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ASSOCIATIVE IDENTIFICATION OF PROPER NAMES: A COGNITIVE APPROACH

Abstract

A mental lexicon is a storage that holds the data about everything we know until it is required to be used. Onyms are stored in the mental lexicon in the form of concepts as individual units of knowledge which reflect the personal experience of the human being. The research aims to explore the standard ways of associative comprehension of proper names to better understand the essence and meanings they exhibit. The view substantiates that the transition from traditional to cognitive onomastic research will help to settle disputes among onomasticians and language philosophers as to the controversial subject of the semantic and referential status of proper names.

In this research, the author conducts a free-associative experiment with 250 English native speakers. The result of the study was the conclusion that the ways of associative identification of onyms depend not only on our presuppositional knowledge, direct or indirect experience in connection to a certain proper name but also on a set of proprial and linguistic features peculiar to each name. The specificity of each proper name in this sense will determine the primary mechanism of its associative identification.

Keywords: proper name, associative experiment, stimulus, association, cognitive onomastics.

Introduction

Proper names have always been studied in two dimensions: as the elements of a specific language system, codified in dictionaries, encyclopedias, and official registries, and as the units of speech, meaning their functioning in different types of discourse. In recent decades these two ways of proper name investigation were enriched by the third dimension, which represents cognitive peculiarities of proper names as onymic concepts stored in the mental lexicon of the human being. The cognitive approach to the proper name interpretation is widely accepted in modern onomastic studies. It focuses on the mental operations that determine the usage of names as lemmas or dictionary items in speech. But first, let us briefly outline controversial points that emerge in the traditional study of proper names in order to provide a broader background for the investigations to follow.

The issues of the semantic and referential status of proper names have long received a fair amount of attention from philosophers, linguists, and onomasticians. Plato first considered the relationship between proper names and their referents in a philosophical aspect in his famous dialogue "Cratylus".

In the 19th century, J. S. Mill defined proper names as minor marks. A proper name is, J. S. Mill (2011) says, "an unmeaning mark which we connect in our minds with the idea of the object, so that whenever the mark meets our eyes or occurs to our thoughts, we may think of that individual object" (p. 38). According to J. S. Mill, proper names have no signification as they are used with the only purpose to distinguish some person or thing among others and to speak of it individually. This philosopher's idea had a profound influence on the subsequent development of the theory of proper names and created the basis for further research in this direction (Chris-

tophersen, 1939; Gardiner, 1957; Nikonov, 1967; et al.).

Later, Mill's views were substantially elaborated in the light of the fruitful discussions held on this subject. Supporting the idea that a proper name has no lexical or definitional meaning, researchers came to the conclusion that it acquires denotative meaning in speech when correlation with a specific referent appears (Russell, 1948; Searle, 1958, 1969).

The famous American philosopher and logician S. Kripke (1980), in his work "Naming and Necessity", carried out a philosophical analysis of the concept of a proper name, calling it "a rigid designator" that "designates the same thing in all possible worlds" and comparing it with demonstratives and pronouns, that can also be used as rigid designators (pp. 48-49, 77). Answering the question of how we refer with proper names, S. Kripke created the causal theory of reference. To refer successfully, we just need to use the name the same way as it was transmitted to us, that is, with the same reference. In this case, the initial reference, which was fixed by description when the name was assigned to an entity, will be preserved, and we will keep referring to this name without any uniquely identifying marks or properties believed to be true of that referent (Kripke, 1980, p. 106). Nevertheless, the scholar does not exclude the possibility that "different speakers may fix the reference of the name in different ways, provided that they give it the same referent", considering the name Madagascar as an example (Kripke, 1980, pp. 139, 163).

In the philosophy of the name written by P. Florensky, the focus is shifted to a spiritual character of names and naming, their fateful significance. P. Florensky (1993) stated: "Not only for a fairy tale creature but also for a real person, his name either foreshadows or brings his character, his mental and bodily features to his fate" (p. 139). That is, proper names acquire symbolic meaning and absolute power to form the essence of its denotatum. O. F. Losev (1990) goes further and puts the philosophy of the name prior to any

other philosophical studies. Name is for O. F. Losev, the centre of all things, the most powerful entity that created the world and rules over everything. He concludes: "Name – as the maximum tension of meaningful existence in a broad sense – is also a foundation, strength, purpose, art, and feat of the whole life (Losev, 1990, p. 138).

In the modern period, onyms are regarded as complex units, which display a number of individual or collective background implicatures, or in other words, "presuppositional meanings", among which are distinguished: categorical, grammatical, emotive, and associative meanings. However, much controversy exists regarding categorical or basic level meaning as an essential feature of proper names, as asserted by some researchers. In his study, W. V. Langendonck (2007) states: "At the level of established linguistic convention, proper names appear to have a categorical presupposition without which their use is inconceivable. Whenever a name is assigned to a referent, this referent is assigned to a specific category of entities" (p. 79). R. Coates (2012) radically denies this assertion since he is convinced that "no name carries with it an entailment or a presupposition about the category of the individual bearing it, as many linguists and logicians have wanted to believe" (p. 125). What W. V. Langendonck refers to as "categorical meaning" for R. Coates are "expectations governed by real-world experiences" or "the fruit of repeated observations". Thus, even a seemingly obvious claim that names fall into logically secure linguistic categories according to the class of objects designated is, in fact, ambiguous. R. Coates (2012) exemplifies his idea by taking horse names as an example: "If we concentrate for a moment on hyponymy, or at any rate the actually-recorded names of horses, we will soon discover that absolutely any linguistic material can serve as a horse-name" (p. 128). Indeed, we may categorize Debora Ann as an anthroponym, Pearl Lake as a hydronym, or Cincinnati as an oikonym, but they have all officially registered

horse names. It is hard to find any other type of proper names with a higher naming variability.

Based on everything stated above, we may conclude that in traditional onomastics, a wide variety of theoretical standpoints on the issues of sense and referential properties of onyms have been adopted, and – therefore – there is no consensus as to this notion. It is clear that a search for the established proper name meaning would be not only futile but also inappropriate, taking into account numerous transfers of a recurring nature from one onymic category to another. Thus, it is quite conceivable that shifting the research direction towards cognitive peculiarities of proper names and their associative potential would allow us to understand their nature better and help to clarify in what forms they exist in the heads of human beings and which mental operations are activated to identify them.

Results and Discussion

Cognitive linguistics is a relatively young science, and the study of proper names from a cognitive point of view is newer still. Nevertheless, it has grown fast along with and partly as a result of advances in philosophy of language, psychology, computer modelling, and the entire complex of modern neurosciences.

The first solid cognitively oriented research devoted to the study of names was conducted by T. Valentine, T. Brennan, and S. Brad and resulted in publishing their joint monograph "The Cognitive Psychology of Proper Names" in 1993. The researchers examined the processes of perception, memorization, and reproduction of names, but they did not create a general cognitive approach to the study of proper names, narrowing the scope of scientific research to the study of psycho-mental processes in the operation of anthroponyms (Valentine, Brennen, & Brédart, 2002, p. 165). The first anthology on cognitive onomastics was published in 2016 and revealed the diversity of cognitive approaches to proper names, including the newly coined cogni-

tive onomastic theories of E. Hansack and S. Brendler (Brendler, 2016).

Particularly noteworthy are the studies that concern the concept of onymic frames, introduced and elaborated by O. Yu. Karpenko. In her doctoral thesis, professor O. Yu. Karpenko described the general patterns of mental organization of proper names and pointed out that actual onyms are stored in the language of the brain in the form of concepts, while less significant ones exist in mind in a "compressed" form of symbols. According to O. Yu. Karpenko (2006), names are "hooks" or "fishing rods" that "extract the necessary fragments of knowledge from the mental vocabulary" (p. 115). The set of names known to an individual person makes up individual onymic frames, which exist as long as there are people inhabiting the planet, and which, uniting, form corporate onymic frames common for a particular group of people, and then – national onymic frames (Karpenko, 2006, pp. 118-135).

The mental lexicon is a system of human knowledge and ideas characterized by internal unity, deep organic connection between words as its key elements. If we concentrate on the existence of proper names in the mental lexicon, we will discover that onymic networks have complex hierarchical organization, i.e., they are composed of 10 basic categories or frames – names of people, animals, places, groups of people, gods, plants, events, cosmic objects, material entities and artworks), a greater number of subframes (i.g., surnames, names of horses, mountains, literary works) and even microframes (i.g., pseudonyms, official hyponyms, mountain peaks, names of poems). Thus, onymic picture of the world is a reflection of all categories of proper names available in the mental lexicon of a person.

It is important to note that the process of categorization or finding the most appropriate place for the onym in the mental lexicon is closely connected with the principle of cognitive economy, introduced and elaborated by E. Rosch. According to E. Rosch (1988): "Maximum in-

formation with least cognitive effort is achieved if categories map the perceived world structure as closely as possible" (p. 312). In other words, the broader is the net of categorical relationships in the mental lexicon of a human being, the less effort will be exerted to find the place of each new proper name there and to construct its meaning in the course of the concept formation. E. Rosch (1988) notes that "to categorize a stimulus means to consider it, for purposes of that categorization, not only equivalent to other stimuli in the same category but also different from stimuli not in that category" (p. 312). By contrast, the process of conceptualization that also accompanies onyms' entering the mental lexicon is aimed at identifying individual characteristics of a proper name, which will allow to recognize it as an independent concept.

The complexity of such superior-subordinate organization of the mental lexicon is accentuated by other types of relations: individual – common, native – foreign, real – virtual – sacral.

As to the individual – common relations, O. Yu. Karpenko developed the idea of concentric circles as structural elements of each mental lexicon within a certain nation. These circles have the ego of the owner of the mental lexicon in their centre and represent four levels of familiarity with proper names. The 1st circle is the closest and contains proper names that are very important to the person. Such onyms can be revealed from the subjective, personal, often emotional, and evaluative associative reactions such as *my mum's name, favourite book, the city I live* in, and so on. Another significant feature that allows us to recognize the proper name of the closest circle is a clear physiological response to it, caused by the anchoring effect (Pligin & Gerasimov, 2000, p. 164). Onymic anchor produces a strong connection between the reaction and the stimulus, which necessarily contains a physiological component and is of a permanent nature. Consider the following response to the onym-stimulus Ravel: "Obsessed with Bolero. Used to listen to it with my mother since I was a kid. Lat-er took a music class and Ravel will always bring the actual music in my head. Tears when hearing this music". We find a strong emotional attachment of the individual to this onym. To simplify the classification somewhat, we consider it relevant to combine the 2nd and the 3rd circle, which consist of those proper names that are not of great importance to the owner, but with whose referents the owner is personally acquainted or have heard of them and thus, bears them in mind. The 4th circle embraces all proper names, which are unknown to us or which we have already forgotten. O. Yu. Karpenko metaphorically calls this circle "a sea of the unknown".

One of the most critical issues in the study of the mental lexical is cultural and ethnic diversity, which undoubtedly should be taken into consideration. It is possible to investigate the mental being of the onomasticon only in a certain language as a sum of the mental lexicons of all the native speakers. Moreover, when the need comes to categorize things, we deal with the categories created in culture and coded by the language of that culture at a certain period of time. Thus, we come to a conclusion that, as R. Coates (2012) rightly states, "the categorizations of names which onomasticians use are therefore not linguistic categories (categories involving types) but cultural ones (categories involving tokens)" (p. 127). In this way, the relations native – foreign come into play when the existence of proper names in the mental lexicon is considered.

Besides, every category or frame consists of real, virtual, and sacral components, which include proper names from the objective reality, proper names of the imaginative creations of cultural value, and proper names of religious and mythological entities, respectively (Karpenko, 2016 p. 72). All the diversity mentioned above of relations forms the general laws of proper names mental organization.

Proper names exist in the mental lexicon in the form of concepts. Onymic concepts are basic units of knowledge about objects of nomination, which are formed through the conceptualization

of reality fragments, and then become elements of the mental lexicon, categorize in it (occupy a certain "niche" in knowledge structure) and represent the onymic picture of the world in the human mind. In the process of conceptualization, onyms take their place in the mental lexicon in the form of clusters of emotion and knowledge about the name bearer. These clusters are structured and classified in an unconscious way, connect with each other through a chain of associations, and are subject to processes of synthesis and analysis.

Since proper names are often exposed to multiple intra-onomastic transfers within the same onymic frame (two people can have the same name) and from one onymic frame to another (a place name Ottawa becomes a horse name or a horse name Airborne becomes a name of an express passenger locomotive), one proper name may be represented by several concepts in the mental lexicon. In this case, in the context of utterance, we choose the concept we need according to the information linked to it, and the reference is performed successfully. Hence, the total number of the onymic concepts in the mental lexicon of a person will not be equal to the sum of proper names this person knows – the mental lexicon will always encompass more onymic concepts.

O. Yu. Karpenko (2006) states that "mental lexicon is an apparatus that works with active concepts and a repository that stores passive concepts" (p. 53). Due to the fact that every day we encounter new onyms, the mental lexicon keeps evolving; its boundaries are moving as onyms enter it and fall out, being forgotten. In this regard, it may be worth noting the role of memory in the processes of proper name storage and retrieval. If we adhere to the typical information-processing model of memory provided by R. Atkinson and R. Shiffrin (1968), we will see that entering the mental lexicon, proper names pass through the sensory register to temporary storage in short-term memory and can either decay from there (in the case of the low frequency

of name usage or lack of direct interaction with its referent) or gradually move into long-term memory. In principle, the process of passing from store to store can go either way. It is in short-term memory where proper names are conceptualized and categorized, and it is in short-term memory where proper names are brought again before being retrieved. Here is an example of such transfer: "…if you are asked this question, 'Who is the primary author of the switch model of attention?' your strategy may be to activate long-term information concerning "names associated with the psychology of attention". These names are then brought to short-term memory where you decide which is the correct answer" (Ellis & Hunt, 1993, p. 79). Aitchison's (2003) observation is in the same vein: proper names are stored in semantic fields or small groups of coordinates characterized by close associative relations. Nevertheless, scientists are only beginning to investigate how proper names are stored in the mental lexicon, how they are accessed later, and how these processes are connected with memory functioning.

Despite the lack of direct access to the mental lexicon of a person, at the present stage of the development of cognitive onomastics, there are many ways to establish the features of the conceptualization of proper names in the brain's language. Different common theoretical approaches from cognitive linguistics can be applied to address the issue depending on the purpose. To distinguish the structure and modifications of the onymic concept, E. Rosch's theory of prototypes can be adduced to identify features of organization and representation of information in the onymic concept, G. Lakoff and M. Johnson's conceptual metaphor theory may be used to reveal the relative cognitive distinction of semantic substructures of the onymic concept, R. Langacker's profile-base-domain distinction may be a powerful research tool. It should be noted, though, that the approaches enumerated above have not yet been widely used in the field of onomastics and traditionally belong to the field of cognitive lin-

guistics. The analysis of the onymic concepts is mainly held using experimental techniques, in particular, associative experiment, different types of which (free, chain, directed, psychophysiological, extended – depending on the specificity of scientific tasks) are traditionally used for research in the field of psycholinguistics (N. V. Kutuza, N. I. Kurganov), ethnopsycholinguistics (D. I. Terekhova, B. V. Dashieva, O. A. Popkova) and lexical semantics (S. V. Formanova, Yu. D. Apresyan).

The free-associative experiment aims to reveal the most frequent quick words-reactions of the respondents to the onymic stimulus. Such reactions from the associative field of a proper name expose the forms in which onymic concepts exist in the mental lexicons of human beings. Thus, it's a whole new way of looking at the meaning of proper names. The psycholinguistic approach views proper name meaning as the most vivid semantic component or part of a concept that is actualized in a psycholinguistic experiment. Eventually, this raises the question of whether there can be proper names with the meaning universally valid for all countries and across all cultures. The answer here is obvious – of course, there are proper names, which refer uniquely to person or place or object we all have in mind and, therefore, their meanings are more or less generally excepted. The same semantic component of the concept will be nuclear in the cross-cultural associative field. Still, there will always be a large periphery of less vivid semantic parts of the concept that served as the only possible meaning for some human beings. It then appears that there is no need to restrict ourselves to such prototypical cases because different contexts, cultural backgrounds, and, after all, mental experiences would result in a well-developed and broad net of associative meanings actualized with more (or less) clarity. From a more philosophical point of view, onomastic concepts are all symbols that unfold into infinity. At the same time, their semantic content depends not only on the functioning of their bearers but also on a

broad set of interpretational practices. Thus, J. Sternin, in his reflections on the meaning of proper names, concludes that the most effective way to penetrate the real essence of the onymic concept in all its diversity is by conducting an associative experiment. "By applying experimental methods to describe the semantics of a proper name, it is possible not only to establish the psychologically real meaning of an onym, but also to identify regional, social and individual features of the semantics of a proper name in the linguistic consciousness of native speakers, as well as to identify the most relevant components of the meaning of the studied onym for various social, age and gender groups" (Sternin & Rudakova, 2011, p. 109).

In Ukraine, some research has also been carried out to study the possible ways of identifying onyms in the mental lexicon to reveal their connections with non-linguistic reality and distinguish the forms of transformation of proper names into concepts. O. Yu. Karpenko was the first to conduct the qualitative analysis of associative reactions classifying them according to the type of their connection with the onym-stimulus. According to the researcher's viewpoint, "what onymic entities exist in the mental lexicon and in what forms – that is the main problem of cognitive onomastics, which makes it a new trend in the study of proper names" (Karpenko, 2016, p. 69). We share O. Yu. Karpenko's viewpoint regarding the necessity to investigate mental being of proper names; such studies will get us one step closer to understanding the complex and complicated nature of onyms.

In this article, we aim to study ways of associative identification of proper names. The free-associative experiment was conducted on the material of English horse names which are well-known from history or which are popular in sport these days. As it was already mentioned, hyponyms are characterized by absolute freedom of nomination. Moreover, "there is no social or cultural norm in the English language, that a certain name may be categorized as a horse name"

(Aleksieieva, 2019, p. 241). Thus, it is this category of onyms that is of particular interest for cognitive research since it allows us to extrapolate the findings from this one-off experiment to other categories of proper names.

Therefore, the object of the research is proper names of the English language.

The subject of the investigation includes the existence of names in the mental lexicon and the necessity to single out the ways of their associative identification.

In order to reveal the semantic content of the hyponyms-concepts, a free-associative experiment was carried out, which consists in collecting the associative reactions of the respondents and constructing the associative fields of the hyponyms-stimuli with subsequent quantitative and qualitative processing of the results. The experiment involved 250 native English speakers of different professions and social statuses with a balanced gender representation, who were asked to give the first associative reaction (word, phrase) to each of the five hyponyms-stimuli: Man *O' War, Cincinnati, Ravel, Charisma*, and Nelson. No further clarification was provided on the meaning of these names.

The research material was 1136 associative reactions, 553 of which are single reactions, 109 – reactions that are repeated. The associative field of each stimulus contains from 186 to 241 reactions. On the basis of the respondents' questionnaires, an associative dictionary of hyponyms was compiled, which contains a brief description of the main characteristics of the denotation to which the hyponym-stimulus belongs, and the list of responses with the following numerical indicators:

1. the total number of different reactions;
2. the total number of all reactions;
3. the number of different onymic reactions;
4. the total number of onymic reactions;
5. the total number of refusals.

The qualitative analysis of the data obtained consisted of the differentiation of the associations by the type of their connection with the sti-

mulus. Based on O. Yu. Karpenko's (2006) classification, we believe that all associative reactions can be classified into the following groups (pp. 306-320):

1. hyperonymic reactions, which consist in the usage of a hyperonym;
2. synonymic reactions, that is, descriptions, paraphrases, or synonyms;
3. qualitative reactions, which indicate the properties and characteristics of the stimulus word;
4. meronymic reactions, denoting a part or a whole in relation to a stimulus word;
5. causative reactions, formed by causal association;
6. contiguous reactions, which imply metaphorical or metonymical perception of a stimulus word;
7. symbolic reactions – as an attempt to reveal the figurative content of a stimulus word;
8. phonetic reactions, based on sound similarity with a stimulus-word or other types of wordplay;
9. individual reactions that cannot be interpreted without additional explanations of the respondent, since the associative connection with the stimulus is not transparent and is generated by the individual's personal experience, incomprehensible to the researcher.

In our associative experiment only five ways of associative identification of onymic stimuli were popular among the respondents. Now let us look at each of them in greater detail.

Hyperonymic reactions are produced when the mental operation of the retrieval of a hyperonym is being performed. By hyperonym, we mean a category a referent belongs to, e.g., is Nelson a person, a horse, or a pub? Since every name bearer belongs to some basic level category, every onymic stimulus in the associative experiment may trigger a search for it. O. Yu. Karpenko (2006) calls such classificatory associations as "lazy", since "the mental lexicon of the recipient is satisfied with the assignment of the onym to a certain group, without retrieving any

individual characteristics of a particular denotatum" (Karpenko, 2006, p. 308). We consider such reactions as acts of probabilistic categorization backed by personal experience or general knowledge, which may externalize socio-cultural norms of a certain society. In this case, we deal with the denotation of a name and not with its reference, which squares well with Coates' (2012) pragmatic view of proper names. The following repeated associative responses on the onym-stimulus Nelson are good instances: name, dog, horse, wrestling hold, a pub, a boy, as they all suggest category membership. We may conclude from this that the lexical item Nelson functions as a multidenotative proprial lemma and can denote various categories among native English speakers. The search for the denotatum is one of the most common forms of stimulus identification in onomastics.

Synonymic responses include synonyms and descriptions of the person or thing named by the onym-stimulus. At this stage, it is interesting to contrast them with the type mentioned above. Though hyperonymic and synonymic responses are distinctly different, there still can be some similarity between the two. Only the latter always appeal to a specific referent, that is, an individual or thing that bears that name and is uniquely identifiable by the respondent. Regarding the name Nelson, such reactions as Mandela, Willie, Rockefeller are all syntagmatic synonyms for together with the stimulus they form a single anthroponym. Other synonymic responses are mere descriptions of some unique concrete bearer of the name Nelson, which are either based on the common ground, as in the responses city in New Zealand, place in New Zealand, Washington's horse, or are rather individual in character, e.g., *a childhood friend's surname, my cousin's dog, my friend's horse*. By contrast, here, we have to do with the reference and not with the denotation, as in the case of hyperonymic reactions. According to O. Yu. Karpenko (2006), synonymic reactions "characterize the onym-stimulus in its entirety and therefore do not create a

new concept, but fit into the concept of the stimulus" (p. 310). In this respect, it can be assumed that more prototypical uncontroversial names like Nelson, Bella, or Cincinnati will evoke more synonymic reactions than referentially obscure onymized appellatives Ravel, Charisma or Black Beauty. If the descriptions are assigned not to the name bearers but to the word itself and its lexical meaning, this means that the stimulus is not regarded as a proper name.

Qualitative reactions are connected with the characterizations of the referent of a proper name. Associative reactions of this type are inherent to all categories of onyms, especially those of appellative origin, and their appearance is preceded by two mental operations: assigning a category a referent belongs to and picking out some concrete entity that is involved. Qualitative reactions are always subjective: for some respondents, Nelson is a strong, courageous leader, while for the others old or one-eyed.

Phonetic reactions often indicate the absence of a search concept in the mental lexicon and demonstrate that the respondents treat the stimulus as an appellative. For instance, the name Ravel has lexical meaning and evokes a wealth of phonetic associations, e.g., unravel, gravel, raven, navel, rhymes with gravel, and so on. From these examples, it can be deduced that there are no potential referents of this name in the mental lexicons of the respondents, which results in the superficiality of the process of association regarding the stimulus by its morphemic structure and etymology. There is no logical relation to any relevant onymic category a referent belongs to, so phonetic interpretation of stimulus is activated.

Meronymic reactions are most common in the identification of toponyms as the activation of the mental operation of searching for the whole is the most characteristic of toponymic concepts. The stimulus Cincinnati evoked a great number of meronymic reactions such as Ohio, America, USA, as a name is generally used to refer to a large industrial city in Ohio. But the name Cincinnati has other famous bearers: a fraternal vet-

erans' organization, "Society of the Cincinnati", a famous Roman statesman and dictator Lucius Quinctius Cincinnati, a favourite horse of the 18th President of the United States, Ulysses Grant, and so on. However, though the name Cincinnati is characterized by multidenotativeness or multiple bearerhood, the American city is still the more well-known denotatum in the mental lexicon of English speakers, so the stimulus is treated by most respondents as a toponym. Thus, it turns out that native English speakers obtained the agreement as to which bearer of this name will be judged the more prototypical, if we may say so. And since toponyms trigger the responses denoting either the whole or the part in relation to the name bearer, we get the maximum number of meronymic associations.

Conclusion

Proper names are stored in the mental lexicon of a person in the form of onymic concepts – sets of knowledge about the objects of nomination, which are designed to structure and transmit onymic information. Two processes accompany the entry of proper names into the mental lexicon: the process of conceptualization, i.e., the creation of a concept, and the process of categorization, i.e., the classification of this concept with respect to the (sub)class of entities it belongs to. After such a transformation, onyms-concepts form a certain frame within the mental lexicon and move into long-term memory. Though there is no direct access to the mental lexicon of a person, the free-associative experiment allows us to construct the associative field of the studied concepts and to investigate their nature.

By focusing on the prevailing forms of the associative identification of different hyponyms, we can observe the direct correlation of leading the mental operation with the "proprial status" of the lexeme, by which we mean a number of well-known referents the name is assigned to, the existence or absence of etymological appellative meaning and its concrete or abstract form, whe-

ther the name has its traditional binding to a certain category of proper names or not, whether it is emotive or neutral and so on.

Our analysis showed that the ways of associative identification of onyms depend not only on our presuppositional knowledge, direct or indirect experience in connection to a certain proper name but also on a set of proprial and linguistic features peculiar to a certain lexeme. On the one hand, this finding corroborates the view of those onomasticians, linguists, and philosophers, who state that proper names may exhibit a broad set of meanings such as class, grammatical, emotive, connotative, structural, pragmatic meanings, and also various associative meanings introduced either via the name phonological shape or via the name bearer. On the other hand, it provides an opportunity to look at proper names anew, from a completely different perspective, and consider them not as elements of a certain class of entities, but as proprial units with multiple "onomastic profiles", with its own nominal potential in a certain language and culture. The specificity of each proper name in this sense will determine the main mechanism of its associative identification.

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