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Opening a Pandora‘s box: translation equivalents of English phraseological units with onomastic components in and out of context

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"Not only every language, but every lexeme of a language, is an entire world in itself."

Igor Mel'čuk (1981:57)

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

- Phraseological units (PUs) with onomastic components (OCs) have been an attractive and **controversial research topic** in many scientific disciplines for a number of decades.
- They are of various origins, encompassing **international PUs**, like those of mythological or biblical origins, as well as other widespread units, whose origins are **culturally specific**.
- PUs have received a prominent status among speakers of different language communities and as such have become an integral part of the **foreign language (FL) curriculum** and **syllabus design**.
- Mastering PUs with OCs poses much of a **problem for FL learners** in their attempts to provide appropriate cross-linguistic/cross-cultural equivalents in the fields of phraseology, translation and interpretation

THE PRESENT STUDY

- The present study focuses on Croatian **translational equivalents** of the English PUs with OCs **in and out of context**.
- The analysis rests on the assumption that most PUs are **conceptually motivated** and not only a matter of language (cf. Talmy 2000; Croft and Cruse 2004, Evans 2006, Karpenko 2017).
- Our further attempt is to highlight the benefits of applying insights of **cognitive linguistics** in translation studies, and thereby provide EFL students with a keener awareness of the translation process directions and the knowledge structures.
- The present study rests upon Peti's (1999) and Marković's (2000) assumption that the OCs are good candidates for **semantic extensions** – metonymic, metaphoric or omnipersonal. The lexical meaning of the named entity thus arises from its **cognitive salience** and the total amount of **previous experiences** associated with it.
- Some **practical guidelines** are promoted to make the insights productive in the EFL educational contexts.

Classification of onomastic components

- Onomastic components of PUs can be classified into different groups according to diffent set of criteria:

1. the frequency of their occurrence (anthroponyms, ethnonyms, toponyms)
2. authenticity (authentic and fictitious names of persons, places, objects)
3. the selected origin (national and international PUs)

- For the purpose of our research, the combination of more and less frequent OCs was taken into consideration

Research questions

1. Do PUs concerning **universal concepts** present **less of an obstacle** to the EFL learners than those expressions that are culturally specific?
2. Does **context** provide more accurate/creative variants of the PUs with names when compared to the decontextualized counterparts?
3. Which **aspects of knowledge** should foreign language learners be equipped with while mastering PUs with onomastic components?

Method

Paticipants

- a total of 90 university EFL students (1st year undergraduates (*n* = 60; 54%) and 1st year graduates (*n* = 30; 27%) enrolled in different combinations of study programmes

Method

Data collection process

- An anonymous questionnaire with the targeted corpus of English PUs with onomastic components was designed and administered among the university EFL learners.
- The questionnaire consisted of 2 parts, both of which shared the same number of identical idiomatic expressions categorised into 4 groups (personal names, towns, countries/counties, nationalities) but presented in and out of context.

PERSONAL NAMES	TOWNS	COUNTRIES/ COUNTIES	NATIONALITIES/ ADJECTIVES
Jack of all trades	fiddle while Rome burns	talk for England	pardon my French
keep up with the Joneses	shipshape and Bristol fashion	grin/smile like a Cheshire cat	It's all Greek to me
before one/you can say Jack Robinson	be like the Black Hole of Calcutta	la belle France	have the luck of the Irish
as pleased as Punch	a Canterbury tale	the Queensberry rules	be as American as apple pie
for the love of Mike	see Naples and die	do a Devon Loch	go Dutch
and Bob's your uncle	meet one's Waterloo	built castles in Spain	Chinese whispers
Hobson's choice	send someone to Coventry	slow boat to China	Indian summer
a plain Jane	New York minute	(not) for all the tea in China	young Turk
appeal from Philip drunk to Philip sober	fight like Kilkenny cats	from China to Peru	French exit
take the Mickey (out of)	the new Jerusalem	all Lombard Street to a China orange	double Dutch

- Concerning their potentially dual character, expressions in the categories are selected according to the following criteria: the universal (presumably transparent) ones and culturally specific (potentially unknown).
- The respondents were required to provide translational equivalents or paraphrases of the same idea or concept in Croatian.

Data analysis process

- Our procedure for analyzing the questionnaires encompassed the following stages and actions:

1. sorting (clarification and elimination) stage,
2. compilation and categorization stage,
3. analyzing the data quantitatively and qualitatively.

Results: **Frequency table** of **the total number of** PU translations according to the corresponding **translation strategies**

Category	Total frequency	
	Count	Percent
1 idiomatic expression containing name	203	2.82%
2 idiomatic expression with no name	1369	19.01%
3 non-idiomatic paraphrase	1636	22.72%
4 wrong translation	355	4.93%
5 no translation	3637	50.51%

RESEARCH QUESTION 1

- Do PUs concerning universal concepts present less of an obstacle to the EFL learners than those expressions that are culturally specific?

HYPOTHESIS 1

- PUs concerning universal concepts present much less of an obstacle to the EFL learners than culturally loaded expressions.

Results: Frequency tables of the PU translations **in groups** and according to corresponding **translation strategies**

TRANSLATION STRATEGIES	CATEGORIES							
	PERSONAL NAME		TOWN		COUNTRY/ COUNTY		NATIONALITY	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
1 idiomatic expression containing name	49	2.72	34	1.89	29	1.61	91	5.06
2 idiomatic expression with no name	473	26.28	262	14.56	388	21.56	246	13.67
3 non-idiomatic paraphrase	497	27.61	321	17.83	283	15.72	535	29.72
4 wrong translation	114	6.33	87	4.83	81	4.50	73	4.05
5 no translation	667	37.06	1096	60.89	1019	56.61	855	47.50

RESEARCH QUESTION 2

- Does context provide more accurate/creative variants of PUs with names when compared to the decontextualized counterparts?

HYPOTHESIS 2

- Context plays a significant role in providing more accurate/creative variants of PUs with names.

Results: PERSONAL NAMES

Category
1 idiomatic expression containing name
2 idiomatic expression with no name
3 non-idiomatic paraphrase
4 wrong translation
5 no translation

Category	Personal names no context	
	Count	Percent
1	24	2,67
2	157	17,44
3	216	24,00
4	44	4,89
5	459	51,00

Category	Personal names in context	
	Count	Percent
1	25	2,78
2	316	35,11
3	281	31,22
4	70	7,78
5	208	23,11

Results: TOWNS

Category
1 idiomatic expression containing name
2 idiomatic expression with no name
3 non-idiomatic paraphrase
4 wrong translation
5 no translation

Category	Personal names no context	
	Count	Percent
1	11	1,22
2	64	7,11
3	100	11,11
4	45	5,00
5	680	75,56

Category	Personal names in context	
	Count	Percent
1	23	2,56
2	198	22,00
3	221	24,56
4	42	4,67
5	416	46,22

Results: COUNTRIES/COUNTIES

Category
1 idiomatic expression containing name
2 idiomatic expression with no name
3 non-idiomatic paraphrase
4 wrong translation
5 no translation

Category	Personal names no context	
	Count	Percent
1	9	1,00
2	111	12,33
3	81	9,00
4	27	3,00
5	672	74,67

Category	Personal names in context	
	Count	Percent
1	20	2,22
2	277	30,78
3	202	22,44
4	54	6,00
5	347	38,56

Results: NATIONALITIES/ADJECTIVES

Category
1 idiomatic expression containing name
2 idiomatic expression with no name
3 non-idiomatic paraphrase
4 wrong translation
5 no translation

Category	Personal names no context	
	Count	Percent
1	35	3,89
2	87	9,67
3	241	26,78
4	37	4,11
5	500	55,56

Category	Personal names in context	
	Count	Percent
1	56	6,22
2	159	17,67
3	294	32,67
4	36	4,00
5	355	39,44

TRANSLATION STUDIES AND COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS

RESEARCH QUESTION 3

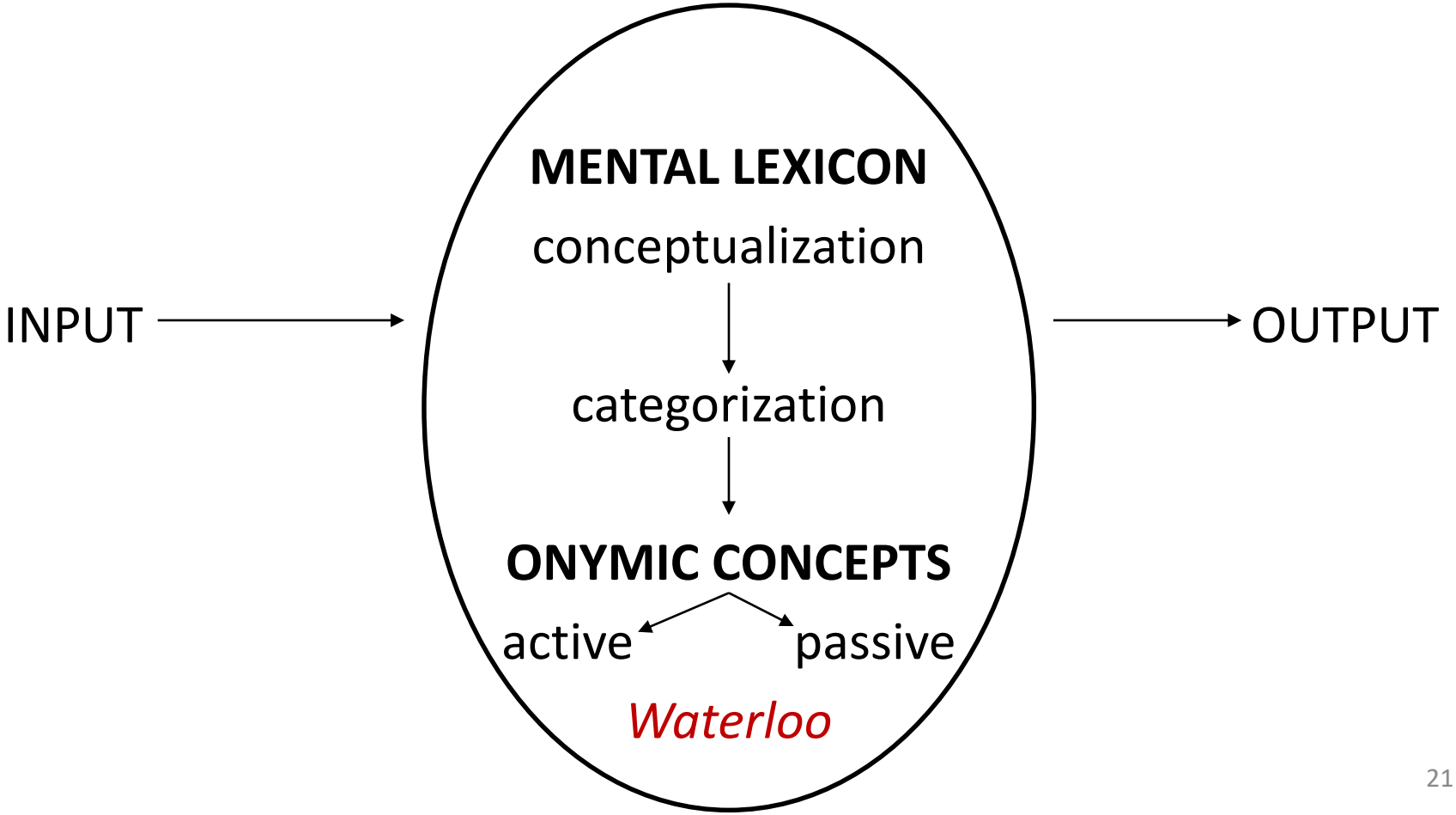
- Which aspects of knowledge should EFL learners be equipped with while mastering PUs with onomastic components?

HYPOTHESIS 3

- experience, socio-cultural competence, general knowledge structures

COGNITIVE ONOMASTICS

- concentrates on the mental existence of proper names



TRANSLATIONS OF PUs IN CONTEXT PROVIDED BY EFL STUDENTS

PERSONAL NAMES

plain Jane

English	*Jane*	SPECIFIC IS GENERIC
Croatian	**Ivana*	*djevojka 'a girl'*
	**Marija*	GENERIC IS SPECIFIC

- FORMAL EQUIVALENCE
- FUNCTIONAL EQUIVALENCE
- TRANSLATION EQUIVALENCE

običnа **Jane 'plain Jane'*

običnа **Ivana 'plain Ivana'*

drvena **Marija 'wooden Mary'*

- *obična djevojka* **'plain girl'**
- *neupadljiva* 'inconspicuous'
- *dosadna* 'boring'
- *tipična* 'typical'
- *prosječna* 'average'

PERSONAL NAMES

- interesting mechanism clearly observable in the analysis of the data is the process of formation of senses variously related to the conceptual macrocategory **FEMALE/MALE HUMAN BEING** from the category of personal names
- the personal name comes to be used with respect to the whole class of referents
- In English and Croatian common names, both female and male, such as *Jack, Jill, Martha, Jane, Kata, Mara, Toma, Šime* are occassionally used in the sense of 'woman' or 'man'
- the female Christian name *Jane* started to be used in the well documented sense 'girl, woman', originally in A.E. slang at the beginning of the 20th century
- the role of metonymy in the rise of lexical meanings related to the centre of the macrocategory **FEMALE HUMAN BEING**, that is the rise of historical synonyms of *girl/young woman, woman* and *old woman*

PERSONAL NAMES

Jack of all trades

English *Jack* SPECIFIC IS GENERIC

Croatian *Katica* SPECIFIC IS GENERIC

- FORMAL EQUIVALENCE
- FUNCTIONAL EQUIVALENCE
- TRANSLATION EQUIVALENCE

* **Jack** za sve

* ***Šime*** *za sve*

- *Majstor svih zanata*
  ‘craftsman of all trades’
  ‘a know-it-all’
- ***Katica*** *za sve*

‘Kate of all trades’

PERSONAL NAMES

Bob's your uncle – Everything is alright! / It's all settled. – *Problem riješen. 'Problem solved.'/ I to je to! 'And, that's it!'/ Mirna Bosna. 'Peaceful Bosnia.'/ I na konju si. And, you have mounted the horse.'/ I, puf, gotova stvar. 'And, puff, it's over.'/ I ja sam kraljica Engleske. 'And I am the Queen of England.'* (Cro.)

Eng. Bob's your uncle for resolved situation

Cro. ———————  **Problem riješen!**

TRANSLATIONS OF PUs IN CONTEXT PROVIDED BY EFL STUDENTS

TOWNS

Eng. ***fiddle while Rome burns***

Cro. - *svirati harfu dok Rim gori* 'play the harp while Rome burns'

- *sjediti prekriženih ruku* 'sit with your arms crossed'
- *selo gori, a baba se češlja* 'the old woman combs her hair while the village is on fire'
- *ni prstom mrdnuti* 'not move a finger'
- *vrtjeti prstima* 'twiddle your thumbs'

INSTRUMENT FOR ACTION

PART OF THE SCENARIO FOR THE WHOLE SCENARIO

TOWNS

Eng. ***The Black Hole of Calcutta***

Cro. - *čovjek na čovjeku* 'men on top of each other'

- *ima nas kao Rusa/Kineza* 'numerous as Russians/Chinese

- *kao konzerva puna sardina* 'tin full of sardines'

- *kao u kokošinjcu* 'like a henhouse'

DIFFICULTIES ARE IMPEDIMENTS TO MOTION

DARKNESS IS BAD

TOWNS

Eng. ***fight like Kilkenny cats***

Cro. - *boriti se kao divlje mačke* 'fight like wild cats'

- *kao bijesni psi* 'like wild dogs'
- *kao mačke i miševi* 'like cats and mice'
- *k'o konji* 'like horses'
- *kao lavovovi* 'like lions'
- *kao Mirko Filipović 'like Mirko Filipović'*

PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS

TRANSLATIONS OF PUs IN CONTEXT PROVIDED BY EFL STUDENTS

COUNTRIES/COUNTIES

Eng. ***slow boat to China***

Cro. *tri dana jahanja* 'three day long horseback riding'

mic po mic 'bit by bit'

puževim korakom 'like a snail'

Eng. ***from China to Peru***

Cro. *od A do Ž* 'from A to Z'

TRANSLATIONS OF PUs IN CONTEXT PROVIDED BY EFL STUDENTS

NATIONALITIES

Eng. ***It's all Greek to me***

Cro. *sve mi je kao na kineskom* 'it's all Chinese to me'

španska sela 'Spanish villages'

Eng. ***be as American as apple pie***

Cro. *Američki kao Obama* *'American as Obama'*

Amerikanac i pol *'American and a half'*

CONCLUSION

- The research findings confirm two of the initial hypotheses and point to the following:

a) PUs concerning **universal concepts** present much **less of an obstacle** to the EFL learners than culturally loaded expressions

b) **context** provides **more accurate/creative translation variants**.

CONCLUSION

- Mastering PUs is a complex process which requires **collaborative**, **cross-subject work** and **carefully tailored study programmes**
- The role of **experience**, **socio-cultural competence** and **broader knowledge structures** considerably effect EFL learners' interpretation of onomastic components.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

- provide **enough input** and classroom **practice** that facilitates memory processes (definition + contextualized example + visual input + etymological note + affective dimension)
- apply the **insights of cognitive linguistics** in teaching PUs and translating culturally loaded items like PUs with OCs
- raise awareness of **linguistic and cultural differences in conceptualisation** while choosing the appropriate translation strategy
- raise awareness of the **conceptual operations** that unfold in the minds of the translators (EFL students) while searching for the appropriate translation equivalents or more creative variants

Thank you for your attention!