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PRAGMATIC FEATURES OF ONOMASTIC UNITS

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Annotation

This article examines the pragmatic features of onomastic units and their role in communication. The study analyzes how proper names convey social, cultural, and emotional meanings in different contexts. Special attention is paid to the pragmatic functions of anthroponyms and toponyms in discourse. The findings reveal that onomastic units serve not only as means of identification but also as carriers of cultural and pragmatic information.

Keywords: onomastics, pragmatics, proper names, discourse analysis, cultural representation, linguistic pragmatics, translation studies, intercultural communication, semantic interpretation, sociocultural context

Language reflects the cultural and social experience of a nation. Among its numerous components, proper names occupy a special position because they preserve historical, geographical, and cultural information. The branch of linguistics that studies proper names is known as onomastics. Onomastic units include personal names, geographical names, names of organizations, ethnic groups, and other naming categories.

Traditionally, proper names have been regarded as linguistic elements whose primary function is identification. However, modern linguistic studies demonstrate that proper names possess much broader functions[1]. They not only identify individuals and objects but also express social relations, cultural values, emotions, and communicative intentions. Consequently, the study of onomastic units from a pragmatic perspective has become increasingly relevant in contemporary linguistics.

Pragmatics examines language use in context and focuses on the relationship between linguistic forms and their users. In this respect, onomastic units serve as important pragmatic markers because their interpretation often depends on cultural background, communicative situation, and shared knowledge between speakers. The pragmatic analysis of proper names enables researchers to understand how names influence communication and contribute to meaning construction.

The aim of this study is to investigate the pragmatic features of onomastic units and determine their functions in various communicative contexts. The research also explores the role of proper names in intercultural communication and translation.

Theoretical Background of Onomastics and Pragmatics. Onomastics is a branch of linguistics concerned with the study of proper names and naming systems. Scholars classify onomastic units into several categories, including anthroponyms (personal names), toponyms (place names), ethnonyms (names of ethnic groups), hydronyms (water bodies), and ergonyms (names of organizations and institutions).

According to linguistic theories, proper names differ from common nouns because their primary function is reference rather than description. Nevertheless, many scholars argue that proper names contain semantic and pragmatic information. Names often reflect national identity, historical memory, social status, and cultural traditions.

[1] Ainiala T, Saarelma M, Sjöblom P. *Names in Focus: An Introduction to Finnish Onomastics*. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society; 2012. 5 p.

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Pragmatics, on the other hand, studies language in use. It investigates how meaning is created in specific contexts and how speakers achieve communicative goals through language. Major pragmatic concepts include deixis, presupposition, implicature, speech acts, and context dependence.

The intersection of onomastics and pragmatics forms an important area of research. From a pragmatic perspective, proper names function as linguistic signs that convey not only denotative meaning but also connotative and cultural meanings. Therefore, the interpretation of onomastic units requires consideration of social and cultural contexts.

Pragmatic Functions of Onomastic Units. Onomastic units perform a wide range of pragmatic functions in communication. Beyond their basic role of naming and identification, proper names carry social, cultural, historical, and emotional meanings that contribute significantly to the interpretation of discourse. The pragmatic value of onomastic units becomes evident when they are analyzed within specific communicative contexts, where their meaning often extends beyond mere reference.

Identification Function. The primary pragmatic function of onomastic units is identification. Proper names enable speakers to distinguish one entity from another and ensure effective communication. Personal names such as John, Elizabeth, or Timur identify particular individuals, while place names such as Samarkand or London designate specific geographical locations. Without proper names, communication would become less precise and more ambiguous.

However, identification is not limited to distinguishing entities. Proper names also facilitate social interaction by helping interlocutors recognize shared knowledge and establish communicative reference. In many cases, mentioning a well-known name immediately activates a set of associations in the listener's mind, thus enhancing mutual understanding.

Expressive Function. Onomastic units often perform an expressive function by conveying emotions, attitudes, and interpersonal relationships. Speakers may choose different forms of names to express affection, respect, irony, or intimacy. For instance, diminutive forms of names frequently indicate closeness and emotional attachment, whereas formal full names may signal respect or social distance.

The expressive value of names is particularly evident in literary discourse, where authors deliberately select names to create emotional effects and characterize fictional figures. Certain names may evoke sympathy, admiration, or even negative attitudes among readers due to their phonetic or cultural associations.

Social-Identifying Function. Proper names serve as markers of social identity. They often reveal information about a person's nationality, ethnicity, religion, gender, and social background. For example, anthroponyms frequently reflect cultural traditions and naming practices specific to a particular community[2].

In multilingual and multicultural societies, names function as indicators of group membership and cultural affiliation. Consequently, onomastic units contribute to the construction and representation of individual and collective identities. The pragmatic interpretation of names therefore depends on the sociocultural competence of language users.

Cultural Function. Onomastic units are important carriers of cultural information. Place names, historical names, and ethnonyms preserve collective memory and reflect the values, beliefs, and traditions of a society. They often contain references to historical events, geographical features, or religious concepts.

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[2] Van Langendonck W. Theory and Typology of Proper Names. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter; 2007. 34 p.

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For instance, many toponyms preserve evidence of earlier civilizations and historical processes. Through proper names, societies maintain cultural continuity and transmit cultural heritage from one generation to another. Thus, onomastic units function not only as linguistic signs but also as repositories of cultural knowledge.

Evaluative Function. Another significant pragmatic role of onomastic units is evaluation. Certain names evoke positive or negative connotations depending on historical and cultural contexts. The perception of a proper name may vary among speakers due to differences in background knowledge and experience.

For example, historical figures or place names may symbolize heroism, power, tragedy, or conflict. These evaluative meanings influence people's attitudes and interpretations during communication. Therefore, proper names often function as instruments of ideological and emotional influence.

Referential and Deictic Function. From a pragmatic perspective, proper names also possess referential and deictic properties. Their interpretation frequently depends on context and shared knowledge between speakers. A name may refer to different individuals or places depending on the communicative situation.

The successful interpretation of onomastic units requires pragmatic competence, including the ability to identify contextual references and infer implied meanings. In this sense, proper names contribute to the establishment of coherence and cohesion in discourse.

In conclusion, onomastic units perform numerous pragmatic functions that extend far beyond simple identification. They express emotions, construct social identities, preserve cultural heritage, convey evaluations, and facilitate communication. The pragmatic study of proper names therefore provides valuable insights into the relationship between language, culture, and society.

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