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SOME REMARKS ON CULTURAL CONNOTATIONS OF URBANONYMS AND IDIOMACITY IN A CONTRASTIVE PERSPECTIVE

1. Introduction

In a linguo-cultural perspective proper names constitute a group within which a number of onyms evoke cultural connotations in language users. Such names tend to be culture-bound and they are included in the idiomicon of a given language, being part of its collective memory.¹⁾ Therefore, such units are particularly interesting in a contrastive perspective. So far little attention has been paid to urbanonyms²⁾ as carriers of cultural connotations and their cross-linguistic equivalents. Cultural connotation, understood as “the interpretative relation between linguistic signs and symbols of any other cultural non-verbal code”,³⁾ can be evoked by any culturally marked words, either common names or proper names.

Nowadays urban culture is developing rapidly with language users finding socio-cultural benchmarks in everyday contexts, and, as a result, more and more urbanonyms function as units carrying connotations, which motivate numerous language phenomena, such as single-word metaphors or phraseological units of various kinds, including proverbial expressions. The names in question tend to be culture-bound units, expressing evaluations or emotional attitudes of language users, in many cases specific to a given culture.

¹⁾ Cf. Ch. Taylor, *Language to Language, A practical and theoretical guide for Italian / English translators*, Cambridge 1998, pp. 103–106; A. Sabban, *Culture-boundness and problems of cross-cultural phraseology*. In: H. Burger – D. Dobrovolskij – P. Kühn (eds.), *Phraseologie / Phraseology. Ein internationales Handbuch zeitgenössischer Forschung / An International Handbook of Contemporary Research*, Berlin 2007, pp. 590–605; A. Sabban, *Critical observations on the culture-boundness of phraseology*. In: S. Granger – F. Meunier (eds.), *Phraseology. An interdisciplinary perspective*, Amsterdam – Philadelphia 2008, pp. 229–241.

²⁾ For the definition of the terms *urbanonym* as well as the differences between the terms *urbonym* and *urbanonym* see: R. Šrámek, *Urbanonymie a urbanonymie*. *Onomastický zpravodaj*, ČSAV 31, 1990, pp. 65–67.

³⁾ V. Teliga – N. Bragina – E. Oparina – I. Sandomirskaja, *Phraseology as a Language of Culture: Its Role in the Representation of a Collective Mentality*. In: A. P. Cowie (ed.), *Phraseology. Theory, Analysis, and Applications*, Oxford 2001, p. 59.

The present paper aims at shedding light on urbanonyms carrying cultural connotations viewed in a contrastive perspective, with a special focus on their cross-linguistic equivalents. Special attention is paid to translatability of such units and their lexicographic description, which is particularly important from the point of view of translation studies and foreign language teaching. The typology of cross-linguistic equivalents is developed, exemplified and discussed. Selected techniques of translation of the onyms at issue are presented in the paper as well.

2. Urbanonyms and idiomacity

Proper nouns of all kinds, which function in a given language, can be carriers of cultural connotations. Anthroponyms constitute the biggest group of onyms which have connotative potential, while the second biggest is made up of toponyms.⁴⁾ The term *toponym* encompasses a number of different kinds of place names.⁵⁾ The group chosen for the analysis is composed of urbanonyms. The term *urbanonym* can be used in a narrow or broad sense and in the present paper it is used in the latter one, i.e. urban place names are defined as “a group of names nominating a variety of places in the urban space”.⁶⁾ Such names, like any other proper names, can develop cultural connotations, which result in their idiomatic character.

According to Kramersch, “language expresses cultural reality (...), language embodies cultural reality (...), language symbolizes cultural reality”.⁷⁾ The relation between language and culture, summarized by Kramersch, is very important in a contrastive perspective. It is closely connected with idiomacity, which is defined as a universal property which a language needs to expand its expressive possibilities.⁸⁾ The term *idiomacity* is used with reference to a number of phenomena, one of which, i.e. urbanonyms having cultural connotations, is discussed in the present paper.

Such proper names tend to have two functions, i.e. a denotative one, as proper name and a connotative one, as common name. They may undergo the process called

⁴⁾ J. Szerszunowicz, Some remarks on the evaluative connotations of toponymic idioms in a contrastive perspective. In: R. Corrigan – E. A. Moravcsik – H. Ouali – K. M. Wheatley (eds.), *Formulaic Language, Volume 1, Distribution and historical change*, Amsterdam – Philadelphia 2009, pp. 173–174.

⁵⁾ Cf. T. McArthur (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to the English Language*, Oxford 1996, pp. 704–705.

⁶⁾ K. Handke, *Nazewnictwo miejskie*. In: E. Rzetelska-Feleszko (ed.), *Encyklopedia polskie nazwy własne*, Warszawa – Kraków 1998, pp. 283–306; E. Rzetelska-Feleszko – A. Cieślíkowa (eds.) – J. Duma (cooperation), *Słowiańska onomastyka. Encyklopedia*, Vol. 2, Warszawa – Kraków 2003, p. 294.

⁷⁾ C. Kramersch, *Language and Culture*, Oxford 2000, p. 3.

deonymization,⁹⁾ as a result of which they are used as metonymies (e.g. *Harley Street* ODLPN: 104, *Madison Avenue* MED: 860) or metaphors (e.g. *the Ritz*, *Piccadilly Circus* ODLPN: 178). Using the term *antonomasia* to describe the phenomenon renders it possible to create a sense of continuity of metonymy and metaphor. Actually, there are various possibilities of secondary uses of proper names,¹⁰⁾ for instance creating derivatives or using a given name as a constituent of a phraseological unit.

3. The urbanonym as a carrier of emotions and evaluations

In general, many proper names are emotionally marked and convey evaluations, which tend to be bipolar and scalar.¹¹⁾ A multifactorial analysis of urbanonyms shows that numerous names are carriers of axiological and emotional load, evoking cultural connotations in language users.¹²⁾ It should be stressed that the connotations at issue are of different character, i.e. they can be decoded by a number of language communities, which means they are internationally understood, e.g. *the Ritz* connotes luxury. Second, some urbanonyms can carry cultural connotations only one language community is familiar with; thus, they are decoded at the national level.¹³⁾ For instance, it can be assumed that the name *Billingsgate* evokes connotations such as vulgarity in the citizens of Great Britain. Furthermore, some connotations of local character, which means the name evokes given connotations in language users of a particular area, for instance, the name *Pitt Street* evokes cultural connotation in inhabitants of Sydney.

⁸⁾ F. Columas, Idiomasität: Zur Universalität des Idiosynkratischen, *Linguistische Berichte* 72, 1981, pp. 27–50.

⁹⁾ M. Rutkowski, Apelatywizacja a deonimizacja. Z rozważań nad zakresem terminów. In: A. Cieślakowa – B. Czopek-Kopciuch – K. Skowronek (eds.), *Nowe nazwy własne – nowe tendencje badawcze*, Kraków 2007; M. Rutkowski, Metafory motywowane metonimicznie (metaftonimie) na przykładzie nazw własnych, *Białostockie Archiwum Językowe* 8, 2008, pp. 95–104.

¹⁰⁾ E. Rudnicka, Eponimizmy versus eponimy. Eponimizmy jako efekt apelatywizacji eponimów. In: Z. Abramowicz – E. Bogdanowicz (eds.), *Onimizacja i apelatywizacja*, Białystok 2006, pp. 194–198.

¹¹⁾ F. Čermák, Functional System and Evaluation. In: E. Hajičová – M. Červenka – O. Leška – P. Sgall (eds.), *Travaux du Cercle linguistique de Prague n.s. Prague Linguistic Circle Papers*, Vol. I, Amsterdam – Philadelphia 1995, pp. 73–84.

¹²⁾ Cf. B. Dereń, *Pochodne nazw własnych w słowniku i w tekście*, Opole 2005, pp. 37–51.

¹³⁾ S. Gajda, Narodowokulturowy składnik znaczenia nazw własnych w aspekcie edukacyjnym. In: R. Mrózek (ed.), *Nazwy własne w języku, kulturze i komunikacji społecznej*, Katowice 2004, p. 24–26.

Thus, a number of urbanonyms function as conventionalized metaphors in a given language, some of which are registered in lexicographic works (e.g. CHD, CIDE, DMD, MED, NPED, ODI, OGBAC, PPR), for example: Eng. *Bedlam* ‘a noisy and confusing place or situation: chaos’; from the name of an old psychiatric hospital in the UK (MED: 109); *Fleet Street* ‘the British newspaper industry’ “The offices of most national newspapers were in this street in central London in the past. (...)” (MED: 535); *Tin Pan Alley* informal ‘the people who write, produce, and play popular music, or the part of a city where they work’ (MED: 1508); *Billingsgate* ‘a famous old London fish market that used to be on the north bank of the Thames in the City. It was well known for the bad language of the people who worked there’ (OGBAC: 53).

Moreover, it is worth observing that some urbanonymic conventional metaphors can serve as a base for derivatives, which can be registered in lexicographic works. For instance, the adjective *ritzy*, used in informal variety of the English language, which means ‘expensive and fashionable’ (MDE: 1227), ‘expensive, fashionable and luxurious’ (CIDE: 1227) ‘ostentatiously smart’ (NPED: 1207), ‘very smart and elegant’ (CHD: 1210). The base of the adjectival derivative at issue is the name of the Ritz Hotels (OGBAC: 454), noted for their opulence. Lexicographic works also register other derivatives, for instance, the adverb *ritzily* and the noun *ritziness* (NPED: 1207; CHD: 1210). As to the onym, it is worth adding that it is also a constituent of idioms, for instance *You are not at the Ritz!*, a pragmatic unit used to suggest that somebody should not expect luxury (PDEI: 209), and *put on the Ritz* (‘make a show of luxury and extravagance’ ODI: 243).

It should be emphasized that numerous urbanonymic metaphors are not registered in lexicographic works, for instance, *Meksyk* is an informal name of a district called Starosielce in Białystok, a city in Poland, means ‘a dangerous place’. The conventional metaphor is known to the vast majority of the inhabitants of the city of Białystok. Metaphorical meanings of urbanonyms functioning in a given place can be determined as a result of field research, for examples interviews and questionnaires done with inhabitants of the city.

Furthermore, attention should be paid to polysemy or indeterminacy of the urbanonym’s metaphorical meaning. Peters gives the example of the *Gowings* case as illustration of the problem at issue. The expression, used in Australian English, contains an onym which is the name of a men’s department store in Sydney. The origins of the phrase *gone to Gowings*, which Peters describes as “a metropolitan idiom”, are connected with a series of advertisements, showing scenes vacated by those who had gone to find bargains in the department store. There was an advertisement set in a church in which the bridegroom was absent and an explanatory note *Gone to Gowings* was fastened to the altar. Therefore, the unit at issue was used to refer to a general excuse for somebody’s absence, the reasons of which cannot be

specified or should not be given. As a result of the elusive character, the idiomatic expression *gone to the Gowings* is used to euphemistically describe financial deterioration, failure of a horse or a sports team to win, illness, overconsumption of alcohol and hangover as well as dementia.¹⁴⁾ This example shows how an urbanonym's connotative potential of indeterminate character can be exploited by language users.

The cultural connotations of urbanonyms can motivate phraseological units. Many various proper names function as constituents of idiomatic expressions.¹⁵⁾ For example, the evaluative potential of the urbanonym can be exploited in a given phraseological unit, as it is in the idiom *swear like a Billingsgate fishwife*. Moreover, some urbanonyms are vital means of expressing culture-bound concepts. To illustrate the phenomenon two units will be presented. The first one, the Italian idiom *aver bevuto l'acqua del porcellino* (lit. to have drunk the water from the wild boar DMD: 5) contains the name of a bronze image of a wild boar which adorns a famous fountain at Logge del Mercato Vecchio in Florence. The meaning of the unit is 'be a Florence citizen, with all typical qualities'. The other item, *be born within the sound of Bow Bells*, has the name of a church as its constituent. The meaning of the units is 'to be a true cockney'. Both idioms exploit the connotative potential of the onyms which are their constituents.

The knowledge of metaphorical potential is part of linguo-cultural competence of a language user.¹⁶⁾ Therefore, the notion of the urban mental map, understood as a collection of connotative potentials of urbanonyms in a given language, is of great importance in a cross-linguistic perspective. Advanced foreign language learners need to gain the knowledge of metaphorical meanings of urbanonyms in order to develop their intercultural competence. Moreover, secondary meanings of urbanonyms are important from the point of view of translation studies.

Therefore, the connotative potential of urbanonyms, likewise all other proper names functioning in a given language, requires a proper lexicographic description.¹⁷⁾

¹⁴⁾ P. Peters, Similes and other evaluative idioms in Australian English. In: P. Skandera (ed.), *Phraseology and Culture in English*, Berlin – New York 2007, pp. 235–255.

¹⁵⁾ S. Fiedler, *English Phraseology*, Tübingen 2007.

¹⁶⁾ J. Szerszunowicz, The Metaphorical Potential of Place Names in a Contrastive Perspective. In: К. К. Красовский – Е. К. Климец – Ю. Ф. Рой – О. И. Грядунова (eds.), *География в XXI веке: проблемы и перспективы развития. Материалы Международной научно-практической конференции*, Брест 2008, pp. 154–155 (abstract).

¹⁷⁾ J. Szerszunowicz, On the Presentation of Onomastic Idioms in Bilingual English-Polish Dictionaries of Idioms. In: E. Bernal – J. DeCesaris (eds.), *Proceedings of the XIII Euralex Congress*, Barcelona 2008, pp. 909–914.

The inclusion of connotations of a given urbanonym supplemented with authentic examples from a variety of texts, both spoken and written, is a prerequisite to a proper command of a given onym, necessary for having a good command of a given language.

4. Urbanonyms and cross-linguistic equivalence

In a contrastive perspective one can distinguish some groups of cross-linguistic equivalents of urbanonyms evoking cultural connotations),¹⁸⁾ the first of which is composed of full equivalents, i.e. urban names, which function in the same form and have the same connotations in the target language and in the source language. The following pair of urbanonyms illustrates the relation described: Eng. *The Ritz* ‘any of a number of hotels around the world established by or named after the Swiss businessman César Ritz (1850–1918). They are famous for being comfortable and expensive’ OGBAC: 454 → Pol. *Ritz* (‘good quality hotel’; ‘best hotel’). In fact, one can assume that such units and their cross-linguistic equivalents are unlikely to be identical if a number of parameters, such as stylistic markedness, frequency etc. are taken into consideration. Therefore, the term *quasi-equivalents* is more adequate to describe the units at issue.

The second group is composed of partial equivalents, i.e. urbanonyms having given cultural connotations in the source language and different urbanonyms in the target language whose cultural connotations are identical or very similar in to the ones the source language urbanonyms have. For example, in English and Polish there are urbanonyms used metaphorically to name a busy place: AmE *Grand Central Station* ‘best known railway station in the US. It is on East 42nd Street in New York (...). The main area is very large, and the trains enter and leave the station on 123 tracks, arranged on two levels’ (OGBAC: 230) → BrE *Piccadilly Circus* ‘a place in the West End of London, England, where several famous streets meet, including Piccadilly, Regent Street, Shaftesbury Avenue. Noisy, crowded places are sometimes compared to Piccadilly Circus’ (OGBA: 413) → Polish *Marszałkowska* (cf. *ruch jak na Marszałkowskiej* lit. traffic like in Marszałkowska; used in Warsaw; Marszałkowska is a street in Warsaw known for being very busy; WSFJP: 676). Such units as those

¹⁸⁾ J. Szerszunowicz, Some Remarks on Equivalents of Toponymic Idioms in a Contrastive Perspective. In: L. I. Korneeva – T. V. Kuprina – O. V. Obvinceva (eds.), *Inostrannye yazyki i literatura v sovremennom mezhdunarodnom obrazovatelnom prostranstve. Sbornik naucznych trudov*. Vol. 1, Ekaterinburg 2007, pp. 299–304; I. Vidović-Bolt – J. Szerszunowicz, On the Croatian Toponymic Phraseological Units and Their Polish Equivalents. In: J. F. Nosowicz – J. Gorbacz (eds.), *Edukacja dla przyszłości*, Vol. V, Białystok 2008, pp. 135–146.

listed, even though they differ in imagery, can be used as functional equivalents in some contexts.¹⁹⁾

The third group of equivalents of urbanonyms evoking cultural connotation in language users is made up of descriptive equivalents, which means that the source language urbanonym is substituted by a phrase of descriptive character, i.e. the phrase does not contain the source language urbanonym or any target language urbanonym. For example, the English urbanonym *Madison Avenue* can be translated into the Polish language as *przemysł reklamowy Ameryki* (lit. advertising industry of America). What is lost in translation is the imagery of the source language urbanonym.

Moreover, the urbanonym which is a carrier of cultural connotation in the source language can be transferred to the target language with explanatory amplification, i.e. the information regarding the cultural connotation of the urbanonym at issue: Eng. *Harley Street* → *Harley Street, ulica w sercu Londynu, gdzie znajdują się gabinety drogich lekarzy* (lit. Harley Street, the street in the heart of London, where surgeries of expensive doctors are). Such amplifications function as a compensation means, which are necessary, since the English urbanonyms at issue do not evoke any connotations in native users of the Polish language. Therefore, using the urbanonyms in the target language without amplifications can result in a sense of so-called concrete foreignness in the receiver of the translated text.²⁰⁾

In a cross-linguistic perspective urbanonyms conveying cultural information pose certain problems of great importance for translation. The first problem is the difficulty connected with proper decoding a given urbanonym as a metaphor in a particular context. Providing that it is done successfully, the meaning is to be determined, which may cause problems due to the polysemy of the unit or the indeterminacy of its meaning. Furthermore, choosing the best equivalent of the urbanonym is a complex process which is to be completed in order to achieve a good quality translation of the unit. It involves the analysis of all possible equivalents of the urbanonym in question in the target language. It should be stressed that the choice of the cross-linguistic equivalent depends heavily on the context.

5. Conclusions

The knowledge of the cultural connotations of urbanonyms should be considered as part of being bilingual and bicultural, which is an important implication for foreign language teaching, translation studies and lexicography. Connotations of urbanonyms are exploited in a variety of written and spoken texts and they perform a variety of

¹⁹⁾ D. Dobrovolskij – E. Piirainen, *Figurative Language: Cross-cultural and Cross-linguistic Perspectives*, Amsterdam 2005, pp. 63–67.

²⁰⁾ Cf. R. Lewicki, *Obcość w odbiorze przekładu*, Lublin 2000.

functions. Therefore, having a good command of a given language entails being able to use urbanonyms as secondaryonyms evoking connotations and to decode them properly when used in discourse.

Urbanonyms require a proper lexicographic description, covering their connotative potential and emotional markedness in a given language. The inclusion of detailed lexicographic information regarding connotative load of a given urbanonym enables language learners to gain knowledge necessary to decode the units used in a variety of texts as well as facilitates the process of translation of texts containing the names at issue, thus improving the quality of the final product of the process.

List of Abbreviations

- CHD – M. Robinson (ed.), *Cambers 21st Century Dictionary*, Edinburgh 1996.
CIDE – P. Procter (ed.), *Cambridge International Dictionary of English*, Bath 1995.
DMD – B. M. Quartu, *Dizionario dei modi di dire della lingua italiana*, Milano 2001.
MED – M. Rundell (ed.), *Macmillan English Dictionary*, Oxford 2002.
NPED – R. Allen (consultant ed.), *The New Penguin English Dictionary*, London 2000.
ODI – J. Siefring (ed.), *Oxford Dictionary of Idioms*, Oxford 2005.
ODLPN – A. D. Mills, *Oxford Dictionary of London Place Names*, Oxford 2001.
OGBAC – J. Crowther (ed.), *Oxford Guide to British and American Culture*, Oxford 1999.
PDEI – D. E. Gulland – D. Hinds-Howell, *Penguin Dictionary of English Idioms*, London 2002.
PPR – M. Castoldi – U. Salvi, *Parole per ricordare. Dizionario della memoria collettiva. Usi evocativi, allusive e antonomastici della lingua italiana*, Bologna 2003.
WSFJP – P. Müldner-Nieckowski, *Wielki słownik frazeologiczny języka polskiego*, Warszawa 2003.

Resumé

Odkazy na kulturní konotace urbanonym a idiomatičnost v kontrastivní perspektivě

Urbanonyma (jména ulic, náměstí nebo ostatních míst ve městě) mohou nést kulturní konotace, které mají velký význam v kontrastivní perspektivě. Některá urbanonyma mají konotace univerzálního charakteru, jiné konotace jsou národní nebo lokální. V příspěvku je představena a analyzována typologie transjazykových ekvivalentů urbanonym nesoucích kulturní konotace. Znalost konotací vlastních jmen včetně urbanonym je částí bilingvního a bikulturního života. Konotativní potenciál urbano-

nym si vyžaduje vlastní lexikografický popis, který je zásadní při výuce cizího jazyka a v překladatelství.

Keywords

onomastics, urbanonyms, idiomacity