The Significance of Learning Nicknames of Public Figures in Modern English and American Language Models of the World

Almira K.Garayeva[a], Ildar G.Akhmetzyanov[a] and Lutsia G.Khismatullina[a]

[a]Kazan (Volga Region) Federal University, Kazan, RUSSIA

ABSTRACT

The importance of the topic of this study is determined by several factors: increased interest of linguists to the problem of interaction between language and culture; the need to study the onomastic units as body language. The purpose of this article is to identify the types of motivational nick names of famous American and English public figures, describing their positive and negative connotations. The leading approach to the study of this problem is multidisciplinary, which requires the use of such sciences as sociology, psychology, cultural studies, ethnography, etc. This article presents the findings of linguistic and cultural research aimed at identifying the semantic features of public nicknames as the key characters in the conceptual spheres of contemporary British and American societies. The materials of this paper may be useful in studying linguocultural language aspects, as well as for contemporary public debates about the place of nicknames in the English language.

Introduction

The importance of the problem

In modern studies on methods of teaching English language an increasing attention is focused on the relation between language, history and culture. The acknowledgement of the importance of the socio-cultural component in research is closely connected with the usage of cognitive approach.

CORRESPONDENCE Almira K.Garayeva ✉ almiragaraeva09@yandex.ru

The recent rapid pace of globalization and significant changes in different connections that exist between nations and people have again emphasized the importance of learning English.

When it comes to characters in stories, nicknames are as important as names – maybe more important.

Nicknames show that the object of reference has essential properties that coincide both with certain properties belonging to the historical evolution of the object and with what we have acknowledged and known about it (Charles & Lucille Hoerr, 1951).

Undoubtedly, modern society has become increasingly aware that knowledge of foreign language and culture of the country of the language gives indispensible advantages: more chances to be integrated in a rapidly changing society with a market economy, to be better employed, to study the culture of other nations to the utmost, to conceive the global problems. Practical foreign language fluency began to be perceived as a significant achievement of an individual. Cross-cultural communicative competence gains importance for young people as a means of interaction between people, a way of communication processes and internationalization of achievements in culture, science, economy and technology, a means of introduction to the national culture which significantly affects the cultural and educational level of an individual and his/her values. Under the internationalization of world labor market cross-cultural communicative competence of Russian students adds to the prestige of the vocational training received, and language resources enhance the competitiveness of native specialists and expand their professional and socio-cultural horizons (Grigoryeva et al., 2015).

The current trends in the national education (integration, globalization, internationalization, regionalization, democratization, diversification, humanization, informatization) lead to the necessity to understand education as a continuous process, and not as a rigid structure. Directions for an educational orgaisation development meet the requirements of society to the effectiveness and quality of educational activities in high dynamics of external and internal environment (Levina et al. 2015).

It is quite evident that many graduates of universities demonstrate not appropriable level of the English language and even those who are knowledgeable enough can not use effectively the language in their professional communication.

The dynamic development of the information society stipulates that the professional activities of modern young professional require continuous education, commitment to continuous improvement of his professional competence.

Therefore, during training, the student should not only form the subject knowledge and skills, but also promote the development of those personal qualities that would enable in future to solve new problems.

Sometimes students fail to comment upon some linguistic phenomena, because they are not aware of linguocultural aspects of the English language, customs, traditions and ways of life of different nations. It has long been recognized that any living language develops together with the speech community, that is, with the people who speak it.

Language is central to historical and social interaction in every society, regardless of location and time period. Presumably the history of the English language is one of the major subjects while learning English.

In recent decades, the linguistic research has developed in line with the understanding of language as an essential constituent element of the science of man as a thinking being. But the main function of the language is to form the conceptual world-image, in the center of which a human being stands as an individuality the carrier of consciousness, national mentality, having complicated inner world and definite point of view to the world (Fomenko, 2003). It is impossible to learn the language itself, not exceeding the bounds of it, without referring to the creator – a human being, the definite linguistic identity (Karaulov, 2004)

The complicated combination of linguistic uniqueness and character peculiarities of a nation leads to the varied degrees of dynamics, rationality and emotionality, estimation markedness, and the varied degrees of scope and reflection of a single field of material and spiritual life of a nation. The lifestyle and the way of thinking, peculiar to a certain nation, are reflected in anthroponyms, especially in nicknames more brightly (Tsepkova, 2011).

Status of a problem

The nickname is one of the most ancient anthroponymic units, the primary source of proper names and surnames. It is this genetic association link of onomastic vocabulary groups leads to ambiguity and conventions between the official names and nicknames. Bizarre and extravagant names such as Appleby, Smellie, Gotobed, Proudfoot, Shepard, Woodcock are evidence of such a link, and often perplex English language learners.

A nickname comes to stand for how we see ourselves. Those derogatory nicknames must have zapped their confidence and self-esteem and been devastating to their development.

A study conducted by A. Mehrabian & Marlena P. (1993) in 1993 found that "given names were ranked high on the attributes of success and morality and thought more suitable (than nicknames) for business and professional settings. In turn, nicknames were ranked high on the attributes of cheerfulness and popularity". The choice of names people go by is not fixed. A person may use his given name in business settings and use his nickname in social settings. They accept the name and come to realize that anything you say or hear often enough loses its strangeness and associated stigma. The power of the derogatory name fades as it becomes common, and the name falls from use. The child may realize that the name-giver was assuming power to cover up his feeling of inferiority. The child called "Fatty" may lose weight to fix the impression he makes (Morgan, O'neill & Harre, 1979).

The actuality of this study is determined by several factors: increased interest of linguists to the problem of interaction between language and culture; the need to study the onomastic units as the lexis corps, rich national cultural meanings and how the person is manifested in language units in all its diversity of life; interdisciplinary approach to the research problem that requires the use of such sciences as sociology, psychology, cultural studies, ethnography, etc.

The Research Hypothesis

This article presents the findings of linguistic and cultural research aimed at identifying the semantic features of public nicknames as the key characters in the conceptual spheres of contemporary British and American societies. In linguistic science the definite experience in studying nicknames has been accumulated. In the English Onomastics there are known works of scholars such as Th.V. Busse (1983), R. Frank (1980), R. Plank (1964), S. Elsdon (1967), B. Jackson (1967), P. Lesly (1990), J.K. Skipper (1990), V. Klerk & B. Bosh (2000), D. Boersema (2002), G. Maddalena (2004), K. Fox (2004) and others.

But there is a debatable question concerning the frame of nicknames, notably the coverage of the term "nickname".

Two approaches to interpretation of nicknames are sorted out in modern English linguistics. According to the first approach, nicknames are names, which are given to people in addition to proper names; here we can include derivative forms of official names. These are reduced, affectionate diminutive, familiar and other forms. According to the second approach, nicknames are meaningful units to individual, whom it means.

The appearance of nicknames is thrown back to history and connected with social causes. As F.G. Cassidy (1993) writes, "when there are many people named John in society, it is necessary to add a word, which would distinguish this John from another, for example, John Baker (from "to bake"), John Brown (from "brown") and the like". Another reason of appearance of nicknames is intention to arouse bright associations. They point to a person's subjective assessment independently on person's objective qualities. For example, because of polished manners and courteousness the 21st US President Ch. Arthur was called Elegant Arthur \ Arthur the Gentleman; because of active charitable and peacemaking activities Princess Diana was called "the People's Princess", "the Queen of Hearts" etc.

As we can see from the examples, differentiating a person among like-being, nicknames compare a nominee to other objects, ascribe to its specified qualities. Therefore, they have high degree of expressivity and attitudinal characteristics. Here the process of transition of selected present factors to attitudinal images is observed, and vice versa, the movement from abstract to visual.

Many nicknames to a larger extent are derived on the basis of indirect way of nomination (Chichagov, 2009).

In English and American conceptual frameworks nicknames of presidents, prime-ministers and sportsmen, formed in a way of metaphoric transfer and appeared as a result of approval, are shown respective and glorified. For example, in a role of positive indicator in different nicknames of the 16th US President A. Lincoln "Honest Abe", "Great Emancipator", or "Emancipation President", which he received for abolition of slavery, the qualitative adjectives "honest" and "great". The first American President J. Washington was named respectively as "Cincinnatus of the Americans", "American Fabius". Here the comparison underlies with famous Roman military leaders Cincinnatus, who thought to be the example of modesty and virtue, and C. Fabius, the example of circumstantiality and successfulness.

As an example of a name with negative connotation M. Thatcher's nicknames "Thatcher the Snatcher" should be mentioned. She received it after

abolition of milk distribution to pupils. The noun "snatcher" means somebody, who takes something from a person by force, and provides the nickname with negative connotation. One of the famous J. Kennedy's sobriquet was "Jack the Zipper", which he received for numerous love passions. In this case the noun "zipper" means the zipper on trousers, that's why it is an indicator of negative assessment. The crowned Queen Marry I Tudor got nickname "Bloody Marry" for her bloody violence. In this example the qualitative adjective "bloody" causes negative associations (Di Leo, 1997).

Methodological Framework

The article is aimed at highlighting semantic features of anthroponymic nicknames in English and American conceptual spheres. It revealed motivational types of nick names of famous public English and Americans public figures; described their positive and negative connotations. On the basis of a detailed analysis it has been stated that the semantic characteristics of nicknames are related to their informative richness, expressiveness, emotional labeling, national and cultural identities.

Preparing this article for comprehensive analysis a set of basic methodological principles and ideas has been used. The main focus was made on the close interaction between the language, history, culture and society. Language scholars agree on the importance of culture in language classrooms and it has become one of the main research areas in foreign language study and teaching (Lange, 2011). The relationship between language and culture is deeply rooted. Language is used to maintain and convey culture and cultural ties. The implications of language being completely entwined in culture, in regards for language teaching and language policy are far reaching, language policy must be used to create awareness and understandings of cultural differences, and written to incorporate the cultural values of those being taught (Leveridge, 2008). The paper discloses the importance that teachers must instruct their students on the cultural background of language usage. If one teaches language without teaching about the culture in which it operates, the students are learning empty or meaningless symbols or they may attach the incorrect meaning to what is being taught. The students, when using the learnt language, may use the language inappropriately or within they wrong cultural context, thus defeating the purpose of learning a language (Leveridge, 2008).

Results

As it has been marked earlier, motivation underlies in each nickname. It can be internal and external. Nicknames are derived in a way of internal motivation – linguistic derivations of official anthroponym in a way of such morphological conversions as reduction, rhythm etc. For example, famous comic actor B.Hope got the nickname "Hopeless" as a result of transfer of his real name and surname Les Hope; Prince of Wales, The Queen's eldest son Charles got the nickname "Ears Apparent" after the harmony with his official title "Heir Apparent".

Short, relatable names, in all things, probably fare better than formal and complex (Kripke, 1980).

Nicknames are formed in a way of external motivation, which implies internal and external qualities, mental abilities, behavioral peculiarities,

biographical facts, cultural attributes, character of individual. Nicknames of this category are semantically complete, meaningful and informative, variety of which can be studied, having been divided into several groups:

— Nicknames, characterizing its carrier by place of residence or birth (local nicknames): "Sage of Chelsey" – the nickname of a famous Scottish historian T.Carlide; "Squire of Hyde Park" – President F.Roosevelt's nickname by his patrimony in Hudson, state New-York;

— Nicknames by profession or post (professional-official): "Haberdasher" – H.Trumann's nickname, who before the big-time policy had worked as a salesman of fancy goods; "Sinbad the Tailor" – Lord Shinuall's nickname, which he got by his activity in Worker of the garments industry Union in Glasgow.

— Nicknames by a father's name (patronomic): "John the Second" / "King John the Second " – the nickname of the 6th American President John Adams, who was the 2nd American President John Adams's son; "Little George" – the nickname of 43rd US President – the son of 41st President George Bush;

— Nicknames by different external and internal qualities (descriptive): "Little Beauty" – General W.Grant's nickname, whom officers called for his complexion and beautiful melodious voice; "Fireside Chatter" – the 32nd US President Th.Rusvelt's nickname, who conducted 30 radio-chats for 12 years (Leonovich, 2007).

The origin of the creation of the last can be of different associations with natural phenomena, animals, plants and imaginative heroes. So, Prime-Minister of Great Britain Tony Blare was named "America's Poodle" by critics for supporting G.Bush's policy; and famous boxer Arthuro Gatty received nickname "Thunder" for a number of successful single combats. Such metaphorical transfer let the nominator sort out definite feature, which has basic meaning in this situation and attracts attention.

A nickname reflects how others view the person named and comes to mirror how that person sees himself/herself. Nicknames can affect a child's self-esteem positively or negatively. Care-givers should observe the group dynamics, how the child responds to a nickname and whether the name-givers are bullying or covering up feelings of inferiority. Nicknames they would be proud to possess and that would strengthen their connection with everyone else. Nicknames that create greater energy and engagement (Feldman, 1959).

Semantic specific of public nicknames as the others is conditioned by their appearance in the result of free name-creation. They are not listed as proper names, don't follow any fashion. But they are created on the basis of lexical structure of native language and keep their variety. But semantic transparency of a nickname is kept till everybody remembers its motivation. Otherwise nicknames become semantically exhausted and lose their actuality.

Discussions

In modern English linguistics there are two approaches to interpreting nicknames. The first refers to the names that are given to people in addition to their personal names. One can refer here the derived forms of their official names or derivatives. These are reduced, affectionate diminutive familiar and other forms. According to the second approach, nicknames are meaningful units to individual, whom it means.

In this article we share V.K.Chichagov's (2009) point of view. According to it, "nicknames" are linguistic units of the second nomination, which are derived on the basis of indirect way of nomination, when the motivated feature is marked associatively, by means of other existent word as a well-known new formation.

Conclusion

In accordance with the results of the project the necessity to change requirements for students can be traced.

Culture is seen as an essential characteristic of a person associated with the human capacity. Communication is an essential part of human life, and therefore part of the culture. Under cross-cultural competence, we understand the student's psychological readiness to communicate (interest, motive, lack of fear of the language barrier) and a certain level of verbal skills, language material, and most importantly - the necessary amount of sociocultural knowledge of the spoken language. The main areas of competence are cognitive, pragmatic and motivational. Cognitive goal is to obtain information about other cultures, and the need to refer not only to the culture of the country of the target language but also the culture of other countries.

Pragmatic purpose involves the acquisition of practical skills necessary for intercultural communication. Motivational terms are connected with the formation of the attitude of the student, which involves tolerance and respect for other cultures, eliminate prejudice, stereotypes and discrimination. The experimental model includes many elements: study material, built on the integration of national and regional courses and culture study, educational technology and student-centered model.

Some semantic features of antroponymic nicknames in British and American conceptual frameworks have been analyzed in this article. It distinguishes the motivational types of nicknames of public officials and government leaders; describes their positive and negative connotations. As the research shows the main semantic peculiarities of nicknames are linked to their informative value, expressiveness, emotional content, national and cultural identities.

Summarizing the above stated it is possible to say that the public names act as words of artistic plan – with associative media background, which may cause certain images and ideas in the minds of the people. Linguaculturological study of large and rich vocabulary of the formation of the English language is of great interest and should be further developed as enhances knowledge about the history, national mentality, the spiritual life, way of thinking, emotional and evaluative attitude towards the reality of the people of Great Britain and the United States.

Recommendations

The materials of this article can be recommended for use in modern practice of higher institutions as well as in the system of teacher training.

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Notes on contributors

Almira K. Garayeva, candidate of philological sciences, associate professor, associate professor, chair of foreign languages in the sphere of international relations, Kazan (Volga Region) Federal University, Kazan, Russia.

Ildar G. Akhmetzyanov, candidate of philological sciences, associate professor, associate professor, chair of foreign languages in the sphere of international relations, Kazan (Volga Region) Federal University, Kazan, Russia.

Lutsia G. Khismatullina, candidate of philological sciences, senior lecturer, chair of foreign languages in the sphere of international relations, Kazan (Volga Region) Federal University, Kazan, Russia.

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