Contrastive analysis of proper names symbolism in English and Ukrainian

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Introduction

Mass culture creates such symbolic names that are preserved in memory of different generations of the society. One way or another, the names of heroes, characters and idols do not vanish without leaving a trace. The problem of symbolism was investigated by many authors, the most important for our work were books by: Чумарна М. "З початку світу. Україна в символах"[4]; Жайворонок В.В. “Зніки української етнокультури”[1]; “Проза символіки: Словник символів” Поташенко О.І., Дмитренко М.К.[2]; “Словник символів культури України” під. ред. В.П.Кочура, О.І. Поташенка, М.К. Дмитренка, В.В. Куйбида[3]; as well as 5. A dictionary of symbols by J.E. Cirlot[5], “Metaphor and symbol” by Cottle B.[6], “Cultural symbolism in literature” by Hall R. [8], “Images and symbols: Studies in religious symbolism” by M. Eliade[7]. After examination of all these books we came to the decision about necessity of contrastive investigation of proper names symbolism in English and Ukrainian. Many symbolic proper names became internationalized, such as: Don Juan – a conqueror of female hearts, womanizer; Gulliver – a giant; Hippocrates – a doctor, etc. So, it was interesting to compare these symbolic meanings in two languages determining what shades made them specific in the English or the Ukrainian languages and what meanings became common or identical.

Main part

We picked out 50 proper names for our analysis and devided them into 4 groups according to the types of proper names: proper names in literature; Biblical proper names; historical persons; Greek Gods and Goddess.

The first group consists of 12 units. In order to find similarities or differences of symbolic meanings, they were divided into three subgroups, those: which coincide completely, coincide partially or do not coincide in English and Ukrainian. For example, symbolic meaning of the main character of the novel Gulliver's Travels written by Jonathan Swift, Gulliver has a symbolic meaning of a giant. It coincides in both languages. At the same time, Mary Poppins, the title character of a series of children’s books, written by P. L. Travers, has three symbolic meanings in English: 1. Perfect nanny; 2. Tidiness; 3. Impeccable manners; but only two in Ukrainian: 1. Ідеальна няня; 2. Охайність. It is obvious that only two meanings coincide: perfect nanny and tidiness. This is an example of partially coinciding meanings. Some proper names do not have meanings, which coincide in two languages at all, for example, жаритця has two symbolic meanings in Ukrainian: 1. Символ щастя; 2. Цюю величне; the English equivalent Phoenix has only one symbolic meaning which is different from those in Ukrainian: 1. Rebirth. In general, in this group we have the largest numbers of words, which symbolic meanings do not coincide in two languages - 6 units (50%), 4 units (33%) have meanings which partly coincide and 2 units (17%) have symbolic meanings which completely coincide in English and Ukrainian.

The second group is called Biblical proper names. In this group there are 15 proper names. The names were taken from the King James Bible and Ukrainian Bible translated by I. Ohienko. The Bible is shrouded in symbolism and hidden meanings. The religious symbol points beyond itself to reality, participates in its power, and makes intelligible its meaning. As such it goes beyond a sign or an image. Symbols are part of the language of faith, the means by which faith expresses itself when it interprets the holy, the eternal, the beyond; when it communicates the divine confrontation, claims, and demands. As such, symbolism is a part of biblical religion from its beginning. Christian symbolism invests objects, actions or names with an inner meaning expressing Christian ideas [7].

Like in the previous group, here we have names which symbolic meanings coincide completely, for example, in English: Abraham: 1. Father of many nations; in Ukrainian: Авраам 1. Вір. In most cases, names taken from the Bible have Hebrew origins. Whatever the language the Bible is translated, the text is the same and in most cases words, names have the same meanings. Sometimes meanings are different and this is because each culture is special and unique. [7]. That is
why some symbolic meanings can get additional colors, for example: in English Isaac 1. The symbol of laugh 2. Child of Promise; in Ukrainian: Ісак 1. Радість. There are 6 (40%) names, which do not coincide for example, in English: Joseph the Betrothed 1. Wisdom; in Ukrainian: Йосип Обручник 1. Хороитель родини. So, the distribution within this group is as following: full coincidence - 20%, partial coincidence – 40 %, don’t coincide - 40%.

In the third group Historical persons there are names of people, who played important role or had impact on people’s outlook or made social or scientific change. Many historic persons became known for their behaviour, achievements, manner of speaking, dressing, etc., for example, Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, whose manners were imitated by her admirers and are stored in collective memory, and accordingly, the following expressions emerged with her name – Jackie smile, Jackie hair style, Jackie hat, etc. Her name is associated with elegance and impeccable manners. Another person, who became famous not only in his country but far beyond is John D. Rockefeller. His name has symbolic meanings which partially coincide in English and Ukrainian, in English - John D. Rockefeller 1. Wealth; 2. Power; in Ukrainian - Джон Девісон Рокфеллер 1. Нецінені богатства; 2. Успішний бізнес; 3. Світова могутність. The reason is that history of every nation has its own figures, who became not only the embodiment of national ambitions, but also the national symbol, symbol of people’s achievements, historical fate, exemplary citizens who stay in memory for a long time. Only two names (17%) out of 12 have the meanings which coincide completely in two languages, for example, in English: Napoleon 1. A leader, 2. A man of a short stature; in Ukrainian: Наполеон 1. Лідер; 2. Людина невисокого зросту. Or another name, in English: Einstein - 1. A brilliant person, in Ukrainian: Ейнштейн - 1. Геніальна людина. This section consists of 12 proper names. Three quarters of all words – 9 units (75%) partially coincide. Persons like Einstein or Napoleon became international symbols. They are known beyond the countries they were born and lived. That is why they have the same symbolic meanings in English and Ukrainian. And only one name (8%) does not coincide in symbolism, that is, in English: Taras Shevchenko - 1. Symbol of resistance; in Ukrainian: 1. Тарас Шевченко - 1.Служіння народу; 2. Еталон політичної чистоти.

The last group is called Names of Greek Gods and Goddess. Greek Mythology is one of the most fascinating mythological accounts of the ancient world. Myths are based on legends passed down through generations by word of mouth, so there are many versions of Greek mythology and not all of the stories agree with one another. The total number of proper names of Greek Gods and Goddesses in this group is 11. There are a lot of names which coincide completely in both languages – 4 units (36%), for example, Aphrodite which has the following symbolic meanings in both languages: beauty, feminine prowess and eternal youth. Also, many names coincide partially – 5 units (45%), for example, one of the symbolic meanings of Apollo, which is common in the two languages, is perfect male beauty; different meanings are: in English - 1. Peace; in Ukrainian - 1. Символ місцятва. Or the name Phoenix: the common meaning is 1. The symbol of renewal; different meanings are: in English - 2. Living in Paradise; in Ukrainian - 2. Безсмертя; 3. Перемога життя над смертю; 4. Невмирущість.

Although myths have Greek origin, each culture interprets them in different ways. That is why the meanings which are different in two languages make up 2 units (19%) of the total number, for example, the name Prometheus in the English language has the meanings: 1. The symbol of human striving, particularly the quest for scientific knowledge; 2. The risk of overreaching or unintended consequences; but in Ukrainian the meanings are a little bit different: 1. Символ радикального та фундаментального звільнення; 2. Борець за свободу.

Conclusion

So, the general statistics is as following: out of 50 analyzed names 11 (22%) have full coincidence of symbolic meanings, 21 (42%) - partially coincide and 18 (36%) do not coincide at all. As we see, we have the greatest number of names which symbolic meanings partially coincide -21(42%).

References