

Rapid Appellativation

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Abstract

The present study is devoted to one type of appellativation. By “appellativation” we mean the transference of a proper name into other various lexical systems – like nomenclature or terminology – or common lexis. There are different types of appellativation possible: full / partial, nominative / characterizing, gradual / rapid.

Rapid appellativation takes place when an onym gains wide popularity in several days due to a certain and often tragic event. The research task is to observe peculiar features of rapid appellativation on the factual basis of Russian linguoculture.

The names connected to the events tend to lose their main function which is individualization. In a certain period they get a strong reference to the mentioned event and thereafter to all similar events. Such onyms undergo some stages of semantic development in a short period, from simple nomination to appellativation. The process itself can be dated by exact days and one can easily observe and describe it.

For instance, in Russian linguistic consciousness a toponym *Beslan* and the name of a musical *Nord-Ost* can function as signifiers for any act of terrorism after the notorious terrorists’ attacks; the name of a military submarine *Kursk* and the name of cruise ship *Bulgariya* can be used to denote every man-made disaster. We give the examples of these and other names’ appellative usage taken from Russian mass media of the past decade. These examples demonstrate the names’ functions and semantic modifications.

Introduction

The present study is a part of a larger survey of linguocultural specificity of appellativation. Let us define **the key term of the study**. By “appellativation” Russian linguists mean the transference of a proper name into other various lexical systems – like nomenclature or terminology – or common lexis (Podolskaya, 1988, 37). This is one of the ways to enrich a language with new lexical units. Recent works on multilingual material have contributed to the contemporary understanding of the appellativation phenomenon. They vividly show the ambiguousness of this process, as well as its national and cultural-specific character. Summing up the types of appellativation drawn by various researchers, we would say that they can be classified on different grounds such as:

1. Full and partial appellativation are defined through the degree of transition into appellatives;
2. Nominative and characterizing appellativation through the absence or presence of an evaluative component;
3. Gradual and rapid through the duration of the process.

The classic and widely quoted examples of appellativation are the sort names of goods which were derived from the names of producers: *nylon*, *pampers*, *Xerox*, *thermos*, etc. Many of them lost their onomastic status not only in Russia but in other countries as well. As a result of long and active functioning in a language collective they start to be mentally connected to the properties of the advertised goods. They transfer into the common lexis layer and lose legal protection (Danesi, 2007; Kryukova, 2008). Meanwhile, a new appellative which has been derived from such an onym has neither visualization nor emotional evaluation. These are the examples of full nominative gradual appellativation.

Names with partial appellativation are characterized by an ability for practically equivalent usage both as an onym and as an appellative. Moreover, in the latter case the name

is used as a vivid figurative means (Langendonck, 2007). Partial appellativation can be observed when it comes to precedent onyms, which means the onyms connected to either a widely known precedent text or a situation known to native speakers only, and thus also considered precedent (Gudkov 1999).

In Russian papers over recent years the subject of study is mainly the precedent name which was firmly fixated in national linguocultural consciousness a long time ago. Its meaning is usually undoubted by the majority of natives: *Einstein* – genius, *Othello* – jealousy, *Plyushkin* – stinginess, etc. The development of these names' appellative meanings can hardly be examined because this process takes decades, if not centuries, to complete. They serve as a glaring example of partial characterizing gradual appellativation.

Nevertheless, social life and information space have been widened. This fact enables us to analyze the cases when an onym undergoes rapid development, which results in forming several appellative meanings.

The research task is to examine the peculiar features of rapid appellativation on the basis of Russian linguoculture. This phenomenon takes place when an onym becomes well-known in several days because of some events — often tragic ones. The names connected to such events lose their basic individualizing function, and in a certain quantum of time start to be connected with that event, and later with all events of the same kind. Such onyms pass through the stages of semantic development, starting with the onym state and ending with an appellative. The stages are passed through quickly and the process itself can be exactly dated, which makes it easy to examine and describe.

The data for study have been formed by over 1000 usage contexts of several names:

— *Nord Ost* (musical) and *Beslan* (toponym), which denote the places where terrorist attacks were committed;

— *Kursk* (submarine) and *Bulgariya* (river cruise ship), which refer to open water man-made disasters.

These contexts were found on various web sites of all-Russian large circulation newspapers, like *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, *Izvestiya*, etc. Television and radio broadcasts, including *Perviy Kanal*, *NTV*, *Kultura*, *Ekho Moskvy*, were also taken into account. The media data of the last ten years have also been analyzed.

For these onyms the date of partial characterizing appellativation is easy to determine.

Names used to designate a terrorist attack

Before the tragic events at Dubrovka Theater Center (October 23-26, 2002, Moscow) *Nord-Ost* was only known as the name a Russian musical based on Veniamin Kaverin's novel *Dva Kapitana* (*Two Captains*). The name was included in the topical range of musicals, like *Notre-Dame de Paris*, *42nd Street*, *Chicago*, and so on. It used to fulfill an advertising function and was syntagmatically connected with such words as *theater*, *musicians*, *actors*, *producer*, *orchestra* etc. On October 23 Chechen militants captured spectators and actors in the middle of the performance and kept them in the building with no demands. They mined the audience hall and held the people inside for three days. The result of a hostage release operation was shocking — all the terrorists were killed, but more than 130 hostages also died.

From October 23 the name of the musical started to recur in the media in connection with the attack. In one day the name gained a new meaning and went to the other lexical category. As it was said on the *Namedni* weekly infotainment show, *From now on Nord-Ost will mean a terrorist attack, it is not North-East anymore* (*NTV, Namedni*, November 19, 2002).

Practically all the media reacted to the name's status change right away and what is more they started to reflect its new connotative meanings. For instance, here is a very precise remark about the name's usage made just after two months after the attack had been committed: *The name Nord-Ost became common. Before the attack this North-Eastern wind*

used to denote the first Russian musical. Now saying it we hear shots and explosions, we see hopeless TV pictures of the assault and exhausted hostages... (Kultura TV Channel, December 26, 2002).

At first the name of the musical became a shortened nomination for the attack in Dubrovka, Moscow. Herewith, the name had not lost its onomastic status completely; it just transferred to the other onomastic class, which is the name of an event: *Right after Nord-Ost our life has started to turn to a more restful direction* (Perviy, Odnako, November 18, 2002). This metonymic type of meaning has practically no visualization, and it is regularly used in various languages for denoting an event with the name of a place where the event happened: for instance, Stalingrad, which is the name of a great battle, or Hiroshima, which is used for any case of a city's total destruction. Nevertheless, during the first several months after the attack had taken place, one could observe the development of a very generic metaphoric meaning. There were some issues in the Russian media devoted to the analysis of a complicated political situation which had led to the tragedy. The titles of these articles had the name of the musical in their main articles: e.g., *Nord-Ost in Russia is more than just Nord-Ost* (Rossiyskaya Gazeta, September 30, 2002) or *What's our life? – Nord-Ost* (Literaturnaya Gazeta, October 28, 2002). A politically competent reader was able to understand the metaphor easily. As a matter of fact, such usage is not characteristic of onyms.

Gradually the activeness of the name's usage went down. This is typical of all the names which have rapidly acquired appellative meanings. But exactly two years later another terrorist attack shocked Russia. On September 1, 2004, Chechen militants captured a school building in Beslan, North Ossetia. They kept 1100 hostages — mostly children, parents, and teachers — in absolutely inhuman living conditions. In three days the hostages were taken out by troops, but 330 people were killed, and 186 of that number were children. Beslan as a toponym had not been well known in Russia. From that moment it has become a keyword in the media. Moreover, Nord-Ost lost its metaphoric meaning and started to denote “some other location where alike events took place”. This meaning is often used at the position of a semantic predicate with the addition of qualifiers *second*, *new*, *another*, and such. These are typical titles of the time: *Beslan is just another Nord-Ost*; *Beslan: Nord-Ost, Episode 2*, and so on.

Later on the connection between the name *Nord-Ost* and the tragic event has been substituted for a connection to any object which has a certain characteristic feature: *We must be ready for a new Nord-Ost — anyone, anytime* (the *Izvestiya* weekly newspaper, October 23, 2006).

Thus *Nord-Ost* gained the meaning of “terrorist attack”. The name lost its advertising function and was included in a topical range of toponyms as a name of a town in Southern Russia where terrorist attacks took place (*Budyonovsk*, *Volgodonsk*, *Beslan*, and others). It acquired new syntagmatic connections with such words as *terrorists*, *bandits*, *militants*, *hostages*, *assault*, etc.

Names used to designate a man-made disaster

About the same time period we observed a similar case of semantic development, when the *Kursk* nuclear submarine sank in the Barents Sea on August 12, 2000.

Let us recite the meanings of the name in chronological order as they appeared in national mass media:

1. A single military technical unit. *According to the mission Kursk went out of Zapadnaya Litsa bay at 22:30 on August 10, 2000, and on the next day by 10:00 occupied the assigned sector* (the Rossiyskaya Gazeta, September 29, 2000). In this meaning the name keeps its onomastic status and fulfills the function of an object definition.

2. Any wrecked and sunk submarine or one likely to sink. *72 Meters – is a film about a Russian submarine, it's not exactly about Kursk, but many other similar kursks* (the Sovetskaya Rossiya, March 10, 2004). Here in one single context we see how onym and appellative meanings of the same word collide. Plural form serves as a marker of appellativation. It is not characteristic of onyms in their direct usage. This is how a name of a certain military unit gets associated with an open class of objects. Capital letters are replaced by lowercase which reflects natives' intuitive idea of the name's status change.
3. An open-water catastrophe with a big number of dead. *With such an approach we will have kursks and other catastrophes increased in number like salmons in breeding period* (*Zapolyarnaya Pravda*, October 9, 2005). A well-known name of an object is being transferred to some other object, which is less known or not known at all, but it bears the same basic characteristic.

By 2011 the name *Kursk* – in the aforementioned meanings – was not that often used in the media. But then another big disaster happened. On July 9, 2011, the *Bulgariya* cruise ship sank on the Volga River. Only 79 passengers of 205 saved their lives. Whole families with children perished. In a day the name of the ship became a precedent and started to be used with the same meanings as *Kursk*. The name *Kursk* was back in the meaning of “another catastrophe resembling some well-known one by a number of characteristics”. An expression *Bulgariya is just another Kursk* became frequently used in media. Besides that, *Bulgariya* is characterized with another world-known precedent name *Titanic* with the qualifiers *Volga, Russian, Kazan, second*.

As a natural result, the name *Bulgariya* was just the next day used for a generic characteristic of an irresponsible attitude on the part of businessmen and the government to people's lives. For instance, within three days after the incident there was an analytical article named *Strana Bulgariya (Bulgariyaland) (Moskovskiy Komsomolets, July 14, 2011)*. Its author tells about the absence of any responsibility for such incidents in our country.

In due course all the mentioned names, which have undergone rapid appellativation, acquire a new general meaning of “any tragic event with a prominent number of deceased”. They are often used in a single line – one after another – without any remarks. Herewith any new tragic event re-creates previous ones in native speakers' memories. For example: *This is our long-suffering motherland, with all its Beslans, Nord-Osts, Kursks and Chernobyls* (*Ekho Moskvyy* radio station, October 25, 2005). We would note that the toponym *Chernobyl* is also present in the line. This name metonymically means “a man-made disaster” after the incident at the Chernobyl Atomic Power Plant (May, 1986). Here is another example abstract, taken from the same radiocast, but 6 years later: *No one is responsible for anything in this country – neither for Kursk, nor Beslan nor Nord-Ost. And Bulgariya is no exception* (*Ekho Moskvyy* radio station, July 20, 2011). It is absolutely evident that the notional dominant of all these names is not connected with denotation anymore, but it is with a notion, whose forming was clearly witnessed by the investigator.

Conclusion

Summing up, we would like to mention that during the first days after every tragic event, which got into the media's special attention country-wide and abroad, a name connected to that event develops several figurative meanings, including:

- a metonymical meaning denoting a single tragic event – a terrorist attack, air-crash, traffic accident and such – with a great number of deceased people;
- a metaphorical meaning denoting some other single event, which is in one way or another like the other one, denoted by the onym;
- a metaphorical meaning denoting a generic notion of a possible event;

— a metaphorical meaning characterizing some social and political events, which may lead to tragic events.

In every new meaning we can see imagery intensification as well as a stress on emotive evaluative components in semantic structure. The last type of meaning is notable for greater predominance of notional attributes. In fact, here we can only deal with partial appellativation, for a name in this case loses the potential to correlate with a certain single object and to perform an individualizing function.

Formal grammar markers of appellativation for these and similar onyms are the development of a plural form and the potential for semantical predicate usage – with modifiers, like *new*, *second*, *another*. In some contexts capitalization is lost.

In conclusion, we would like to mention that in spite of substantial differences in denotative correlation of appellativized onyms, as well as in their emotional and expressive connotation and spheres of usage, all of them vividly demonstrate objects and phenomena of Russian linguoculture in a certain time. Therefore, they are still essential and promising objects for interdisciplinary research, made at the intersection of onomastics, pragmalinguistics and sociolinguistics.

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