

## **THEORY OF NAMES AND COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS – THE CASE OF THE METAPHOR**

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**Abstract:** The philosophical and, in a lesser degree, linguistic debate about the notion of names has been raging for a long time. The processes behind naming are presented and explained in various ways. This paper will try to give a new insight into the motivation behind the creation of new names as seen from the linguistics viewpoint. Metaphor, as one of the major sources of motivation from the perspective of cognitive linguistics, is the basic form of human conceptualization. The first part of the paper presents the current theories about names. The second part describes the basic principles of cognitive linguistics as related to metaphors. The third part deals with providing the evidence regarding metaphor involvement in original creation of people's names, while the last part of the paper presents examples from the Serbian language.

**Key words:** name, conceptual metaphor, cognitive linguistics, onomasticon, Serbian, anthroponym, descriptive theory, causal theory

### **1. THE THEORY OF NAMING**

The discussion of the nature of names in language has always taken place within the frameworks of philosophy rather than, as one might expect, within linguistics. The traditional inquiry that linguistics was concerned with was always the question whether names have meaning or not. The fact that most linguists have agreed early on in the discussion is that names do not have meaning but only perform the function of denoting items once they become *inactive* (Anderson 2007: 276) and lose all elements of usage

becoming institutionalized. General nouns were seen as being meaningful units while proper names stand as mere identification marks (Ullmann 1962: 77). That conclusion shifted the focus of semantics from them and made the issue philosophical in respect of the problem of denoting. The question that philosophy was interested in answering was what is denoted by a name both in a speaker's and the hearer's mind and in the real world and how does that process of denotation function?

There are several conflicting theories trying to describe this process originating with the works of Ancient Greek grammarians and philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle. Their ideas regarding names were represented by the Stoic's distinction of names into proper and common (*proprium* vs. *commune*) (Anderson 2007: 145). Their ideas presented a beginning for the philosophical tradition of concern with names which ran shoulder to shoulder with the grammatical inquiry. The traces of these impressions can be found in the work of early linguist and philosophers such John Wilkins (Wilkins 1668), John Stuart Mill (Mill 1919 [1843]), Gottlob Frege (Frege 1892) and Bertrand Russell (Russell 1905), just to name a few. Their work was in turn fine-tuned by contemporary philosophers, and linguists to a point, into the state of affairs we find today. The two most significant contemporary theories are the *causal theory* whose champion is Saul Kripke (Kripke 1972) and the *descriptive theory* supported by Gareth Evans (Evans 1973). Before we look at their considerations it is important to emphasize that the complete debate at hand here is far too copious to be described even in a contracted form so only the shortest possible representation of the major issues will follow.

The whole contemporary discussion regarding the nature of names comes down to two important concerns regarding names: what the speaker denotes upon a particular occasion of using a name and what the name itself denotes upon some particular occasion. There are no easy answers to these questions, and both of the main contemporary theories try to answer them in somewhat different ways.

The descriptive theory sees names as denoting an item only if they satisfy all or most of the descriptions or characteristics one associates with the item that the name is supposed to represent. The speakers also have to believe and intend to use the given name with the necessary denotation including the necessary set of characteristics.

*'N.N.'* denotes *x* upon a particular occasion of its use by a speaker *S* just in case *x* is uniquely that which satisfies all or most of the descriptions *O* such that *S* would assent to '*N.N. is O*' (or '*That N.N. is O*'). Crudely: the cluster of information *S* has associated with the name determines its denotation upon a particular occasion by fit. If the speaker has no individuating information he will denote nothing. (Evans 1973: 188)

Kripke sees names as rigid designations which have a causal connection to the items they name and hence foresees several different ways to name the same object regarding the fulfillment of the truth conditions.

*A person who associated with the name 'Godel' merely the description 'prover of the incompleteness of Arithmetic' would nonetheless be denoting Godel and saying something false of him in uttering 'Godel proved the incompleteness of Arithmetic' even if an unknown Viennese by the name of Schmidt had in fact constructed the proof which Godel had subsequently broadcast as his own.* (Kripke 1972: 94)

This lengthy philosophical debate about the nature of proper names, though very important in their finer understanding, does not however shed light on the linguistic and cognitive motivation of people when creating names. That job was taken up by a relatively modern approach to semantics brought about by cognitive linguistics.

## **2. THE CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR**

Cognitive linguistics begins with a somewhat new approach to the process of encoding and decoding meaning and the mental concepts our minds form and express about the world through language. As such it is genuinely the first complete linguistic system fully describing the nature and the dynamics of constructing meaning. George Lakoff (Johnson & Lakoff 1980), Charles Fillmore (Fillmore 1978) and Anna Wierzbicka (Wierzbicka 1995) are just the ones at the top of the list of relevant works dealing with cognitive linguistics. This paper is however not the place to lay out the full significance and implications of this approach to semantics so it will focus only on the selected notions important for the given topic.

The idea instigated by cognitive linguistics referring to metaphors is that the meaning we recognize in language is primarily based in semantic concepts. Semantic primitives (Wierzbicka 1995: 34), metaphorical concepts (Johnson & Lakeoff 1980: 7), conceptual primitives or basic notions (Grković–Mejdžor 2008: 53) all stand for a collection of cognitive concepts which can be found at the basis of meaning transferred by language which is in turn expressed by the lexical and grammatical means that every language can display. Such a conceptual system is at its most primitive level universal to all human beings (i.e. conceptual primitives such as *up is good, down is bad; straight is good, bent is bad*; etc.) because it flows from a connection formed between the human cognition of the world and its reality and it can be seen as prelanguage. Other cognitive concepts, more numerous, display a lesser degree of universality and are more culturally conditioned.

Either primitive or culturally conditioned, metaphorical concepts represent interwoven basic structures of human thought, social communication and concrete linguistic manifestation through a rich semantic system based on the human physical, cognitive and cultural experience (Fauconnier 2005: 2). The linguistic manifestations are metaphors which conceptualize one element of a conceptual structure using elements of a different conceptual structure. It is important to understand early on that the term *metaphor* used within the framework of cognitive linguistics, and indeed in this paper, does not refer to the stylistic figure used in literature but to semantic concepts, or rather a linguistic representation of basic mental concepts. As such it must be considered as different from the notion of the term *metaphor* in traditional linguistics.

The process of constructing meaning using metaphorical concepts is called metaphorization and it is “founded on association [and it] constructs systems based on prototypical notions and meanings which are used to classify the real world” (Grković–Mejdžor 2008: 54). Metaphorization is based on the transfer from the source conceptual domain to the target conceptual domain. Most commonly the structure of the source concrete domains is mapped (Johnson & Lakeoff 1980: 252) onto abstract target domains, where the meaning retains the semantic markings of the target domain (i.e. LION IS A PERSON: LION is the concrete source domain whose conceptual structure (such as *strong, proud, fierce, independent*, etc.) is transferred to the abstract target domain of a

human being PERSON). The titles used to denote particular concepts (i.e. ROSE IS A PERSON) reveal the given procedure of cross-domain pairing. Concepts based on the physical human experience are usually chosen as source domains while certain apparent semantic connection selects the target ones. Such basic processes of linguistically marking items in the real world also relate to naming in the sense of original creation of names, as the paper does not deal with reasons of choosing a particular name for a child, which can range from esthetic reasons to family tradition (although metaphorical meaning can also be considered as a relevant reason if the meaning is transparent enough such as i.e. names like *Vuk* or *Ognjen*).

### 3. THE PRACTICE OF NAMING

Although, as contemporary semantics recognizes, names do not have meaning, it was precisely meaning that was essential in the primary origins of many personal names. Apart from metaphors, original reasons behind the prototype creation of personal names are certainly various and diverse. One reason can be, for instance, a case when the meaning of a general noun was simply used to denote a person (i.e. *Ana* from Heb. (*h*)*anna* meaning mercy, gratitude (Skok 1971: 39)). Another common source can be the usage of the name of a geographical location as denoting a person regarding the place of his or her birth (i.e. *Adrian* from Lat. *Hadrianus* denoting the geographical area of Hadria at the Adriatic coast). It can also be a case where a name of an ancient god<sup>1</sup> is used to mark the named person both with the perceived qualities of a given deity and put the person under the protection of that deity (i.e. *Apolonija* from the Ancient Greek god of sun and art Apollon). The main point is that the cultures stemming from the European tradition forgot that all names, as the naming tradition in different cultures show (Brozović-Rončević & Žic-Fuchs 2003–2004), carry meaning in their original form from the point of their creation and that that meaning lies behind the motivation for their first usage in denoting a human being.

The previously listed reasons, and others not mentioned here, found at the roots of certain names seem to be highly culturally conditioned being that they stem from local geographical areas, local gods or specific and different languages. A more universal and

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<sup>1</sup> The motivation behind the origins of the names of deities is a matter for a different discussion.

basic principle of generating names proposed here would be metaphorization as described in this paper. To reiterate, metaphorization is the transfer of semantic and conceptual structure (strength, stability) from one conceptual domain (PLANT: poplar) to a different domain (PERSON: *Jablan*). The process is, as it was stated, considered as one of the most basic notions of human cognition and language and from the linguistic point of view its importance in the origins of names is enormous (Brozović-Rončević & Žic-Fuchs 2003–2004). Apart from the scientific account, the process of metaphorization in naming can even be reconstructed from the old folk stories about the instances choosing a certain name, as the very familiar story of Vuk Stefanović Karadžić reveals. According to his own record, he was given his name for the reasons of protection against evil spirits and disease due to the *meaning* of the name *Vuk* (*Wolf*). The process and the importance of meaning is almost self-evident – one can imagine a small group of people thousands of years ago faced with high infant mortality searching for a way to help them. They look at the world around them, the physical experience of which is actually the primary motivation of metaphorical concepts, and see the *wolf* as a formidable animal, strong, courageous and fierce. The idea comes that in order to empower and protect the given child they name it *Vuk* (*Wolf*) and thusly somehow transfer the qualities of the animal onto the child. The same reasoning was applied by Vuk Karadžić's parents. This example illustrates the process of metaphorical concepts operating in language, though many of them do not function on such a transparent and conscious level as regarding names (i.e. the metaphorical concept connected to political discourse ECONOMY IS A BODY – *to put the economy back on its feet; the recovery of the economy; to strengthen the economy; etc.* in the case of which the mental connection between the target domain of ECONOMY and the source domain of BODY is not so obvious). This kind of natural experience transferred by metaphorization can be found at the basis of most of the names as the following examples from the Serbian *onomasticon* will show.

#### 4. ONOMASTICON OF THE SERBIAN LANGUAGE

Although it was used earlier to denote a vocabulary of names or nouns, or even of a general lexicon (Pollux 1967) *onomasticon* in a contemporary sense represents a *vocabulary or alphabetic list of proper names, esp. of persons* (Oxford English

Dictionary 1999) and can be seen as a dictionary of inactive names. Due to the nature of proper names as not having meaning there have even been suggestions that proper names should be assigned to an onomasticon as different from the lexicon or a dictionary which contains words of all types (Anderson 2007: 15).

The onomasticon of Serbian names, especially anthroponyms, used in this paper is not a separate publication listing all Serbian names and their origins but rather a collection of individual instances of analysis gathered from various etymological sources, which will not be individually noted for every listed name due to clarity of the text, but just collectively presented<sup>2</sup>. Some of the names cannot be traced etymologically so the proposed conceptual structures and source domains are in those cases constructed by the author based on the transparency of the name (i.e. the name *Biserka* which, though it was not found in any of the available sources, has relatively transparent origins in the word *biser* (pearl) whose conceptual structure which was transferred is then incurred from the qualities that people attribute to pearls such as *perfection* and *shine*).

It is also important to emphasize that this investigation does not provide an etymological analysis of the words that served as the source domains in the metaphorization processes of primary creation of personal names. The reason behind such a decision is that it is not relevant at this point how the word *cvet* came to be in the Serbian language in its present form or meaning. The relevance is only in the fact that it served, or rather its conceptual structure did, in such a form as motivation for the Serbian name *Cvetko*.

The names analyzed in this manner were further identified according to their source domain (regardless of whether they are of Slavic, Latin, Ancient Greek, Indo-European, Hebrew, or any other linguistic origins), their transferable conceptual structure<sup>3</sup> and their target domain and are provided in alphabetical order. They do not represent a full and exhaustive record of all metaphorically motivated names but only a selection of suitable example illustrating the suppositions of this paper (Fig. 1).

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<sup>2</sup> The etymological sources used for all of the listed names are as follows: Miklosich 1886; Pokorny 1967; Skok 1971.

<sup>3</sup> As it is the case with many etymological analyses it is impossible to claim with absolute certainty that the listed conceptual structures were indeed the exact ones born in the mind of the original creators of given names. The conceptual structure proposed here is the supposed one as reconstructed from the existing etymological and traditional cultural records and notions about the paired domains at hand.

SOURCE DOMAIN	CONCEPTUAL STRUCTURE	TARGET DOMAIN
AMBER (Sr. <i>žar</i> )	warmth, power	Žarko
BASIL (Sr. <i>bosiljak</i> )	wellbeing, piety	Bosiljka
BEAR (Ger. <i>ber</i> )	strength, power	Bernarda
BELL (Sr. <i>zvono</i> )	openness, outspokenness	Zvonka/Zvonko/Zvonimir
BROAD BEAN (Sr. <i>bob</i> )	delicacy, small size	Boban
CARNATION (Sr. <i>karanfil</i> )	calmness, peace	Karanfil
CHURCH (Fr. <i>eglise</i> )	faith, piety	Alisa
COAL (Sr. <i>ugljen</i> )	stealth, energy	Uglješa
CROSS (OGr. <i>sauros</i> )	faith, piety	Stavra/Stavro
CROSS (Sr. <i>krst</i> )	faith, piety	Krsta
CROWN (OGr. <i>stephanos</i> )	nobility, authority	Stefan
CROWN (Sr. <i>kruna</i> )	nobility, authority	Kruna
DATE (OHeb. <i>tamar</i> )	harmony, family bliss	Tamara
DAWN (Sr. <i>zora</i> )	freshness, youth	Zora
DEW (Sr. <i>rosa</i> )	purity, youth	Rosa
DOE (Sr. <i>srna</i> )	purity, freedom	Srna
FIR TREE (Sr. <i>jela</i> )	fitness, elegance	Jela
FIRE (Lat. <i>ingeus</i> )	warmth, power	Ignjatije
FIREPLACE (Sr. <i>oganj</i> )	warmth, power	Ognjen
FLAX (Sr. <i>lan</i> )	power, protection	Lana
FLINT (Sr. <i>kremen</i> )	toughness, resilience	Kremen Cvetana/Cvetko/Cveta
FLOWER (Sr. <i>cvet</i> )	beauty, tenderness	Cvetan/Cvetin/Cvijan Cvijana Cvijeta/Cvijetana
FOREST (Lat. <i>silva</i> )	healthiness, virility	Cvijetin/Cvijo/Cvetomir Silvija/Silvije
GRAPES (Sr. <i>grožđe</i> )	good fortune, fertility	Grozdana
HAIR (Sr. <i>kosa</i> )	youth, healthiness	Kosara
HEAVEN (Sr. <i>raj</i> )	purity, bliss	Rajko
HILL (Sr. <i>gora</i> )	power, sturdiness	Goran
HONEY (OGr. <i>melitine</i> )	sweetness, healthiness	Melita
ICON (OGr. <i>eikon</i> )	piety, solemnity	Ikonija
IRON (Sr. <i>gvožđe</i> )	toughness, strength	Gvozden
JASMINE (Sr. <i>jasmin</i> )	joy, harmony	Jasmin/Jasminka/Jaca
LIGHT (Lat. <i>lux</i> or IE. <i>leuq</i> )	purity, spirituality	Luka
LILAC (Sr. <i>jorgovan</i> )	love, purity	Jorgovan
LILY (OGr. <i>leirion</i> )	good fortune, healthiness	Lijerka
LILY (Sr. <i>ljiljan</i> )	good fortune, healthiness	Ljiljana
LION (Sr. <i>lav</i> )	pride, power	Lav/Leon/Leontije
MAPLE (Sr. <i>javor</i> )	intelligence, wisdom	Javorka
MARIGOLD (Sr. <i>neven</i> )	perseverance, eternity	Neven
MOON (OGr. <i>mena</i> )	luminance, guidance	Mina
MORNING STAR (Sr. <i>danica</i> )	hope, luster	Danica/Danka/Daca
NIGHT (Arab. <i>laila</i> )	mystery, secrecy	Lejla



OLD RAM (Lat. <i>petronius</i> )	experience, strength	Petronije
PEARL (Lat. <i>margarita</i> )	perfection, shine	Margarita/Margita
PEARL (Sr. <i>biser</i> )	perfection, shine	Biserka
PEONY (Sr. <i>božur</i> )	honor, wealth	Božur
PIGEON (Sr. <i>golub</i> )	gentleness, loyalty	Golub/Golubica
POPLAR (Sr. <i>jablan</i> )	stature, strength	Jablan
QUINCE (Sr. <i>dunja</i> )	intelligence, fertility	Dunja
RASPBERRY (Sr. <i>malina</i> )	sweetness, healthiness	Malina
ROCK (OGr. <i>petros</i> )	strength, stability	Petar
ROSE (Sr. <i>ruža</i> )	passion, love	Ruža
SHADOW (Sr. <i>senka</i> )	safety, protectiveness	Senka
SNOW (Sr. <i>sneg</i> )	purity, virtue	Snežana
SPARK (Sr. <i>iskra</i> )	vividness, activity	Iskra
STAR (Sr. <i>zvezda</i> )	shine, virtue	Zvezdana
STONE (Sr. <i>kamen</i> )	toughness, resilience	Kamenko
STRAWBERRY (Sr. <i>jagoda</i> )	attractiveness, sexuality	Jagoda/Jagodinka
SUN (Sr. <i>sunce</i> )	warmth, radiance	Sunčica
SUNLIGHT (Gr. <i>hele</i> )	luminance, brightness	Jelena/Elena/Ela/Jelica Lela/Lena/Lenka
TEAR (Sr. <i>suza</i> )	delicacy, sensitivity	Suzana
THORN BUSH (OGr. <i>batos</i> )	toughness, resilience	Bata
VIOLET (Sr. <i>ljubiča</i> )	purity, modesty	Violeta
WHITE (Sr. <i>belo</i> )	purity, cleanliness	Belislav
WILD CHERRY (Sr. <i>višnja</i> )	sexuality, virility	Višnja
WOLF (Sr. <i>vuk</i> )	fierceness, strength	Vuk
WOODS (Sr. <i>dubrava</i> )	beauty, youth	Dubrava

Figure 1. List of names as examples of cross-domain pairing in creation of names

All of the metaphorical concepts can further be grouped under four higher concepts universally applicable in most languages as most common sources of motivation for the creation of names as proposed here:

(1) SURROUNDINGS IS A PERSON

(Belislav; Biserka; Danica/Danka/Daca; Gvozden; Goran; Ignjatije; Iskra; Kamenko; Kremen; Kosara; Zvezdana; Senka; Snežana; Sunčica; Suzana; Petar; Žarko; Margarita/Margita; Uglješa; Zora; Rosa; Ognjen;; Melita; Lejla; Luka; Mina; Jelena/Elena/Ela/Jelica/Lela/Lena/Lenka);

(2) PLANT IS A PERSON

(Bosiljka; Boban; Karanfil; Tamara; Jela/Lana; Grozdana; Jasmin/Jasminka; Jaca; Jorgovan; Lijerka; Ljiljana; Javorka; Silvija/Silvije; Neven; Božur; Jablan; Dunja; Malina;

Ruža; Jagoda/Jagodinka; Bata; Violeta; Višnja; Dubrava; Cvetana/Cvetko/Cveta/Cvetan/Cvetin/Cvijan/Cvijana/Cvijeta/Cvijetana/Cvijetin/Cvijo/Cvetomir);

(3) ANIMAL IS A PERSON

(Bernarda; Srna; Lav; Leon/Leontije; Golub/Golubica; Petronije; Vuk); and

(4) SYMBOLICAL OBJECT IS A PERSON

(Zvonka; Zvonko; Alisa; Stavra/Stavro; Krsta; Stefan; Kruna; Rajko; Ikonija).

## 5. UNIVERSALITY

A closer scrutiny of the listed examples along with their corresponding source domains and the originally imprinted conceptual structures serve as sufficient evidence that the process of metaphorization (as defined by cognitive linguistics) presents a very important tool in the creation of names. Both Serbian names of older origins (such as *Petar*) or of newer creation (like *Biserka*) show that the process has been active ever since people felt the need to denote one natural unit apart from the other. A larger-scale study involving a bigger number of languages from various language families would surely corroborate the claims of the universal nature of this procedure in forging names. The process of metaphorization is actually so very important in the way we describe and comprehend the world around us that it is to be expected that it found such an important role in the creation of names. Hence, besides structuring and restructuring the physical world, conceptual metaphors actually structure who we are through the way we chose to mark ourselves when our forefathers decided to give us our designations in the world, our true names, and as we still do when we create new ones.

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## TEORIJA IMENA I KOGNITIVNA LINGVISTIKA – SLUČAJ METAFORE

**Sažetak:** Filozofska i, u manjem opsegu, lingvistička debata oko problema imena traje već duže vreme. Procesi iza imenovanja su predstavljani i objašnjavani na različite načine. Rad će pokušati da pruži novi uvid u motivaciju za stvaranje novih imena viđenu iz jezičke perspektive. Metafora, kao jedan od najvažnijih izvora motivacije u jeziku kako je vidi kognitivna lingvistika, je jedna od osnovnih formi ljudske konceptualizacije. Prvi deo rada predstavlja pregled najvažnije teorije o imenu. Drugi deo rada opisuje osnovne principe kognitivne lingvistike i odnosa prema metafori. Treći deo predstavlja prikaz učešća metafore u originalnom nastajanju ličnih imena, dok poslednji deo rada daje primere metafore u imenima u srpskom jeziku.

**Ključne reči:** ime, konceptualna metafora, kognitivna lingvistika, onomastikon, srpski jezik, antroponim, deskriptivna teorija, uzročna teorija