

# Naming Units (NUs) , Observational Linguistics and reference as a speech act

or

## What's in a name

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### 1. Introduction

The concept of *Naming Unit (NU)* plays an important, if not a central role, in recent linguistic theories and is crucial for a functional, onomasiological approach to language and for the empirical study of word-formation (WF), for semantics and pragmatics, ie the use of language in context from the standpoint of Observational Linguistics (OL). The origin of the term and the concept denoted or named by it will be investigated in the following from its origins in Mathesius (1975) to the most recent linguistic research by Štekauer, Grzega and others.

### 2. Definitions

#### 2.1 Classical: Mathesius

The term was first coined and introduced into linguistics by Vilém Mathesius in 1961. But his ideas were only published in English in 1975 in a book edited by J. Vachek, translated by L. Duškova, under the title *A functional analysis of present day English*.

*Naming Units* and the acronym *NU* can be said to substitute for terms like *word*, *lexeme*, *lexical unit*, *complex word*, *compound* or *collocation*. In Mathesius' framework the use of language as a means of communication involves the stages of **encoding** and **decoding** with the help of NUs for objects in the extralinguistic reality where "the word as a naming unit is a conventional sign" (1975: 17). Words may denote "unique objects, such as *the sun*". Names may include proper names, such as *Prague*, *Charles Dickens* but also common nouns that may acquire "a unique meaning" in certain contexts (eg *father*, *mother*, *teacher*, *town*). Of course both *naming units* and the acronym *NU* are so-called *notational terms* as defined by N. E. Enkvist, which require an explicit nominal definition (see Index in Lipka 2002a). Mathesius (1975: 18) distinguishes three "components of the naming units" viz (1) the semantic nucleus or basic meaning, (2) associations attached and (3) "emotional colouring". On the basis of their form and formation process (see 3. below) he sets up four different types of NUs (1975: 23ff):

1. Simple and descriptive NUs
2. Non-compound words
3. Compound words, including collocations (*evening paper*)
4. Shortening of words and coining of new NUs (*bus*, *zoo*, *YMCA*, *kodak*).

## 2.2 Some recent uses of the term NU

In a number of publications including two books – Štekauer (1998) and (2005) has assigned a central position to NUs. The subtitle of the book (2005) is *Novel, context-free naming units* and the Introduction (XV) begins “New naming units come into existence every day.” In Chapter 4 various experiments are carried out with “sample naming units”, viz non-established (non-institutionalized) two-constituent compounds (*baby book*, *ball hammer*, *flower hat* and ***apple-juice seat*** (now institutionalized with many linguists), zero-derived denominal verbs (*to morning*) and derivatives (*stealer*, *becomeable*, *sittee*).

Štekauer (2005: 224) views “each new NU as a result of a very specific and real act of naming by a coiner” and states (ibid.: 212 fn 8) that the term was first coined and introduced by Mathesius and that “the naming act is a **cognitive phenomenon**” (ibid.: 213).

Grzega (2005: 79) notes that in his opinion “the basic cognitive process” is the same for a pair like “the nouns *cheat* and *cheater*” and that in an onomasiological approach the starting-point should always be “the concept to be named.” In my view the formal categorization or re-categorization of the extralinguistic referent and its mental, conceptual image is also a matter of a specific speech community. This is particularly evident for the category *cottage* – see Schmid (1993). The classification and sub-classification of NUs can obviously be made on the basis of formal, conceptual and functional criteria and may result in a cross-classification.

## 3. Forms and classifications

### 3.1 Formal criteria

These depend on language-specific processes of WF as already implied by Mathesius’ distinction of 4 types, viz simple NUs, non-compound words, compound words including collocations and shortening of words ie acronyms. He illustrates shortenings, ie the extremely productive processes of clipping and acronyming, with the examples *bus*, *zoo*, *YMCA* and ***kodak***. In modern texts in many languages esp acronyms are pervasive.

### 3.2 Semantic considerations and onomasiology

As specified in 2.1., Mathesius already distinguishes three types of “components” , viz semantic nucleus, associations and “emotional colouring”, ie connotations. We may add further non-formal criteria and distinctions (see 3.2.1. and 3.2.2.), viz metaphor and metonymy, but also the involvement of proper nouns, ie eponyms.

#### 3.2.1 NUs, metaphor and metonymy (M & M)

In these categories no formal change, as in WF, takes place and we may speak – following Cruse – of creativity producing new **lexical units** and not new **lexemes**. Clearly, many NUs referring to plants and animals are metaphorically related and metonymy is at stake with contiguity eg part/whole, or other spatial relationships eg a vehicle and its driver (see Viennese *Fiaker* below).

### 3.2.2 *Eponyms (names within names) and onomasiology*

Eponym is defined in Freeman (1997: vii) as “a proper name that comes to stand for a place, or a thing, or an institution” like *cardigan*, *mackintosh*, *sandwich*, *Ferris wheel*, *Alzheimer*, *Parkinson*, *bikini*, *bowdlerize*, *Benz*, *Ford*, *Bentley*, *Porsche* and *black-eyed Susan*. Eponymy may be regarded as a subclass of metonymy. For a long time proper names have been neglected in structural linguistics and banned from word-books and the lexicon as extralinguistic knowledge. After their re-discovery (see Lipka 2000 – also for the very special case and blend *Fumihiko*) their function as NUs has been recognized. All subclasses of proper names belong here ( not only personal names as place names like *Bismarck* in North Dakota and *Columbus* in *Columbia*) but also first (or given – not always Christian) names like *Susan* in the above example as a plant name and BrE *lazy Susan* ‘a flat piece of plastic or wood on a dinner table which can be turned round for every one to reach several dishes etc’.

According to 2.2. both Štekauer and Grzega stress the importance of an onomasiological approach to a proper and full understanding of NUs and their various functions. In Lipka (2002: ix, xviii, 20, 40ff, 146204) I had also stressed the need for an onomasiological perspective. Quite recently (forthcoming in *OnOn*) I will argue in detail for a Re-Discovery of Onomasiology.

## 4. Functions of NUs

In the Prague School of Linguistics – beginning with phonology and the phoneme – the function of linguistic elements plays a central role, which is often neglected in other linguistic theories. As seems obvious, the primary function of NUs is **naming** extralinguistic objects, actions and processes. Simple and complex lexemes serve to create specific classes or language-specific categories (see Lipka 2002a: 63, 67, 69) such as E *tower* and G *Turm*. They divide up the same reality in different ways by drawing border-lines between specific referents and words. Thus, the German category *Schnecke* is split up in English into *snail* and *slug* and *Straße* into *street* and *road*. Leisi’s (1985) contrastive approach in which extralinguistic referents are central can therefore be characterized as Referential Semantics. In Prototype Semantics categories such as *bird* are represented as radial categories. On the other hand, the use of different NUs as referring expressions, for **reference**, can be seen as different speech acts (see Austin 1962, Searle 1969). Contrastive Linguistics, eg between English and German, may focus on a specific referent and ask “ What is this called, or What is the name for it in E, G, F, It, Sp etc “? There may be a partial correspondence only, one equivalent category may be missing altogether and there are also *false friends* (a metaphor!). If the name is missing, a pointing gesture may be used accompanied by empty placeholders like *thing* (*over there*), *thingamajig*, G *Ding*, F *truc*, *machin*, *cela*. Sometimes it is claimed that proper names have no meaning but only reference, but cf *Shakespeare*, *Constable*, *Wagner* and place names with a suffix *-er* in E *Londoner*, G *Alzheimer*.

### 4.1 *Reference, nomination and denotation*

As discussed in Lipka (2002a: 75f), I propose – following John Lyons – to make a theoretical distinction between the **denotation** of lexemes, which denote classes of extralinguistic objects and **reference** as a relation between various linguistic **expressions** and a specific object. Although Lyons claims that reference is an utterance-dependent notion and thus a matter of

language in use (or parole), proper names have a relatively stable, systematic function as a speech act. This, clearly, is a pragmatic notion based on the concept of reference as a speech act introduced into linguistics by Searle in 1969 and also John Austin's (1962) claim that when speaking we "do something with words." In contrast, some linguists, including Lipka (1999) speak of the nomination-function of words, in German *Benennung* or *Bezeichnung* - see Grzega (2004). In chapter 4 of his book entitled *Reference as a speech act* Searle (1969: 81) introduces the category of *single definite reference*, which may be performed by using four types of 'definite referring expressions' (our NUs):

1. Proper names
2. Complex noun phrases in the singular eg *the man who called, John's brother*
3. Pronouns
4. Titles, eg. *the Prime Minister, the Pope*.

Later in this article I will discuss the *case history* (5.3.1) of the present Pope and various other expressions referring to the *Holy Father* or *His Holiness*.

#### 4.2 Naming, denotation and categorization

As can be seen from Leisi's examples and the treatment of the category *bird* in Cognitive Linguistics and Prototype Theory naming means setting up NUs for language-specific classes of objects or, more precisely, categories. Categorization, naming or denotation and the existence of a NU may also lead to **hyponymization** as defined and stressed by E. Leisi, ie it may mislead the users of languages to believe that a single entity denoted and created by this name actually exists independently of language (see Lipka 2002a: 22f, 189, 207). Obviously, the metalinguistic NU *hyponymization* is a notational term.

*Brand names* ie particular names or designs for a type of product made by a particular company are a specific subcategory of NUs. They are related to trade marks ie the official names of a particular product. In order to best fulfil their function, they must be short, have positive connotations or emotional colouring and act as an attention-seeking device (ASD) as specified in Lipka (2002a: 147, 189).

### 5. Some case histories/studies

The discussion of case histories (*G Fallstudien*), partly relating to etymology, and of the history of linguistic expressions and their referents were discarded by the ideology of Structuralism and disparagingly dubbed anecdotal.

Before beginning with a discussion of interesting specific cases in 5.2 let me characterize the approach to theoretical and practical, applied semantics in Ullmann (1962). His general perspective is made clear with an impressive wealth of specific cases from a broad variety of European languages, esp Romance, English and German with reference to various types of meaning and semantic processes. Particularly revealing especially for borrowing is his account of *fiacre*, *money* and *croissant* (1962: 78, 197). As is well known to Romance scholars, *F tête* derives from the slang of Roman legionaries who referred to the skulls of their slain foes with *testa* meaning broken pots. The staple French breakfast includes *croissant* metaphorical from the shape of the *crescent* moon - on the tents of the Turks, during the siege of Vienna, which was baked by the Viennese to mock the Turks. The pastry

(Austrian *Hörndl*, ie little horn) with its characteristic shape travelled to Paris. A similarly complex fate, via the Swiss *Red Cross*, *La Croix-Rouge* has led to the *Red Crescent*. As opposed to *croissant* another borrowing, the NU *fiacre* and also the referent travelled East to Vienna from Paris, the typical *Fiaker*, a horse-drawn carriage – and metonymically its driver. The NU stems from the fact that such cabs waited for customers on a place in front of the church of *St. Fiacre* in Paris. Thus, the name of the vehicle and the driver ultimately goes back to that of an Irish saint who lived in the seventh century. A final case of general interest is the existence of NUs from different languages for the same place at different times. A typical case in point is the eponymic example *Leningrad* and *St. Petersburg* and the original *Königsberg* later dubbed *Kaliningrad*. In *Alsace* and *Südtirol* or *Alto Adige* it is quite common to use different NUs for the same place eg *Lützelstein* and *La Petite Pierre*.

### 5.1 Participant Observation (PO)

In the following I shall illustrate the above theoretical discussion by giving and explaining some examples called *case histories* (in a non-medical sense) gained with the method of Observational Linguistics (OL) as postulated in Lipka (2003). This novel subcategory of Empirical Linguistics is in opposition to Corpus Linguistics, which employs a rigorous methodology and which, on the basis of counts and statistics, claims representativeness. PO stems from anthropology and has also been used in sociolinguistics. The following cases are not rigorously documented and quoted as is the custom in general linguistics. The *participant observer* need not be a linguist.

### 5.2. Case histories as partly etymological information

The profitable use of PO may become obvious from the following cases and examples. Some of them obviously are related to examples given by Mathesius and Searle, printed in bold type.

#### 5.2.1 Pope Benedict XVI – Cardinal Ratzinger – Papa Ratz

The person known to the world today, or better all over the world, was born 4 March 1939 as *Joseph Ratzinger*. Eventually he became *Archbishop of Munich and Freising* and then a cardinal in Rome. After his election as pope, the British press used to refer to him as *Papa Ratz*, beginning with the non-intellectual paper *The Sun*, that showed his picture on the title page with the headline “From *Hitler Youth* to ...*Papa Ratz*” and also “*German cardinal becomes Pope Benedict XVI*”. Here are quite a number and variety of NUs with single definite reference.

#### 5.2.2 The Story of *America*, *Google* and *Co*.

After the unique **Pope** we begin with A like *America*. It is quite well known, that the name goes back to *Amerigo Vespucci* but not exactly how. *Google* can tell you and also why *Mercedes* and *Audi* bear their names but not – right after the *World Cup* or *G Weltmeisterschaft* or (*WM*) - how *football* or *soccer* are called in other languages and why *Zinedine Zidane* bears the name *Zizou* for fans in France. As can be gathered from an article in *TIME* (February 20, 2006, or 2/20) by Adi Ignatius, and from general PO, the noun *Google* can be the basis for various complex lexemes derived by processes of WF. First, the action of searching by means of this programme or *search engine* can be denoted by the zero-derived

verbs *to google*, G *googeln*. The article on the *Google Empire* (a compound) further contains *Google guys*, *Google watchers* and *Googleplex*, the campus in California and *Googler* for the employees. In the following case histories the origin of a broad variety of NUs, also functioning as buzz-words or household names will be traced.

### 5.2.3 The name *Google*

According to TIME and other sources for PO, the *Google co-founders* Sergey Brin and Larry Page initiated the project in 1996 and wanted to name their creation *Googol* (after the mathematical term for the number 1 followed by 100 zeroes). But someone misspelled the name as *Google* which then stuck and became a globally institutionalized NU. In 2004 the magazine *Wired* put Brin and Page on the cover with the adoring line *GOOGLEMANIA!*

### 5.2.4 The story of the name *America*

Many people know that it is related to the name *Amerigo Vespucci*. *Google* (another new NU) tells us that he was an explorer who made several voyages to the Americas between 1497 and 1502. He gave an account of these in books and in letters that were published in the 16<sup>th</sup> century in 37 languages. In 1507 the German cartographer Martin Waldseemüller translated the letters and proposed to name the new continent after the first name of the explorer, in the latinized NU *Americus Vesputius*. In his map of the world (1507) which was spread widely he used the name *America* for the continent(s).

### 5.2.5 The age of the *automobile* – *Mercedes* - *Audi* – the *papamobile*

120 years ago, in 1886, Karl Benz and Gottlieb Daimler invented the *motorcar* and, in 1926, founded *Daimler-Benz AG*. On 29 January 1886 Benz took out a patent on what was called the *Benz Patent-Motorwagen*. From 1902 on the products were sold under the trade mark *Mercedes*. This name goes back to the first name of the daughter of the businessman Emil Jellinek who had ordered 36 cars in 1900. This is a very special eponym, different from other brands called after inventors, engineers or owners of factories like *Benz*, *Daimler*, *Ford* (who founded the *Ford Motor Co* in 1903), *Porsche* and *Toyota*. Many NUs are formed as acronyms, eg *FIAT*, *Renault*, *VW (Volkswagen)*, *BMW (Bayrische Motorenwerke)* and others are metaphorical eg *Jaguar*, *Rover* (an eponym), *Beetle*, G *Ente (duck)* for *Citroen 2 CV*.

*Audi* is a different story altogether. The name is due to a very special play on words. The *automaker* August Horch had left the original company *Horch* he had founded to start a new one. For reasons of trade mark he was forbidden to use his surname again. When debating this problem at the home of a friend called Franz Fikentscher the ten-year old boy Heinrich was present, who had learned Latin at grammar school. He translated *Horch* into Latin and so the NU *Audi* was born.

NUs for brands, makes, and types of cars can be coined in a variety of ways, eg as acronyms, like German *PKW (Personenkraftwagen)*, *LKW* and depending on their use, size, number of people it holds such as *sports car*, *limousine*, *cabriolet*, *sedan*, *van*, *SUV (sports utility vehicle)*, or *gas guzzler*. Cars may also be characterized and named after their type of propulsion such as *petrol-powered*, *hybrid* or the eponymic *diesel* (after *Rudolf Diesel*). There are two-seaters, four-seaters and racing cars with a single driver. But there is only one exceptional vehicle for a single person in the world – the *papamobile*.

### 5.2.6 *The case, the creation and advent of the bikini*

On 5 July 1946, thus 60 years ago, the French automobile designer Louis Réard invented and named the *bikini*, a piece of clothing in two separate parts, that women can wear for swimming. A few days before, the Americans had dropped an atom bomb, as a test, on the atoll of *Bikini*. In the language of the natives *bikini* means ‘land of many coconuts’. Réard wished that the two-piece swim suit and its name would make the same splash as the bomb – which it did. The subsequent evolution of the bikini has led to the *monokini* (*topless* bikini – from *bi* to *mono*) and, in order of diminishing size, to the *thong*, *slingshot*, *mini* and *micro*.

### 5.2.7 *Kodak and digital photography*

In *Wirtschaftsmagazin brand eins* 8 (2006) the participant observer hit upon an article on **Kodak** and the invention of the digital camera. In 1881 George Eastman founded the *Eastman Dry Plate Company* in Rochester and 8 years later he brought the first camera on the market. He invented the name **Kodak** for it because apparently **K** was his favourite letter which, for him, suggested strength and presence. Today it is well known that **K**, in advertising, is a favourite attention-getter or ASD, as in *Kleenex*. In 1900 the first successful camera named *Brownie* was sold for 1 Dollar. In 1892 Eastman renamed his company *Eastman Kodak Co.* In 1976 Steven Sasson, who worked for the company, invented the electronic camera and presented it to Kodak managers. The fact that they did not recognize the importance of the invention caused the decline of Kodak and Rochester due to the rise of digital photography.

### 5.2.8 *The space shuttle and the case of Challenger, Columbia and Discovery*

In August 2005 both linguistic expressions *the (space) shuttle* and *Discovery* could be used unambiguously for a single (not so new) extralinguistic referent. *Shuttle*, as well as *G Weltraumfähre* (a very special type of *ferry*), denote nameworthy categories with both lexical items combining metaphor and word-formation (WF). With the complex lexeme *space shuttle* the coiner (whoever) has created a very new category of referents. For individual members of this class, ie single definite reference, the NASA introduced and used specific proper names that are often morphologically complex. 20 years ago *Challenger* exploded killing six *astronauts* (another NU) and the first female one. In 2003 *Columbia* burnt up on re-entry into the atmosphere due to a faulty heat shield. In 2005 the same problem with *Discovery* required the first repairs in outer space and the shuttle made a safe return. It had lost part of the heat shield at lift-off. In July 2006, in the 15<sup>th</sup> mission of the shuttle program, the *Discovery* was launched again and returned safely home after leaving a German astronaut on the *ISS space station*.

### 5.2.9 *Whisky, wodka, wines and cheeses*

In many cultures where there is no prohibition of alcohol, spirits and wines bear interesting names that may be related to geographical NUs. It would be far too tedious to go into detail in this wide field. Let me just mention that both *whisky* (*Scotch*, Irish or US) - from Gaelic *usquebaugh* - and *wodka*, formed as a diminutive with the suffix *-ka* from *woda* ‘water’ - basically have the same metaphorical etymology, relating it to water (as also in Scandinavian *akvavit*). Subcategories are (*single*) *malt*, *blend*. Names or brands are *Glenfiddich*, *Glenmorangie*, *Laphroig* or the eponymous *Johnny Walker*. It would be madness, in this context, to go into detail. So let me just mention *calvados*, *port*, *sherry*, the liqueur

*benedictine, Burgundy, Bordeaux, Riesling* and the cheeses *roquefort, camembert, banon* (from the name of a village in Provence) and *Emmental(er)*.

#### 5.2.10 *Groups of people and the Tübingen Mafia*

In many situations there is a need for NUs referring to a group of people, not only single persons. Criteria for creating categories could be nation, ethnic, and also religion, race, convictions, political and other beliefs and parties and common ideas eg *the English, Americans, French, Germans, Buddhists, Christians*, religious orders eg *Benedictines, Franciscans, Muslims, Tories, Whigs, democrats, republicans* etc and NUs based on age – eg *kids, dated teenies, senior citizens, yuppies* (young urban professional people), and *woopies* (well off old people), *best agers, generation (55) plus* and *master consumers*.

To finish off with linguistics, there are no *Blairites, Spice Girls* but *Chomskyites, MITniks, transformationalists* and *the Gang of Four* (Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, Svartvik) as attested in the Annual Report 2005 of the *SURVEY of English Usage* (SEU). But there are also *the Marchandians* as characterized by one of them (see Kastovsky 2005) in Štekauer/Lieber (2005: 107-117) viz K. Hansen, H.E. Brekle, L. Lipka and G. Stein (*Lady Quirk*) together *the Marchandians*. They have often been referred to by the NU *the Tübingen Mafia*. Titles are also a special kind of NUs eg *Sir Randolph, Lord Quirk, the Duke of Edinburgh*. Recently the claim was made that there is also a *Prešov Mafia* or *Connection*.

## 6. Summary and Conclusions

Since NU is a notational term, the original definition and recent uses are first presented and discussed. The naming act is considered a cognitive phenomenon. There are several formal criteria and semantic considerations that may be used for classifying and for the categorization of NUs. M & M and the involvement of eponyms are here postulated for the first time. The various functions of NUs are crucial for an appropriate understanding. Also brand names, trade marks and titles eg *Lord Quirk* (the founder of *the SEU*), have been neglected in the past. For an adequate approach to NUs their conceptualization as a pragmatic category, esp the notion of the speech act of single definite reference, is crucial. This is illustrated with a discussion of a number of case histories, beginning with Searle's example of *the Pope*.

In closing, gentle reader, let me mention – as a participant observer – several very special NUs: *Onomasiology Online* (*OnOn*), *Leonhard Lipka* (*LL*), *München, Monaco di Baviera*.

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