

Original Research

Soubriquet nomination as referred to cultural awareness and intercultural competence

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The article deals with the analysis of the English soubriquet nomination in terms of its linguo-cultural potential realisation in reference to cultural awareness and intercultural competence development in language education process. Soubriquets can be used to pass cultural information and knowledge represented in language and speech. On the basis of complex methodology that integrates linguistic and linguo-cultural approaches to soubriquets within the English-speaking communities, nicknames are considered as part of cultural historical continuum, including their variation properties. The analysis of media materials serves to penetrate into the sphere of linguo-cultural peculiarities of soubriquet nominations used in political discourse to persuade and manipulate target audience by means of memes encoded by the linguistic units in question, presented in discourse to pass evaluative and cultural information within new discursive formats, reflecting current trends in the communicative processes. The use of soubriquets in literary works implies the reader's cultural awareness that facilitates recognition and understanding of cultural contexts, which becomes important for intercultural competence development as it reflects typical characteristics of a given culture realised in language manifestations.

KEYWORDS: *soubriquet, cultural awareness, intercultural communication, background knowledge*



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1. INTRODUCTION

The problem of teaching languages as the process of intellectual and professional competencies development in its complexity is closely connected with the development of cultural awareness and intercultural competence issues. The use of the creative potential of language to express cultural notions is determined by the correlation of

linguistic and cultural knowledge, important for cultural awareness and intercultural competence theoretical bias and practical application as basic constituents of the communicative process.

In this study the notion of cultural awareness is considered in a broad sense, not only in reference to linguistic and behavioural etiquette norms of certain communities, but also in terms of cultural

knowledge possession, used to implement successful communication in various fields. The notion of intercultural competence concerns the integrity of cognitive, communicative and cultural skills in reference to the ability of human beings to take part in the interactions that are supposed to meet the social and pragmatic expectations of the representatives of communicating cultures.

Thus, while taking into consideration the linguistic phenomena that belong to various domains of language functioning, we proceed from the premise that each of them corresponds to certain cultural peculiarities, recognised in the process of communication. Soubriquets (or nicknames) are a result of soubriquet nomination that lies in the field of secondary nomination. Soubriquets occur when a certain linguistic unit is used as the name for a new object or phenomenon in accordance with some similar properties of signified objects and phenomena, that can be realised both at the level of form and at the level of meaning. Soubriquet nomination is based on the use of imagery to express evaluation induced by attitudes towards the object of nomination and involves further expansion of linguistic meanings through their transformations to create new secondary names (nicknames), some of them based on semantic and structural modifications.

Linguistic meanings of nicknames may contain cultural nuances, connected with stereotypes and metaphorical representation specifics, typical of linguo-cultural communities, which is particularly important for cultural awareness development and successful communication skills acquisition.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The study relied on research by well-known linguists, culturologists, methodologists and scholars, specialists in intercultural communication. Analysis of soubriquet nomination, within the scope of proper names, is distinguished as the particular area in terms of linguo-cultural studies (Delahunty, 2003; Morgan et al., 1979). Units of secondary nomination are closely connected with linguistic, cultural and conceptual world view presentations, both explicitly and implicitly, thus being subject to

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the analysis with special reference to cultural meanings transferability and translation (Bracaj, 2015; Constantin, 2013; Holden & Von Korfleisch, 2004). Much attention is paid to associative connections between English-speaking cultures and the corresponding aspects of home cultures referring to the dynamics of correlation between linguistic and cultural issues (Alexandrova, 2015; Crowther & De Costa, 2017; Ter-Minasova, 2017).

Ter-Minasova (2017) states that intercultural communication presents itself as both the scientific field and academic discipline, concerned with the process of world view formation and establishing contacts within the frames of mutual understanding between people. The importance of promoting cultural awareness through language learning and understanding cultures is discussed in a number of scientific disquisitions (Constantin et al., 2015; Davitishvili, 2017; Ficzer, 2014; Gulbinskiene & Lasauskiene, 2014; Liton & Qaid, 2016). Some of the manuals are aimed at teaching students to appreciate the impact of cultural patterns on intercultural communication and the ability to communicate in various fields of human activity (Lustig & Koester, 2020; Skrinda, 2020). Malyuga and Tomalin (2017) discuss communicative strategies and tactics of speech, paying particular attention to functional pragmatic speech peculiarities in English varieties within intercultural business discourse. Topical issues that concern teaching and learning intercultural communication as well as intercultural awareness in multicultural communities are taken into consideration from both theoretical (Deardorff, 2009; Palmer, 2018; Susilo et al., 2019; Winkelman, 2018; Yang, 2017) and practical points of view (Holling & Govan,

2015; Mayfield, 2020). In this respect, the boundary between linguistic and cultural knowledge is considered to be hardly discernible and presents an important problem of cognitive nature (Keesing, 1979, p. 14-15), as the ability of discourse production and understanding is based on the linguistic skills as well as knowledge of the world (Van Dijk, 2014).

Despite a lot of literature on the subject, not so much attention has been paid to the linguo-cultural approach to the phenomenon of soubriquet nomination in terms of linguistic and cultural knowledge acquisition aimed at cultural awareness and language proficiency, as well as intercultural competence development.

3. MATERIAL AND METHODS

3.1. Research material

The study material was retrieved from the English language sources, both lexicographic and reference, as well as the mass media discourse, in order to analyse culturally significant phenomena and corresponding linguistic means, important for students' background knowledge acquisition with reference to the global cultural continuum.

Most of the examples from the scope of the media deal with public figures' outstanding qualities evaluation and description by means of nicknames. Some of them are devoted to election campaigns and social events, represented in the traditional and newly emerging communication formats of passing information using the Internet, such as quizzes and questionnaires, as well as asynchronous, postponed online interactions (Jurida et al., 2016), such as discussion forums and surveys. English varieties referring to ethnicity, social and territorial divisions, along with their use as the means of international communication are subject to discussion in the course of the study.

The most complicated area of the analysis are soubriquets in fiction, embodying fancied words concerned with imagery and stylistic effect production via literal and metaphorical, sometimes camouflaged (Baranova, 2019) manifestations, relying on cultural and cognitive context. The material is taken from *The Go-Away Bird* and *The Por-*

tobello Road by Muriel Spark (Spark, 1984) that may be used as the source of linguo-cultural information for learners of English to extend their knowledge and world-view at the global and culture-specific levels. This also concerns possession of background knowledge, intellectual development of a personality and understanding of the peculiarities of linguistic consciousness. These works represent not only vivid examples of soubriquet coinage, but also lie in the mainstream of the intertextual tradition in the use of nicknames, created in accordance with various models and certain contextual functions.

3.2. Methods and techniques

In the course of the investigation, characterised by its integrative nature, the complex of methods have been used, according to the main purpose, which deals with cultural awareness and intercultural competence development in the language learning process, with a special focus on English soubriquet nominations as a reliable research source.

Thus, the following methods and techniques have been used: (1) lexicographic analysis that concerns with definitions borrowed from dictionaries; (2) semantic structural analysis that deals with the formation of linguistic meanings; (3) semantic functional analysis, which deals with the semantic manifestations of linguistic units in their dynamics; (4) linguo-stylistic and (5) functional-stylistic analyses, which help investigate the stylistic potential of linguistic units in language and actual speech; (6) contextual analysis, referring to context varieties that reveal the semantic and environmental specificity of language; (7) discourse analysis, which takes the linguistic, extralinguistic and linguistic-cognitive peculiarities of the units in question into consideration; (8) linguistic semiotic and (9) general semiotic analyses, both referring to the semiotic status of soubriquets in language, speech and extralinguistic reality; and (10) linguo-cultural analysis, which deals with culturally significant information and knowledge of a specific and global character, relevant to cultural awareness and intercultural competence development issues.

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4. STUDY AND RESULTS

4.1. Soubriquet nomination as part of the cultural historical continuum

Because of its evaluative characteristics, a nickname can be regarded as an important axiological element of discourse and an indicator of attitudes of society to an individual, created on the basis of outstanding features of the object of nomination. Evaluative properties of anthroponymic nicknames may be realised both at the explicit and implicit levels of expression. Evaluation can be regarded as the most important functional, semantic and pragmatic quality of the units in question. Anthroponymic nicknames reflect national-cultural mentality by means of associative and figurative linguistic meanings due to individual or collective cultural preferences and the basic values of the society. In terms of the linguo-cultural approach, a nickname is a repository of cultural and linguistic information passed on to subsequent generations. While taking into consideration the social characteristics of a secondary name, which, in contrast with the official name and surname, is peripheral in its status, it should be mentioned that motivational factors are of vital importance, as the first stage of nickname emergence within a social-cultural environment is primarily subjective. In this regard, a special role is played by ethnic and territorial nicknames that serve to express interpersonal and intergroup relations, created in accordance with common associations, such as colour of skin (*darky, black, red-skin*), attributes of material culture (*blue-bonnet, kiltie, blanket-Indian*), associations related to food traditions (*potato-eater, frog-eater, hans-wurst*), thus encoding socially significant and sometimes subjectively evaluative information in coordination with the scale of cultural values.

Most collective soubriquets function as stylistically neutral units, which in the course of time have lost their expressive colouring and are now used to indicate the object as belonging to a certain layer or group of society. Many of them are common nouns and may indicate any member of a given linguo-cultural community, serving as manifestations of a stereotypical approach to soubriquets.

Apart from the problem of evaluation, soubriquet nominations present a special interest from the cultural point of view due to their historical and linguistic development. Many of them are used as proper names to refer to real or fictional people, e.g. John Bull, Uncle Sam, Johnny Canuck, etc. Problems may arise in connection with their meaning, origin and functioning. For example, the etymology of the word *canuck* has not been clarified so far and, according to some sources, is associated with the Latin word *canis* ('a dog'), which goes back to the early modes of travelling in the northern parts of the country. In lexicographical sources the word *canuck* is defined as an informal soubriquet, as in 'a Canadian, especially one whose first language is French' (West, 2006, p. 194), and is also referred to the notion of French Canadian, sometimes used as a disparaging term (Hornby, 1974, p. 124). Johnny Canuck is a collective nickname possessing various evaluative connotations. In the 1970s in the United States it was associated with people from Quebec and had an extremely offensive, pejorative colouring that signified low social status. As for positive evaluative connotations, it is accepted by the Canadians, who consider it to be related to the Canadian cultural uniqueness. Cultural information associated with this particular soubriquet is usually linked to a comic book image of Johnny Canuck that appeared in Canada in 1869 that later made the character be perceived as a World War II hero. For thirty years, up to the early 20th century, Johnny Canuck has been the main character of editorial cartoons, and is still accepted as a personified image of Canada, used in various spheres of representation. For example, The Vancouver Canucks, a professional ice hockey team in the NHL, used Johnny Canuck as their logo until 1970. This sort

of cultural linguistic material tends to be regarded as an important piece of information for the learners' cultural awareness development and should be considered a precious part of background knowledge for establishing intercultural contacts, in the case of situations where appropriate communication tactics and strategies are applied.

Many collective nicknames are used as nominations of residents of certain areas, territories or states, and although their linguistic representations bear various inherent connotations, their stylistic colouring may not be evidently manifested in everyday speech, as in *cockroach* referring to a resident of New South Wales, *crow eater* referring to South Australian residents, or *coat hanger* used to refer to the citizens of Sydney (Allan, 2013). Some of the nicknames are associated with geographical position, historical events, situations significant for a given society, real or fictitious, characterising the specificity of culture and uniqueness of linguistic consciousness.

Extensive use of contractions within the scope of soubriquet nomination can be regarded as one of the current trends typical of the English-speaking community. Abbreviation is designed to use the most effective and heuristically justified linguistic means to convey the message in the most semantically capacious, optimised way, which can be analysed in terms of neology. A New Zealand anthroponymicon incorporates abbreviations like *ocker* or *Aussie* (Australian), *Sa* (a native of Samoa), *dally* (a native of Yugoslavia), *bro* (brother), *cuz* or *cuzzy* (cousin as referred to Maori), *JAFa* (Just Another Friendly Aucklander).

The tradition, typical of English-speaking communities, of using nicknames in everyday speech goes back to ancient times when soubriquets began to emerge as the result of the reality-specific cognitive division, due to the peculiarities of linguistic consciousness, among which are reliance on individual experience and individualised perception of the world associated with concealment of subjective evaluative representations, emotions and categorical attitudes along with uniqueness and certainty of assessment, as well as manifesta-

tions of humorous, ironic or sarcastic overtones, accompanied by the propensity for allegorical comprehension of the reality, to a certain extent determined by old folk and religious customs to use names that disguise and encrypt the entities behind them.

Among the nicknames of an individual nature, political nicknames and nicknames of public figures deserve particular attention. For example, nicknames of American political leaders are widely spread and reflect the most prominent characteristics of outstanding people having to do with their origin, occupation, race, nationality, education, modes of behaviour and political activities, as in *Handsome Frank* (Franklin Pierce), *Boatman Jim* (James A. Garfield), *Peanut Farmer* (Jimmy Carter), *Bush Original* (George H. W. Bush), *Wild Bill* (Bill Clinton), *Puppet Jones* (Doug Jones), *Evan McMuffin* (Evan McMullin) (List of nicknames of United States Presidents, 2020; List of nicknames used by Donald Trump, 2020). The cultural historical aspect of the material presented deserves particular attention from the point of view of its linguistic and cultural peculiarities as in order to understand most of them the possession of certain background knowledge is needed, which may serve as an incentive to penetrate into the cultural historical and social context of the community in question. For example, *Wild Bill*, used by Donald Trump while mentioning Bill Clinton, alludes to the 19th century American Old West personage, famous for his notoriety, involvement in gunfights and fabricated tales he told about himself, James Butler Hickok, known as 'Wild Bill' Hickok, which in a sense may be associated with certain aspects of Clinton's personality.

Nicknames based on metaphorical structures, including those, which by analogy contain names of other politicians or public figures, are widely used to express attitudes towards a personality or concept (including sports teams names, music bands, pseudonyms) by producing memes and singling them out semiotically (Aslan, 2018; Vishnyakova & Alexandrova, 2015) within the frames of evaluative (negative or positive) representations in politics (Akbar & Abbas, 2019; Van

Dijk, 2017). In the political media discourse, concerned with election campaigns and corresponding events, one may come across examples like *Heartless Hillary*, *Crooked Hillary* (Engel, 2016), *Barack O'Change Obama*, *Obama bin Laden*, or *Barack Saddam Hussein Osama* (Obama nicknames, 2010) and many others. Donald Trump, in order to debunk Hillary Clinton's public image, called her *America's Angela Merkel*, whose name was associated with migration policy in Germany and unacceptable in some social and economic circles (Schultheis, 2016).

With regard to current trends in information representation in the Internet, quizzes, questionnaires, surveys, forums, microblogging and social networking services like Twitter, as well as special websites, concerned with identifying and collecting nicknames are used for the purpose of promoting certain attitudes and creating stable evaluative stereotypes. This phenomenon deals with direct and indirect reference manifestations in the communicative space, which in the English-speaking linguo-cultural community goes back to various long-standing traditions and techniques, including provoking a rival before the fight. In this respect, the analysis of socio-cultural manifestations at the level of mass culture, with special reference to the Internet abilities mentioned (Shifman, 2013, p. 365) contributes to widening cultural knowledge on the basis of information arrays processing (Surbhi, 2016).

A vivid example of both meliorative and pejorative evaluative representations by means of soubriquets can be adduced as referring to Condoleezza Rice, fondly nicknamed *Black Flower in the White House* (Ryan, 2011), and scornfully characterised as *Brown Sugar*, which is associated with the slang meaning of the collocation (Vishnyakova et al., 2019, p. 71): '*Bush's nicknaming proclivity is noted enough to have attracted a variety of satire, including a New York Times humour piece and a Doonesbury strip where 'Condi' is admonished with the phrase 'Careful, Brown Sugar'*' (Trudeau, 2004).

Thus, political media discourse can be regarded as a fertile field for nicknames investigation. Political

soubriquets used as manipulative instruments by politicians, in the course of time, due to frequency of occurrence, became part of national lexicon and are used as prototypical bases for new nicknames bearing new meanings and connotations of their own. In terms of cultural awareness and intercultural competence, the phenomenon in question is closely connected not only with background knowledge and understanding cultural traditions, but also with culturally and politically correct social and linguistic behaviour in certain contexts and situations.

4.2. Soubriquet nomination in fiction

The use of anthroponymic nicknames realised in literary art is by no means related to motivational issues that concern both linguistic and cultural cognition properties, closely connected with their contextual and discursive characteristics. In this regard, an important role belongs to the symbolic function of soubriquets, which may correspond to the process of soubriquet nomination based on the parameter of similarity, at the same time playing the role of a key stimulus for the narration development on the symbolic basis. For instance, in Muriel Spark's *The Go-Away Bird* one may come across the intertextual phenomenon that alludes to the corpus of family nicknames, used in Kenneth Graham's *The Wind in the Willows*. Some of her characters were nicknamed after those in *The Wind in the Willows* (e.g. *Rat*, *Mole*, *Toad*), others named from as yet unaccountable sources (e.g. her uncle *Pooh-bah*, and *the Dong*). The Du Toits could not quite follow the drift of Daphne's letters from England when she read them aloud, herself carried away the poetry of the thing: '*Rat,*' she would explain, '*is Henry Middleton, Molly's husband. He's in the navy;*' '*Next week-end, while Linda was away, several Pattersons relations arrived. Molly, Rat, Mole, and an infant called Pod. Mole was an unattached male cousin. Daphne expressed a desire to see Cambridge. He said it would be arranged. He said she would probably be in London soon. He said he hoped to see her there. Aunt Sara stuck a pin in the baby's arm, whereupon Molly and Rat took Daphne aside and*

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advised her to clear out of the house as soon as possible'; 'She decided to take a job in the autumn, and to cut out the fortnight's motoring tour of the north with Molly, Rat, and Mole which she had arranged to share with them'.

Another group of family nicknames in Muriel Spark's story is based on onomatopoeia as referred to one of the character's (*Pooh-bah*) disease symptoms: *'She herself adored Pooh-bah with his rheumatism and long woolen combies'; 'Daphne went for walks with Uncle Pooh-bah. She had to take short steps, for he was slow'; 'Linda and Daphne had to sit by a one-bar electric fire in the library if they wanted to smoke; Pooh-bah's asthma was affected by cigarette smoke'*. Thus, the use of these units in the function of nicknames is aimed at attaining certain artistic goals due to the need for a vivid, realistic, as well as ironic description of the environment in question, which alludes to the traditional social routine, verbally represented even at the level of nicknames borrowed from the literature of the past, and opposed to the metaphorical meaning of *The Go-Away Bird's* key concept of the story. The narration concerns with the description of social-historical events referring to some members of the English-speaking communities, travelling from one part of the world to another, acquiring new knowledge of the world and some features of multicultural mentality.

The phraseological fund of language serves as an important culturally determined source of soubriquets. For example, in the story *The Portobello Road*, the well-known concept of 'a needle in a hay stack' is used as the central issue of the plot, where its main character, who found a needle in a haystack and pricked her finger, and later was killed in a haystack, received a situational nickname *Needle*, that becomes the key component of the story and its major symbol. In the course of

narration, it acquires new shades of meaning, undergoes semantic transformations and conceptually carries association with a whole range of new meaningful features within the context, represented by such units as 'blood', 'pain', 'secret', 'murder', 'love', etc., being semantically and functionally located around 'a needle in a hay stack' concept and the soubriquet *Needle*, which stands for the real name of the girl. The system of proper names in the story also includes names and nicknames, all of them symbolic and playing important roles from the literary creative point of view.

Interestingly, some of the characters are represented by their real names, with complicated associative relations between the original meanings of the units in question and the characters' nature and behavioural peculiarities, while other characters go by their nicknames, contextually and semantically concerned with their personal features with regard to the meaning of phraseological units performing as key concepts within the literary space of the story. For example, *Skinny* (John Skinner) gets involved in the situations conceptually correlated with the phrase 'to pierce one's skin with a needle' content structure as referred to his relations with *Needle*: *'I got engaged to Skinny, but shortly after that I was left a small legacy, enough to keep me for six months. This somehow decided that I didn't love Skinny so I gave him back the ring'; 'But it was through Skinny that I went to Africa.... Skinny vouched for me, he paid my fare, and he sympathised by his action with my inconsequential life although when he spoke of it he disapproved'; 'After the war Skinny returned to his studies. He had two more exams, over a period of eighteen months, and I thought I might marry him when the exams were over'; 'I visited Skinny twice in the two years that he was in the sanatorium. I told Kathleen after my last visit. Maybe I'll marry Skinny when he's well again'*. Within the artistic space of the story, soubriquets, as opposed to usual names, are regarded as direct and truthful reflection of the characters' nature, indicating the 'anthroponymic boundary' between the nicknames realness and the names falseness, which reflects one of the outstanding characteristics of

Muriel Spark's artistic method and creative vision that later found representation in various, even unpredictable, spheres of social communication (Lopez, 2020).

Thus, the profound background knowledge in reference to proper names etymology and functioning provides deep understanding of the explicit and implicit meanings of a literary work, which supplies important cultural and philological information to the reader for the sake of their literary and cultural intelligence.

5. CONCLUSION

The problem of linguistic knowledge and knowledge of the world correlation as applied to intercultural competence and cultural awareness development deals with the analysis of linguistic meanings and structures, as well as corresponding contexts that express more or less vividly represented cultural phenomena and processes. Soubriquet nominations can be regarded within these terms as the linguistic cultural material that suits the didactic purpose under consideration as the linguistic, cultural and conceptual world view properties in their integrity are manifested by their meanings, both semantic and evaluative.

Research in the field of soubriquet nominations as part of a cultural historical continuum shows that much attention can be given to dynamics of the historical and social development of linguo-cultural communities, including linguistic and cultural variation properties, as referred, for example, to the English language, in which a number of its varieties characterised by their cultural reality interpretations are presented. For the process of cultural awareness and intercultural competence, along with language proficiency development, the status of English as the means of international communication should be taken into consideration as well. In this regard, possession of cultural background knowledge in terms of the functioning of various layers of language is particularly important. The analysis of the cultural potential of soubriquets may serve to illustrate the ways language is used in linguo-cultural communities and social areas under consideration.

Current trends in the semantic and semiotic development of linguistic units observed in soubriquet nominations use within the political discourse deserve special attention from the point of view of cultural awareness formation as it deals with the requirements of clear understanding of new tendencies in human communication in general and political communication in particular, referring to the interaction of traditional issues and new concepts within the society under consideration. This is because a nickname that presents evaluation not only expresses and forms the subjective attitude to a personality in a given situation but is also used as a means of meme production encoded by the word, which penetrates into the minds of the target audience and functions as a widespread informational unit in the society. This observation is closely connected with the problem of the word image and its symbolic role in manipulating individuals and societies, as referred to different types of cultures and communities, as well as the new formats of information and knowledge procession and dissemination, vitally important for the development of cultural awareness and intercultural competence.

The analysis of literary sources, in which soubriquets are used to achieve a certain artistic goal, seems to be the most complicated area in terms of adequate interpretations and understanding taking into consideration the author's literary intentions along with cultural and conceptual background that helps decode the artistic message. The use of proper names in a literary work, nicknames among them, plays a significant role in the process of inspiring the reader to acquire cultural background knowledge, which also can be used both in further communication and new knowledge formats possession.

It should be emphasised, that the notion of cultural knowledge, which is significant for intercultural competence and cultural awareness development, covers not only the issues of cultural phenomena and the specifics of their representation in the linguistic meaning but also the entire cultural background of the existence and functioning of linguo-cultural communities.

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