Arguments of the Doctoral Dissertation

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Proper Names in Language and in Linguistics
Possible Approaches to Proper Names

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1 Objectives

As the title of my dissertation has already suggested, my basic aims during the preparation of my theses were to examine what theoretical approaches are present in linguistics in relation to proper names as well as to find how the concepts of proper names represented by individual linguists are interlinked to each other and what is the connection between these concepts and the situation and behaviour of proper names in language.

It has several, mainly pragmatic, reasons that I focused solely on the Hungarian linguistic literature. One of the reasons is that this segment of the linguistic universe is easier to survey that's why it provides the dissertation with a stricter structure. But of course this does not mean the negligence of foreign literature. At many points do I cite foreign authors but I have to emphasize that this happens without aiming at completeness and that these citations have only a reaffirming role.

My objectives were not the less supported by realizing the fact that Hungarian onomastic literature relatively lacks theoretical writings. This relative absence of the theoretical background leads to a certain vagueness as to the objectives and methods in Hungarian onomastics. So that huge quantity of data as well as the publication of these and the papers commenting these, which can be considered the most spectacular achievement of the latter decades of Hungarian onomastics, cannot be assessed easily and uniformly from the scientific point of view.

When surveying the Hungarian onomastic literature, my primary objective was to highlight controversies and obscure points. The basic question I am concerned about in relation to proper names is not so their meaning or their nature but rather their situation in the linguistic system. I think finding their place in the system of language and defining the concept of system in relation to proper names (and, besides, in relation to the language itself) may help us in clearing up the problem of their nature, too. Thence the aim is a kind of an overview, touching upon tender spots and suggesting through all this that proper names appear as a distinct linguistic category only if we interpret language as a non-formal system. This latter aspect is not elaborated so much in the dissertation.

No author's viewpoint is favoured directly in the dissertation as to the general approach of proper names and answering the basic questions. But the treatment surely gives the clue to it with the author's comments, the selection motives, and the order of chapters, etc. And perhaps no stronger author's presence is reasonable due to the objectives set by me.

2 Methods

My dissertation surveys the literature from two viewpoints, once chronologically, and then in a thematic way. These two approaches overlap sometimes, of course. This can be seen already during the chronological overview when it occurs that the works of some authors are so closely interlinked (due to direct reflections between them) that it is almost impossible to separate their treatment. However, I hold it important to keep the chronological overview since invididual works are based on each other and so certain tendencies can be seen more clearly through this kind of an overview. On the other hand, thematic treatment cannot lack chronological aspects, too.

Chronological presentation of Hungarian literature is preluded at the relevant parts of ZOLTÁN GOMBOCZ's semantics. Then significant papers on onomastic theory are surveyed together with ideas on onomastic theory touched upon in the works of authors with wider thematic concern (authors treated are ANDRÁS MARTINKÓ, JÁNOS BALÁZS, LÁSZLÓ ANTAL, BÉLA KÁLMÁN, ÁRPÁD SEBESTYÉN, SÁNDOR KÁROLY, KATALIN J. SOLTÉSZ, ANDRÁS BARABÁS – GYÖRGY KÁLMÁN C. – ÁDÁM NÁDASDY, KINGA FABÓ, FERENC KIEFER, ISTVÁN HOFFMANN, MIHÁLY HAJDÚ, ATTILA HEGEDŰS), as well as the relevant chapters of our greater descriptive and historical grammars.

Following the chronological overview, literature is put into a thematic order. Of course, not only the above works and authors are cited but many others, too. These were not treated in the previous chapter for several reasons (their relative lack of the relevance to proper names, their being not theoretical enough; their totally different approaches may have made it unnecessary).

First grammatical approaches to proper names are elaborated. Within this the following greater aspects are highlighted: (1) the boundaries of proper names and appellatives, (2) morphological features and grammatical behaviour of proper names, (3) the formal extent of proper names, (4) orthographical aspects. Surely, this latter one is not strictly grammar but only a projection of grammar into practical writing but since it reflects grammatical statements it is justified to treat the question here.

The problematics of system is approached first from a formal viewpoint. This chapter is divided into two subchapters. First I treat the question whether the proper name is a category of the linguistic system. Then comes the problem of the classification of proper names in the terms of linguistics.

The last chapter deals with non-formal approaches to proper names. This chapter is less elaborated than the previous ones. The reason is partly that Hungarian literature has not been really concerned with this aspect so far while my dissertation is aiming at the critical survey of Hungarian literature. Furthermore, my own attitude is best reflected in this chapter since I think that non-formal approach may be the best way to interpret proper name as a linguistic category. However, I do not wish to go into further details as to this approach since I think it would exceed the limits of this work. That's why I intend the ideas mentioned here to be guidelines for further research. This chapter deals with the questions of the translatability of proper names and I also stress the significance of translogic in this context.

3 Results

3.1 Chronological overview of the onomastic literature

Notwithstanding certain critical opinions on onomastics' being an individual branch of study, Hungarian onomastics ceaselessly demonstrates its independence. The problem is that it is not sufficiently proven that the object of onomastics, that is, proper name, is linguistically differing from other linguistic signs and, this being the situation, it has no cause to have an independent branch of study for the research of proper names. Standpoints are regularly mixed up and the theoretical background is not clear. Those authors who tried to highlight these vague phenomena got no substantial reflections.

Surveying papers and other writings on onomastic theory, it is evident that researchers had long approached proper names as being different from other linguistic signs on the ground of semantics. They had all treated mainly the meaning and the information content of proper names. It was a paper by BARABÁS et al. in 1977 to be the first one to reject previous definitions and views and to stick to linguistic proofs. That's why they applied syntactic distribution during their grammatical approach. Their significance lies not in their results since they could not have succeeded in proving that proper names are grammatically distinct so their paper is methodologically a dead-end. But it is important being the first to highlight vague points and controversies of Hungarian onomastics. The continuation of their question posing was not really spectacular, apart from FABÓ's papers. In other respects, long years had had to pass until another substantial paper was published in onomastic theory in Hungary by KIEFER who, besides highlighting again

some obscure features of Hungarian onomastics, applied the semantic approach. It was HOFFMANN who demanded again the purely linguistic approach in his classification of place names. With the passing of almost twenty years, HAJDÚ and HEGEDŰS reflected on BARABÁS et al.'s paper in their discussion about the separation of proper names and appellatives. One of our recent descriptive grammars (Magyar grammatika) seems to use in its definition of proper names that view of TOLCSVAI NAGY's according to which proper names can be better interpreted by taking psychological and sociocultural factors into account.

3.2 Grammatical approaches to proper names

First I examine the literature in the question of the boundaries of proper names and appellatives. According to some views, they have an especially wide boundary area since the proper name has not had clear-cut definition yet. All definitions either exclude or include such linguistic elements that can be assessed in another way according to another definition or the habits of the linguistic community. However, today we accept only in few cases that proper names are of appellative origin, which view had been long accepted evidently due to the semantic transparency of some proper names. Anyway, it is clear that linguistic elements denominating entities of certain conceptual categories are felt rather proper names but there are such categories the denominations of the entities of which are felt on the boundary or so close to common names that languages have different standpoints in the categorization of these. Here we find trade names, titles, Hungarian tribe names from the age of the Hungarian conquest, people's names, event's names, names of months, days and holidays, names of institutions, names of animals and objects.

We can be sure that questions of morphological features and grammatical behaviour of proper names are completely depending on language. In Hungarian, nobody could have proven that proper names have distinct morphological features, notwithstanding the efforts with some eventual endings. Surely these endings do not constitute a morphological system.

The examination of grammatical behaviour of Hungarian proper names may reveal some interesting features. For example, the lexicological form remains intact when it undergoes derivation or inflection, even if its appellative variant shows root alternation. Proper names which are in the plural only formally are agreed as singulars. The use of articles with plural names is evidently a much more complicated case than it is with

appellatives, although nobody has succeeded in laying down relevant rules so far and the question does not seem to be answerable.

The formal extent of proper names is one of the most difficult questions concerning this linguistic phenomenon. Researchers tend to apply orthographical considerations, too, since orthography reflects linguistic judgments in the question of the extent of proper names consisting of more than one elements and this may lead to the feedback of orthography into language description. Within this subchapter, the inclusion of name accessories and name complements as well as articles into the extent of proper names as discussed in the literature is treated.

The last subchapter of this chapter deals with the orthography of proper names, that is it surveys the views of orthographical literature (regulations and commentaries) about proper names. As I have already stressed, I do not consider orthography an essential criterion but it is the reflection of grammar and that's why it is an important contribution in the grammatical examination of proper names. However, our academic regulations and their commentaries are not free from conceptual controversies and this is the most apparent in the treatment of the names of institutions, titles, geographical names, names of events as well as other names on the boundary of proper names and appellatives.

3.3 Proper names and the formal systematization

Proper names and the linguistic system are examined in this chapter first. It is beyond doubt that proper names are linguistic elements, therefore, if language is a system, then these must be elements of this system. The question is the following: which is the organizational level of language where proper names occur as a distinct category? Traditionally, it is lexicology, or, more exactly, the study of word classes that categorizes proper names. This seems logical from that point of view that it would be senseless to treat proper names under or above the lexical level since they are lexical elements. Among word classes, they are usually regarded as a subclass of nouns, and, regularly, they are further classified. The problem with this all is that the study of word classes generally produces systems that are full of ambiguities since other elements of the vocabulary escape classification, too, so all word categories can be criticized, and not only in relation to details. In Hungarian literature, BARABÁS et al. and FABÓ were right to challenge the statement that the proper name is a subclass of nouns since our traditional descriptive grammars know only such words that consist of a mere word; consequently a noun must

also consist of a mere word but we know proper names consisting of more than one words. This problem might be solved if we assign word classes as forms of meanings to syntagms consisting of more than one words, too. Nevertheless, we do not have sufficient linguistic proof to why proper names are formally subclasses of nouns.

Formal classification of proper names is closely connected to the previous problems because it is an unanswered question whether it is justified to further classify proper names if they do not constitute a category of the linguistic system. In this case, further classification cannot have linguistic grounds, too. Some authors declared that proper names themselves do not constitute a system, in spite of which classification is a quantitatively significant part of Hungarian onomastic research. Name collecting has great traditions in Hungary and the data are regularly published, classified and analysed. These publications usually show mixed-up standpoints, lack logic and linguistic approach. Their categories are mainly defined according to the type of the denotatum, which is of course not a linguistic approach. Besides, we should not forget about KIEFER's opinion according to which proper names in themselves do not have information content and it is not guaranteed in any way that the denotatum of the name *Nagy Klára* is a Hungarian woman since it can be likewise a boat.

Following foreign authors, some Hungarian onomasticians state that the formation of proper names is driven by onomastic models. The model theory may suggest a systematic character with proper names. E.g., HOFFMANN established a really sophisticated formal system in relation to place names. I present here a paper by TOLCSVAI NAGY, which also leads to the next chapter. This paper of his examines the so-called postmodern name giving (in a way a non-formal name-giving model) which cannot be conceived formally exactly because in this model anything may be named with any linguistic form.

3.4 Non-formal approaches to proper names

All formal approaches are deemed to failure in the background since language is unsystematic in a way, and it varies both spatially and temporally, and it depends on its users as well as on psychological, sociological and cultural factors. If we interpret language as a system on logical-grammatical bases, we have to face an inherent controversy: all logical systems aim at the total coverage of elements and their possible relations (this being the very essence of a system), but this is exactly we cannot reach in the case of language since exceptions occur immediately. But if we do not interpret

system in a formal way and we interpret change and variability as system elements than we should not be surprised at that for example SZÉPE even suggested that proper names should be examined in relation to certain deviant languages (that is, children's language, speech products in aphasia, as well as poetic language).

In this chapter I treat a question that is rarely dealt with in the literature and this is the translatability of proper names. This subchapter perhaps could have been placed into one of the previous chapters concerning formal approaches (perhaps the best would have been that one treating the boundary between proper names and appellatives) but in this subchapter I present rather my own ideas and not the literature (in which it differs from the other parts of the dissertation). The other reason is that this approach led to such conclusions which are not really formal since it deals with language contacts. As we can see in the case of sociolects and the changes of language, language contacts and the comparisons between languages can never be traced back to mere formal, linguistic factors, but these are strongly influenced by the users of languages and cultural circumstances, too. The primary conclusion during the examination of the translatability of proper names was that proper names do have a certain kind of a semantic content and it has to be a cultural meaning. It followed from the hypothesis according to which translation means that certain meaning types are related to each other and also from the fact that sometimes we translate proper names together with the text but other names are not translated (which is better interpreted if we say that it is translated the proper name maintaining its original form).

The other subchapter treats translogic. I use this notion following LÁSZLÓ MÉRŐ and I do it probably unprecedented in linguistics. Under this notion, we mean the treating mechanism of certain phenomena inconceivable by formal logic. I assign here such well-known approaches that have not been described with this notion yet. Another denomination (from another point of view) of this notion is prelogic which is often used by researchers when treating children's language, the mythologic conscience (see name magic, totemism, etc.) as well as fairy tales. In these kinds of languages, proper names have a stressed role. Here I also discuss proper names in the context of poetic language. I do not touch upon aphasia but it surely should have its place in a detailed approach of these questions. I also consider it important that the Western culture is basically not defined by translogic mechanisms and perhaps it results from this fact that this culture is related to proper names in a special way. This subchapter, as I have already mentioned, rather wishes to give an impulse to further research without elaborating the details.

4 List of My Publications in the Topic

Work edited by me

English–Hungarian Glossary of Linguistical Terms. The onomastic terminology is available at the following URLs: http://mnytud.arts.klte.hu/glosshu.htm, http://mnytud.arts.klte.hu/glosseng.htm

Papers

Massa, hámor, huta. [Examination of the lexical elements *massa, hámor, huta.*] In: TIBOR SZÉCSÉNYI, ed., Nyelvész doktoranduszok dolgozatai. (LingDok Vol. 1.) Szeged (2000), pp. 150–157.

Ómagyar kori helynevek Diósgyőr határában. [Old Hungarian Place Names in the fields of Diósgyőr.] In: Magyar Nyelvjárások, vol. 38 (2000), pp. 451–456.

Diósgyőr középmagyar kori helyneveinek nyelvi elemzése. [Linguistic Analysis of the Middle Hungarian Place Names of Diósgyőr.] In: Magyar Nyelvjárások, vol. 39 (2001), pp. 147–158.

TAKÁCS, JUDIT – VÁRNAI, JUDIT SZILVIA, *Gondolatok a magyar hivatalos személynév-adásról az uniós csatlakozás tükrében.* [Some Aspects of the Official Hungarian Personal Name Giving System as Hungary's Accession to the EU Draws Near] In: ENIKŐ GRÉCZI-ZSOLDOS – MÁRIA KOVÁCS, eds., Köszöntő könyv B. Gergely Piroska tiszteletére. Miskolc (2002), pp. 182–185.

A tulajdonnevek lefordíthatósága. [Translatability of Proper Names.] In: Magyar Nyelvjárások, vol. 41 (2003), pp. 653–657.

Review

BÍRÓ, FERENC, Körösladány helynevei (Eger, 1999). In: Magyar Nyelvjárások, vol. 39 (2001), pp. 231–232.

Conference lectures

Massa, hámor, huta. [Examination of the lexical elements *massa, hámor, huta.*] Delivered at the 3rd National Conference of PhD Students of Linguistics (Szeged, 18–20 November 1999).

Diósgyőr és környékének történeti helynevei. [Historical Place Names of Diósgyőr and its Fields.] Delivered at the Doctoral Conference of the Hungarian Linguistics Doctoral Council of the University of Debrecen (Noszvaj, 20–21 April 2000).

Diósgyőr középmagyar kori helyneveinek nyelvi elemzése. [Linguistic Analysis of the Middle Hungarian Place Names of Diósgyőr.] Delivered at the 4th National Conference of PhD Students of Linguistics (Szeged, 25–26 January 2001).

Vizsgálati lehetőségek Diósgyőr helynévanyagán. [Possible Ways of the Analysis of Diósgyőr's Place Names.] Delivered at the Doctoral Conference of the Department of Hungarian Linguistics of the University of Debrecen (Noszvaj, 27–29 September 2001).

Translations

HOFFMANN, ISTVÁN (ed.), *Plan of Series* (Onomastica Uralica). Debrecen–Helsinki (2001), pp. 5–19.

HOFFMANN, ISTVÁN (ed.), *Selected Bibliography of the Onomastics of Uralian Languages.* (Onomastica Uralica, vols. 1a, 1b) Debrecen–Helsinki (2001)

NYIRKOS, ISTVÁN (ed.), *History of the Study of Toponyms in the Uralian Languages.* (Onomastica Uralica, vol. 2) Debrecen–Helsinki (2002), pp. 5–6, 145–160, 199–244.