-sideration of existing linguistic material, restructured on the level of speech (appellative > proper name) and meaning (contextual discursive function).

2. Object of analysis

This research is mainly theoretical and builds on the matrix proposed by Eugen Coșeriu (1994) for the sphere of language. The linguist discriminates three language levels (see Table 1) as: the universal level of *speech in general* (independent of historical determinations), the historical level of *languages* and the individual level of *discourse* (or of 'text'). These levels are distinguished by virtue of the fact that language is a universal human activity, developed by each speaker individually and always in agreement with certain histor-ical traditions (there is no speech outside a given language). The levels cor-respond to a) autonomous linguistic knowledge, with specific, differentiated norms: *elocutional knowledge* (competence), that is, knowing how to speak in general, independent of a given language; *idiomatic knowledge*, or knowing how to speak a (certain) language; *expressive knowledge*, that is, knowing how to speak in specific contexts; b) distinct language content: *designation* (refer-ring to 'reality', 'things', and 'states of things'), *signification* (content deter-mined exclusively by language and functional idiomatic oppositions), and *sense* (the actual discursive content underpinned by the linguistic expression and extralinguistic determinations: for instance, the fact that an utterance can be a question, an answer, an order, a request, a statement, a greeting, and so on). On the level of elocutional knowledge, *conformity* (clarity strictness,

coherence, noncontradiction, nontautology, etc.) is called *congruence*; in relation to idiomatic knowledge, conformity lies in (linguistic) *correctness*, whereas with respect to expressive knowledge, conformity refers to the so-called *appropriateness* (Coșeriu, 1994, pp. 135–136).

Table 1. Description of language levels

Language levels	Activity/ enérgeia	Technique/ dynamis/ knowledge/ competence	Product/ ERGON	Content	Conformity judgments/ criteria
Universal level	speaking in general (linguistics of speaking in general)	elocutional competence	"speaking", everything that has already been said or that could be said	designation	congruence
Historical level	to speak a language (idiomatic linguistics)	idiomatic competence	(abstract language)	signification	correctness
Individual level	discourse (as a unit of speech) (text linguistics)	expressive competence	text (spoken or written)	sense	appropriateness/ aptness (*tò prépon*)

Source: based on Coșeriu, 1994.

To achieve the aims established for this research, proper names will be grouped into the aforementioned three functional levels, with the corresponding stages of competence and evaluation of speech. To this end, the present study mainly employs the theoretical tools of anthroponymy and pragmatics, as well as those of related fields: text theory, speech act theory, and philosophy of language.

The conative (appellative) function is the one which behaves differently on each level. It acts as the delimitation of an extant entity (I), confirmation of civil nominal status (II), or appointment of oneself unto alterity (linguistic intersubjectivity, III).

3. Levels and names

3.1. On the universal level, names are non-deictics, do not have lexical meaning, and develop a designating function. This is the level of general naming. On this plane, one finds names in general, prior to their dissemination among individuals. These "world" objects (that is, names) lack lexicographic entries, because they are devoid of meaning. They count exclusively as means of exerting speakers' elocutional competence. As language facts, only their signifier is taken into consideration, as their content consists of designation *in abstracto*. The conformity criterion is congruence ("clarity strictness, coherence") in speech. This level includes the inventory of names without adjectival determinations (French names, English names, etc.).

Every speech act refers to extralinguistic reality by means of language categories which develop certain discursive functions. *Designation* is the basic function of language. It is found on the universal level of the latter (Felecan, 2014a, p. 71). Coșeriu (1981/2000, p. 246) considers that *designation* is "reference" to "reality", that is, the specifically determined relationship between a language phrase and a "real" "state of things", between a sign and the denoted "object". In other words, *designation* is the relationship with extralinguistic objects or with the extralinguistic reality itself (Coșeriu, 2009, p. 310). Thus, by means of *designation* or *referential* function, language unites a *concept* (extralinguistic reality) with an *acoustic image* (or, as de Saussure describes it, the mental impression of a sound [1916/1998, p. 85]), which is the conventional linguistic equivalent (see Felecan, 2014a, p. 71).

3.2. On the historical level, names become "embodied", they develop idiomatic content (specific to every language). This is the level of conventional naming, which actualizes the idiomatic function. On the historical level, names no longer refer to "reality", but they are "naturalized", that is, they are defined by certain historical determination. From the heterogeneous mass to which they pertained on the previous level, names are now subsumed under particular languages, and become emblematic of national idioms. From this viewpoint, onyms make up the personal name code of every individual, his/her registration in civil records. Proper names are semantically unstructured. Oltean (2003) writes that they do not have descriptive

content to mediate the connection with their bearers or, in other words, they lack meaning – and denote directly a certain individual in the real world (p. 24). They are also *singular terms*, whose signification depends exclusively on the existence of reference, which is fixed conventionally (p. 24). As *rigid designators* (see Kripke, 2001, pp. 48–49), names are unambiguous, as they are directly attached to a referent based on a ceremony of original 'naming' and function like personal numerical codes[2] (Oltean, 2003, p. 24). There are also deviations from the custom of giving historical names, in the sense that there are names characteristic of other languages which cross the border of a certain language and permeate an area alien to them. On this level, names may function as bearers of signification (they mirror a name giver's intention, which is "laden" in that particular name). The conformity criterion is (linguistic) correctness: a name must observe the historical tradition to which it pertains.

Universal immutability embodies conventionalised manifestations (language forms) based on the way in which every historical language embraces extraverbality. Once the *unrecognisable continuum* (extralinguistic reality) turns into *historical discontinuance* (natural language), designation is instantiated as *signification*. Put differently, the extraverbal is 'translated' depending on the corresponding *particular language*. The level of significance is that of linguistic convention, of the historical 'contract' between signifier and signified (Felecan, 2014a, pp. 71–72). As Coșeriu (1981/2000) pointed out, the *signified* is the content of a sign or phrase coined in a certain language and solely through language itself (p. 246).

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[2] Oltean (2003) writes that proper names are rigid designators, because they signify even in the absence of meaning or descriptive content. They are merely attached to individuals as a part of certain ceremonies, by means of initial baptisms, and the connections established in this way spread step by step, so that the members of a community preserve them in the process of name use. Once a name is attached to an individual, the link between the name and the referent seems to become necessary; it is not a consequence of the properties of the individual, nor does it alter in the case of a different history of the bearer's life. In problematic situations, a language community can turn to experts to determine the identity of a certain individual, such as parents, close acquaintances, or representatives of the authorities. Theoretically speaking, we can imagine a genuine 'chain of communication', a 'causal chain', by means of which the connection between a name and an individual can be verified. Therefore, in agreement with the theory under discussion, proper names refer to their bearers directly, unmediated by clusters of descriptions, and they are rigid designators which designate the same objects at every possible world (pp. 75–76).

3.3. On the individual level, names are meaningful, and describe their bearers by means of "clusters of definite descriptions". This is the level of unconventional naming, of the onymic markers which render their denotata unique. On this plane, names are taken out of an amorphous mass to specify the individuals bearing them. The linguistic content of the level under investigation is represented by meaning, and the function developed is twofold, textual and affective: the participation of a speaker in the speech act (their attitude towards the propositional content) by means of an act of innovative linguistic creation (see the example of nicknames, bynames, user names, and various unconventional anthroponymic phrases). (Eugen Coșeriu (2000–2001) states that we do not learn a certain language; we learn to create in a certain language [p. 17]). Name bearers are saved from substitution by virtue of nominal originality (anthroponymic homonymy is decoded correctly). Unofficial names make their bearers unique, not interchangeable.

Names are vested with meaning on the individual level – a complex of meanings which refer to bearers, their physical appearance or mental attitude. Thus, from rigid designators, names turn into nonrigid designators (it is the case of the cluster of definite descriptions which describe individuals). This level encompasses everything that is not allowed on the previous level, whatever reaches beyond its confines. This is the level of the unconventional, of what was established not in an official context, but outside conventional naming standards (by *convention* one understands the historical tradition on the second level). The contents on this level do not have to reproduce traditional naming patterns; former appellatives may proprialise or underlie the coinage of entirely new name forms. Appellatives are similar to proper names by virtue of the means in which they are attached to subjects they identify. They, too, imply an "initial baptism" that generates the referential link between the words under discussion and different categories of referents (Oltean, 2003, p. 24). Their aim is descriptive, especially in view of rendering individuals unique, distinguishing them from other bearers of the same conventional name. In this case, the new onymic choice fulfils a pragmatic role: singularising the individual, which on the previous level is achieved by means of an indexical act (ostension). Individual description can only be decoded with the help of linguistic and extralinguistic context. On this level, the conformity criterion is fitting the name to its bearer. An appropriate adjustment will make the

denotatum transparent (*nomen est omen*); the name will precede the deno-tatum. The individual level is the field of utmost lexical creativity, where previous judgments are suspended, written off, based on *to prépon/deco-rum* 'appropriateness'.

Instances of conspicuous violations of a certain convention are pushed towards the individual, "unconventional" level of language. This is the lev-el of expressive specific difference, of "free technique",[3] of "personalised" construction of discourse, namely the level of *meaning*. According to Coșeriu (1981/2000), *Meaning* is the content proper of a text, what the text express-es beyond (or by means of) designation and signified (p. 246). *Meaning* is simultaneously the repetition of predefined models (repeated discourse) and creative potential. What locutors produce consists equally of at least three aspects (see Felecan, 2014a, p. 72): what has been said (polyphonous discourse) + what they aim to convey (potential discourse) + what the receiv-ers understand (successful/unsuccessful discourse). Coșeriu (1986/1999) states that an individual creates speech acts following patterns from one's memory, in other words, he/she recreates speech acts that have already been experimented, and by recreating them, he/she alters them to some extent, in matters of either form or content, perhaps with respect to both (p. 29). Thus, language is not usage, first and foremost, but the creation of signifieds, which is why it is not the mere production of material signs for extant significations, but the creation of content and expression at the same time (Coșeriu, 2009, p. 47).

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[3] Coșeriu (1981/2000) discriminates between two discursive traditions: *free* discourse and *repeated discourse*. The free technique comprises constitutive elements of language and 'current' rules regarding their change and combination, that is, 'words', together with lexical and grammatical tools and processes. On the other hand, repeated discourse encompasses everything that is repeated more or less identically in the speech of a community, in the form of preconstructed discourse or a more or less fixed collocation, as a long or short fragment of 'what has already been said' (pp. 258–259).

4. The level of meaning

The level of (discursive) meaning includes the following actualisations: nick-names, bynames, user names, hypocoristics, pseudonyms, unconventional appellatives functioning as individual or group names, and generic names.

Unconventional anthroponyms are occasional names which appear as a result of nonritual name-giving, by deviating from the official act of naming people, and which function as substitutes of individuals' official names. The community to which the bearer of the new name pertains considers the institutional name to be insufficient or inadequate, and so replaces it with an unofficial nominal surrogate. This onymic substitution does not imply registration in official records. Its validity depends on it being acknowledged within the small circle of users. Unconventional anthroponyms display a marked semantic function and stand out due to their mobility (they are created continuously) and plurality (the possibility of there being a succession of unconventional anthroponyms bestowed on a person).

Phonetic structure discloses or conceals a bearer's real name. Regardless of the composition (be it transparent or opaque), the correct reading of an unconventional anthroponym depends on the circumstances in which it was created, as well as on interlocutors' sharing encyclopaedic knowledge and on the history of their message exchanges. Unconventional anthroponyms are heterogeneous linguistic creations, whose definite description oscillates between various sizes (from a collocation to a noun phrase or even sentences).

5. Concluding remarks

In the context of new theoretical studies on onomastics, it is necessary, as shown above, to redefine certain concepts, such as *appellative* and *anthroponym*. Thus, an unconventional appellative is produced by the speaker, who, according to Ionescu Perez (2007), decides on the structure of the phrase and is free to choose and create new units, which gain the status of anthroponyms

only if the entire community or at least a part of it accept the stable and constant referential use of the phrases in which they appear (p. 220).

As regards unconventional anthroponyms, the possibility of their recurrence and overlapping can be acknowledged, but they should be considered *multivocal*, yet *monovalent*,[4] just like official names. This translates as *denotative multiplicity* (several signifieds) and physical/material uniqueness (the same signifier in repeated uses), i.e., they make up a single sign, but are different *symbols* (Coșeriu, 1962/2004, p. 272). *Multivocal* unconventional anthroponyms prove to be polysemantic in two ways: on the one hand, they identify different referents; on the other, they convey specific information for each denotatum (see Felecan, 2014a, p. 75).

Like every speech act, name-giving implies the name giver's intuition and expression, and the receiver's perception and image. *Designation* implies the existence of a signifier for the *signification*; the latter can be divided into signifier + signified of the unconventional anthroponym, but only on the level of the historical language in which it is used. At the same time, signification also functions as signifier + signified, that is, as a sign, for *meaning*, the literal signified of the unconventional anthroponym, the intention with which it was created/performed. Thus, according to Coșeriu (1981/2000), the level of meaning is *semiotically twofold*, as on this level a signifier and a language signified make up a first series of relationships, followed by another series, in which the language signified (by means of which it is designated) becomes, in its turn, the 'signifier' for the *textual content* or 'meaning' (p. 247). The very fact that it is an *unofficial* anthroponym is *meaningful*.

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[4] Coșeriu (1962/2004) writes that what matters is not the fact that *Juan* or *Rome* are the names of several objects, but, quoting O. Jespersen (1924/1948, pp. 64, 69), the way in which these names are used by speakers and understood by listeners. Names are not multivocal in their capacity as *words* (signifier + signified), but as 'simple words', as mere signifiers. Two occurrences of the name *Juan*, applied differently, only have in common the physical part, without sharing the signified: they are not, in fact, the same word. They are a single sign, but distinct *symbols* (p. 272). Further to this, he writes that the words 'Juan', 'Mary', 'Rome' are used here to determine the categories of objects which solely have in common the fact that they are each, individually, bearers of the proper names *Juan*, *Mary*, *Rome*. Similarly, 'Juan' and *Juan* are identical merely as simple words, not as signifying words, since 'Juan' designates an individual 'Juan' only because he is named *Juan*, not because he is a specifically determined 'Juan'. However, the proper name *Juan* is not a categorial name and does not apply to an existing real category, like the appellative *dog*; on the contrary, the relationship between a proper name and a category is defined in terms of *ahead*, not *after*: it is the condition for the establishment of a category as such (p. 274).

The particular signified (meaning) of an unconventional anthroponym is only identified in use, whereas signification exists in itself, independent of use. The *adequate* decoding of an unconventional anthroponym is achieved with the help of several pragmatic factors: the social relationship between name giver and name bearer, the name giver's status, name-giving conventions, name usage conventions, etc. (see Felecan, 2014a, p. 74).

On the universal level, unconventional anthroponyms neutralise congruence/incongruence judgments. On the historical level, correctness/incorrectness appreciations are annulled, as unofficial names observe the rules of individual speech, not those of standard language. Unofficial names pertain to a flexible norm, which is called regional, familiar, or argotic, depending on the variations of the stylistic subregisters of speech. During an interlocutory activity, the locutor may alternate speech registers and adapt his/her inventory to various discourse *frameworks*; these *switches* enable the activation of one speech norm or another (Felecan, 2014a, pp. 74–75).

The theoretical perspective outlined above shows that unconventional anthroponyms identify the linguistic attachment of a specific entity to a system of verbal signs on the *universal level* of language, but the meaning of these signs is decoded on the *individual level* (see Felecan, 2014a, p. 73). As unconventional anthroponyms become accepted by a community, they record a historical transgression towards the significational level. The access to the meaning (discursive functions) of an unconventional anthroponym implies acknowledging its designation and signification, whereas knowing them is an insufficient, albeit compulsory condition for the correct interpretation of *meaning*. Nevertheless, meaning should not be construed in absolute terms, as detachment from previous discourses, but as the re-evaluation of encyclopaedic knowledge, as the activation of *semantic memory*[5] (Felecan, 2014a, p. 73).

Thus, the statements presented above underline the need to revise the typology of anthroponyms by expanding and loosening the semantic sphere of the unit of analysis, in view of identifying new functional categories, corresponding to the new semantics of the term.

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[5] *Semantic memory* designates the memory for general, factual knowledge. A kind of knowledge found in dictionaries and encyclopaedias. It does not include information on particular objects (Miclea, 1999, p. 328).

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