

New English name-based eponyms and their relations with Polish ones. The case of ‘Chad’, ‘Karen’, ‘Julka’ and ‘Karyna’ in social media

A review of the literature shows that name-based eponyms occur not only in the Polish language (Walkowiak 2020, Burkacka 2020) but also in Swedish (Sköldberg, Toporowska-Gronostaj 2008), Hungarian, Finnish (Sarhema 2018), and English (Menzie 2020, Podlecka 2021). While the very meaning of eponyms is inseparable from the language or culture in which they originated and spread, the mechanisms leading to their creation are universal. The cognitive processes that allow the transformation of proper nouns into common ones (eponyms) are metaphor and metonymy (Lalić 2004, Rutkowski 2007, 2008).

Since those processes lead also to the ‘sense-acquisition’ of names, users are capable of transferring foreign eponyms and their meaning as any other common nouns during the language contact episodes. However, not every attempt seems to be successful and I decided to describe factors that might be responsible for it in the case of ‘Chad’ and ‘Karen’. These English-originated eponyms marked their presence in Polish social media but only the first one became a popular youth slang word (PWN 2022).

My studies revealed that we absorbed the English eponym Chad very well and at some point failed during the same with Karen, despite the fact the second one is a much bigger phenomenon in the English-speaking world (Negra and Leyda 2021, Podlecka 2021). The analysis was possible by making and studying the first corpus of new Polish name-based eponyms and focusing on its socio-cultural background and linguistic factors.

In the analysis, I use a cognitive paradigm, following the metaphor and metonymy theories (Lakoff and Johnson 1988, Radden and Kövecses 1999, Langacker 2009, Wachowski 2019). However, I had to modify the classic models, due to their incapability to explain the source of the meaning we generate in metaphor and metonymy that includes new name-based eponyms. It is related to the special status of names subjected to appellativization. Classical examples (e.g. Judas) have a single personal root whose features are the source for the later eponym (e.g. You are such a Judas!). The same cannot be indicated in the case of new eponyms (e.g. Janusz), because their single personal source remains unknown, yet later meaning is still clear for the big non-related groups of language users (Rutkowski 2007, Walkowiak 2018).

With modified models, I described the creation mechanism of new name-based eponyms in Polish and English language. Afterward, I described their meanings in Polish examples, based on the data from social media. It led to the conclusion that social problems and conflicts related to the meanings of ‘Karen’ (such as a racial conflict) do not fit the socio-cultural reality of Poles (Negra and Leyda 2021). Also, the word ‘Karen’ is too similar on a phonological level to the already existing Polish eponym ‘Karyna’. Therefore ‘Karen’ is mixed and even supplanted by the native one. At the same time, ‘Chad’ has no such barriers and indicates a much more universal socio-cultural background as women vs men conflict (Menzie 2020), and one of its meanings refers to any kind of positive attitude, no matter in what case it was used. Because of that, ‘Chad’ can be easily implemented in the Polish context and even enter into a relationship with native Polish eponyms with similar meaning patterns, such as ‘Julka’ and ‘Oskarek’ (Chaciński 2020).

Literature

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