

People as points of reference. How famous and infamous individuals become part of language

Bogusław Bierwiaczonek, Jan Długosz University in Częstochowa, Poland

In cognitive linguistics, anthropocentrism is considered an import aspect of language. The paper is a survey of numerous ways English uses proper names of people, i.e. anthroponyms, to designate various conceptual entities related to their referents. Two types of name-based expressions are discussed. The first one consists of name-based individual lexical items (either simplex or derived), while the other includes more complex multi-word syntactic constructions, such as the internationalized French à la X construction, prepositional constructions like according to X, a subcategory of the comparative prepositional like X construction with X standing for a personal point of reference, a subcategory of comparative as Adj as X construction, and the special anthroponymic genitive XYZ blend construction.

Keywords: *anthroponym, reference point, eponymy, metonymy, construction*

“Man is the measure of all things” (Protagoras, c.490 B.C. – c.420 B.C.).

One of the most important aspects of natural language is its anthropocentricity, i.e. the fact that people tend to construe and describe the world from their own, i.e. human, point of view. This special importance of human beings is often reflected in language, e.g. they motivate most gender and pronominal systems, they provide the prototypical grammatical subjects, etc. People, especially famous and influential people, are also an important aspect of what we usually mean by context. In fact, they are so important that they often become conceptual points of reference (cf. Langacker 1993) and their names become entrenched elements of languages. This paper is a survey of the numerous ways English uses proper names of people, i.e. anthroponyms, to extend its lexicon and other symbolic units of language. Two types of name-based expressions are discussed. The first one consists of individual lexical items (either simplex or derived) whose meaning is extended to designate various conceptual entities related to their referents, e.g. eponyms like (*Henry*) *Ford* (name) – *Ford* (Motor Company) – *Ford* (type of car), and morphological name-based derivations, like *Darwinism*. The other category includes more complex multi-word syntactic constructions, all using people as points of reference again, such as a number of prepositional constructions, clausal comparative constructions and the genitive XYZ construction.

1. Eponymous metonymy

Proper names are often used metonymically to designate various entities related to their basic human referent. From the conceptual point of view, such eponymous metonymies (cf. Bierwiaczonek 2013) are best described in terms of Langacker’s (1993) Reference Point Model, where the essential components are:

C- conceptualizer

R - reference point (an outstanding individual X)

T – target (an entity associated with X)

D – dominion

- -> mental path

The process of activation of the target meaning is represented as follows:

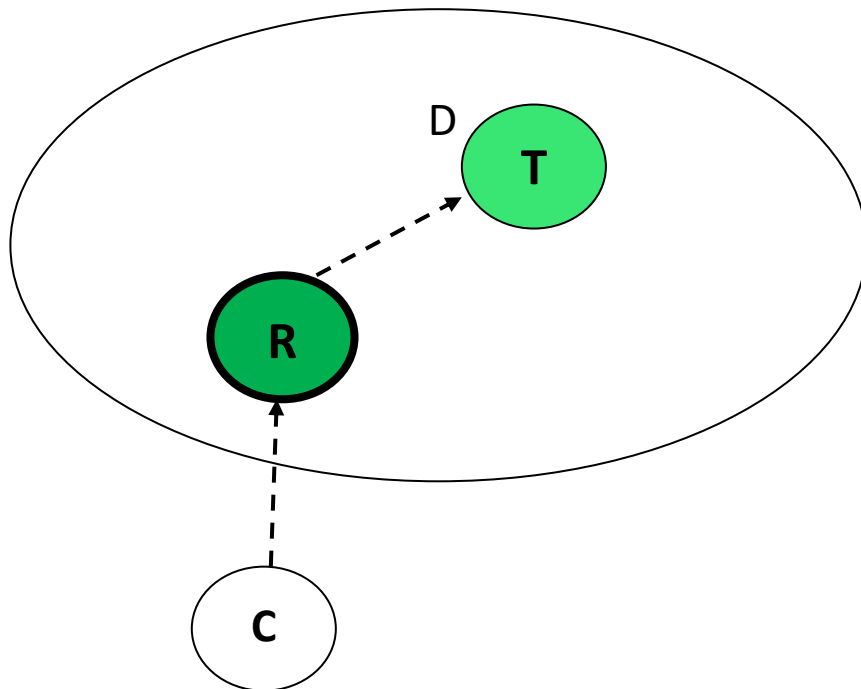


Figure 1. Activation of target meaning according to Langacker's Reference Point Model (1993)

Grammatically, this metonymic shift results in various kinds of conversions. There are several patterns of these conversions.

1.1 *Minor conversions: Proper nouns >> common nouns*¹ (Bierwiazzonek 2013, 2016)

This conversion is based on several kinds of metonymy:

A. NAME OF RESEARCHER/INVENTOR FOR A UNIT OF ENTITY

André-Marie Ampère – *ampère*, 'unit of electric current'

Daniel Gabriel Fahrenheit – *fahrenheit*, 'unit of temperature'

Heinrich Rudolf Hertz – *hertz*, 'unit of frequency of sound waves'

Isaac Newton – *newton*, 'unit of force'

B. NAME OF INVENTOR FOR INVENTION

Samuel Colt – *colt*, 'a revolver'

Mikhail Kalashnikov – *Kalashnikov*, 'automatic rifle'

Charles Mackintosh – *mackintosh*, 'waterproof coat'

W.H. „Boss” Hoover – *hoover*, 'vacuum cleaner'

C. DISCOVERER OF DISEASE FOR DISEASE

These often result from ellipsis of the full name of the disease to the name of its discoverer, e.g.

¹ The symbol “>>” should be interpreted as “converted to”, the particular metonymies are indicated by small capitals. See Dirven (1999) and Schönefeld (2005) for cognitive accounts of conversion.

Alois Alzheimer – *Alzheimer's Disease* – *Alzheimer*
 Jakob Heine, Carl Oskar Medin – *Heine-Medin Disease* – *Heine-Medin*
 John Langdon-Down – *Down's syndrome* – *Down*
 James Parkinson – *Parkinson's disease* – *Parkinson*

In the case of *Alzheimer* and a few other metonymic names of diseases, the lexicalization is a matter of degree and register. Thus in formal and professional English either the full name *Alzheimer's* (or *Alzheimer*) *disease* or its abbreviated form *AD* is usually used; the metonymic *Alzheimer* being more common in informal spoken English.

D. CHAIN²: FOUNDER OF COMPANY FOR COMPANY FOR PRODUCTS OF COMPANY

These are special cases of metonymic chains, where the name of the founder of company is used not only for the company but also for its products. In the case of some companies, those products may be of different kinds, e.g. *Hewlett-Packard* may designate HP printers, computers, printer inks, etc.

Adam Opel – *Opel* (AG) – *Opel* (car)
 Henry Ford – *Ford* (Motor Company) – *Ford* (car)
 King C. Gillette – *Global Gillette* – *gillette*
 William Hewlett and David Packard – *Hewlett-Packard* (company) – *Hewlett-Packard* (product) – *hp* (printer, computer, ink, etc.)
 Hugon Junkers – *Junkers and Co. Warmwasser-Apparatefabrik* – *junkers*³

In the case of metonymic chains, Figure 1 must be extended to include the name's new designations, as shown in Figure 2:

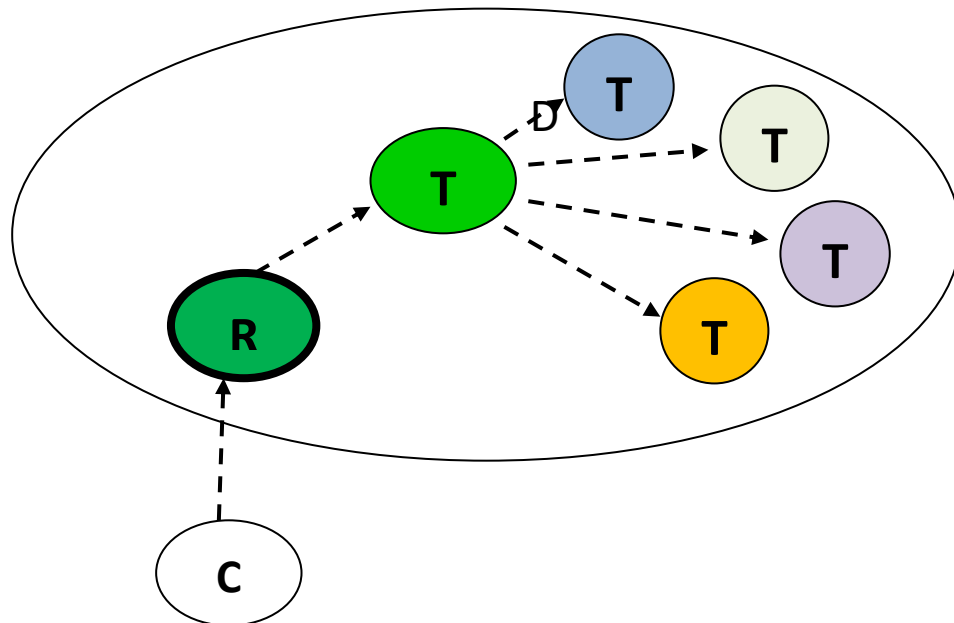


Figure 2. Reference-Point representation of metonymic chains (cf. Bierwiczzonek 2016)

² Metonymic chains are sometimes referred to as “serial metonymy” (cf. Nerlich and Clarke 2001).

³ In Polish *junkers* has undergone the process known as auto-superordination (cf. Cruse 2000) and now is often used in the general sense of ‘a gas hot water heater.’

1.2 Paragons as common nouns

Outstanding individuals may become paragons of excellence in their fields (Lakoff 1987) and stand for the whole axiologically marked subcategory, e.g. *Mozart* may stand for a subcategory of musicians, namely, EXTREMELY TALENTED MUSICIANS, *Hitler* stands for the subcategory of RUTHLESS DICTATORS. The transfer of meaning from the unique referent to a category is based on two metonymies, namely INDIVIDUAL X FOR X'S SALIENT PROPERTY and PARAGON OF CATEGORY C FOR WHOLE CATEGORY C.⁴ These two metonymies (or, “syntonymies”, as they are called in Bierwiazzonek 2020), result in conversion of proper names to common nouns, which exhibit the standard definite-indefinite contrasts and may be pluralized, e.g. *We would need an Einstein to deal with that problem, Is this the Einstein you were talking about the other night? They are incredibly smart guys – there some real Einsteins among them.* The special status of paragons in relation to other members of the category they form is often used in the XYZ construction discussed in Section 2.3. below.

1.3 Major Conversions

Major conversions of anthroponyms change the grammatical status of proper nouns to other major grammatical categories. In English there seems to be only one but highly productive type of these conversions, namely, conversion from the proper noun to the verb. This conversion may take one of two different metonymic routes.

A. Proper noun>>verb

The conversion is motivated by the metonymy PERSON X FOR BEHAVIOUR/ACTIVITY ASSOCIATED WITH X.

A celebrated example of this type of conversion is the name of Captain Charles C. Boycott (1832–97), an Irish land agent who was opposed and ostracized, in an attempt instigated by the Irish Land League to insure fair rents, fixed tenure, and free sale. At present, according to the online *Cambridge Dictionary*, the verb *boycott* is used in two senses, explicated and illustrated below.⁵

- a) ‘Refuse to buy a product or do business with a company’,
e.g. *Motorists boycotted the company's gas stations and its share price crashed.*
- b) ‘Refuse to take part in an activity as a way of expressing strong disapproval’,
e.g. *Opposition parties boycotted the elections as unfair*

Furthermore, Kosecki (2005: Ch. 6) discusses a number of modern cases whereby the surnames of well-known people are converted to verbs, according to the same metonymic pattern. Here are a few relevant recent examples:

- ▶ They Khadaffi'd the USA Embassy.
- ▶ They Bin Laden'd Madrid.
- ▶ He's going to OJ his way out of the marriage. (discussed also by Gibbs 1999)
- ▶ He Raul'd the ball into the net.

B. Proper noun >> common noun>>verb

⁴ This is equivalent to Barcelona's (2004) proposal that the mapping from paragons to other members of the category is based on the metonymy IDEAL MEMBER FOR CLASS.

⁵ There is also a noun *boycott*, which seems to have been converted from the verb, with the sense ‘an instance of boycotting’ by means of the common metonymy ACTIVITY X FOR AN INSTANCE OF X, motivating a great number of other such conversions, e.g. *to walk*>>*a walk*, *to ride*>>*a ride*, etc.

In this case, the conversion from the proper noun to the verb is mediated by a minor conversion of the proper noun to the common noun, which reflects the metonymic chain PERSON X FOR DEVICE Y ASSOCIATED WITH X FOR ACTIVITY INVOLVING Y

A well-known example of this kind of chained development is the verb *guillotine*, based on the name of Joseph-Ignace Guillotin (1738-1814), a politician who promoted the use of guillotine in French Parliament. The actual inventor of the prototype was a man named Antoine Louis.

- ▶ “Go back to the seventeen-nineties, and the French Terror guillotined aristocrats just for being what they were” (COCA: Sean McMullen, *The Precedent*, Vol. 119, Iss. 1/2; pg. 230, 27 pgs, 2010 (Jul/Aug 2010))⁶

1.4 *Proper names in derivation*

Our frames of knowledge about particular individuals usually contain a number of elements, depending on the activities associated with those individuals. Different lexical constructions, and thus different affixes, may systematically activate different elements of those frames (cf. Dancygier & Sweetser 2014). However, they may also be restricted to particular groups of individuals.

1.4.1 *Minor name-based derivations*

Minor derivation derives a subcategory X' from another subcategory of the same category X, e.g. countable nouns like *chicken* or *duck* may become uncountable nouns when their meaning is construed as food (cf. Bauer 1983; see Brdar 2007 for cross linguistic corpus-based studies of ‘animal grinding’ and tree-wood names).

A. From proper nouns to abstract nouns:

X-ism, which derives abstract nouns from names of well-known philosophers and politicians, e.g. *Darwinism*, *Marxism*, *Maoism*, *Freudism*, *McCarthyism*, *Thatcherism*, etc. to denote ‘doctrines, systems of philosophical, religious, or political beliefs, intellectual or artistic movements’ (Bauer & Huddleston 2002 [henceforth B&H]:1702). Thus, the ultimate meaning of the derivation is a result of blending the general constructional schema of X-ism derivation with the frame activated by the anthroponym X. As an example, consider Figure 3 below, which shows the formal and semantic integration of the derivation *Darwinism*:⁷

⁶ In languages where conversion is less common (or, arguably, non-existent at all, cf. Szymanek 1998), like Polish, the verbs are derived morphologically through suffixation. The most common Polish verbal suffix having this function is *-ować*, e.g. noun: *gilotyna* >> verb: *gilotynować*.

⁷ For more on conceptual and formal aspects of word-formation, see Panther and Thornburg (2003) and Booij (2013).

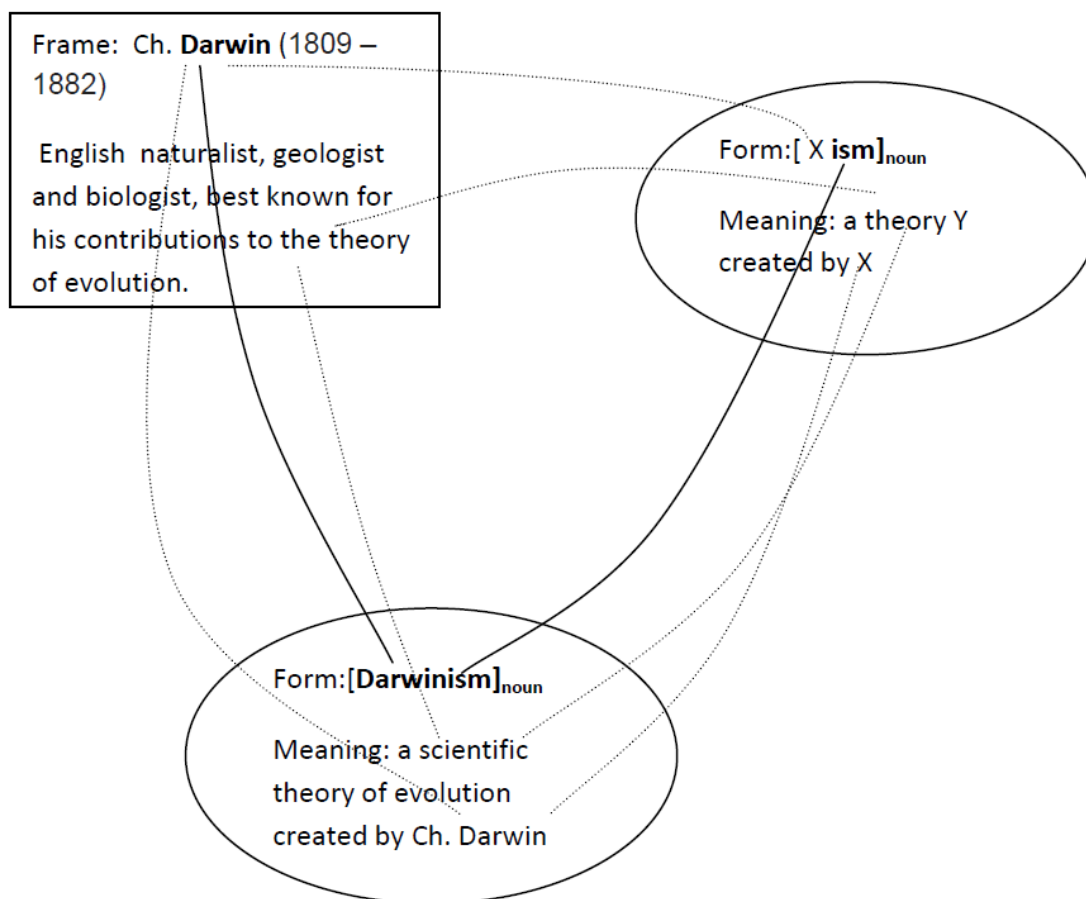


Figure 3. Formal and semantic integration of the derivation *Darwinism*. Note that the ellipses represent linguistic units, whereas the rectangle represents a conceptual frame of encyclopaedic knowledge.

The above meaning of *-ism* derivations can be easily extended. According to blog.oxforddictionaries.com, the new formation *Kardashianism*, based on the name of the well-known American celebrity Kim Kardashian, might mean something like ‘mindless way of speaking marked by an overuse and misuse and believed to be ruining the English language’, and, because of its implicit sexism and ageism, it may well develop another sense, namely ‘the hatred of the speech of young women’.

B. From proper personal nouns to other personal nouns:

X-ist – most of these derivations with X as a variable for person have *X-ism* counterparts and designate ‘a person holding beliefs associated with X-ism’, e.g. *Darwin* - *Darwinist*, *Marx* - *Marxism*, *Thatcher* - *Thatcherist*, etc.

- ▶ “Aldous Huxley was the grandson of a distinguished Victorian biologist and Darwinist who authored in 1932 a chilling indictment of progress gone mad - *Brave New World*.” (Google search: <https://www.ibtimes.co.uk/aldous-huxley-brave-new-world-john-f-524470>)

X-ite – B&H (2002) define its meaning as ‘follower or supporter of X’, derogatory ‘often coined by opponents’, e.g. *Darwinite*, *McCarthyite*, *Thatcherite*.

- ▶ “EXTREME FUNDAMENTALIST ATHEISTS – (The Darwinites) Atheists base their theories on a bed of communists quicksand.” (Google search: <https://contextout.blogspot.com/p/extreme-fundamentalist-atheists.html>)

C. From proper nouns to collective nouns

X-iana (derived from the *X-ian* adjectives, see Section 2.2 below) ‘the collected sayings, wisdom, or artefacts connected with X’ (B&H: 1692f), e.g. *Darwiniana*, *Shakespeariana*, *Burnsiana*. A well-known example of *darwiniana* is Asa Gray’s 1888 book *Darwiniana; Essays and Reviews Pertaining to Darwinism*.

1.4.2 Major derivations

Major derivations derive words of one major word-class (part of speech), such as noun, verb, adjective or adverb, from morphemes belonging to another major word-class by modifying its form with an appropriate affix, e.g. the noun *happiness* is derived from the adjective *happy* by attaching to it the nominal suffix *-ness*. In cognitive grammar terms, each derivational affix changes the conceptualization represented by the root, e.g. the suffix *-er* in English prototypically designates the agent of the process (action) designated by the base verb, e.g. *writer* or *reader* (see Panther & Thornburg (2003) for details).

A. From proper nouns to adjectives

X-an/ian, PROPERTY: ‘contemporary with X’, ‘proponent of X’ or ‘characteristic of X’, where X is a well-known individual, e.g. *Elizabethan*, *Lutheran*, *Darwinian*, *Baconian*; classical names: *Epicurean*, *Herculean*, *Caesarean*.

- ▶ “They violate the fundamental rules of Darwinian evolution. They tend to borrow genes from different places, Bachvaroff said” (COCA: Scientists map the genetic evolution of dinoflagellates for the first time, MAG: Phys.Org, 2017-01-26))

X-esque, again PROPERTY: either ‘in the style or manner of X’, or ‘resembling X’. The attested examples include e.g. *Kafkaesque*, *Queenesque*, *Faulkneresque*, *Reaganesque*.

X-ish, cognate and having a similar meaning and etymology to **X-esque**,⁸ i.e. ‘in the style or manner of X’, or ‘resembling X’. There are no examples in B&H (2002), but there are a few in corpora, e.g. *Trumpish*, *Chaucerish*, *Eliotish*.

- ▶ “The title sounds very Chaucerish! Like "The Wife of Bath's Tale"! After all, Chaucer's storytellers were on a religious pilgrimage.” (Google search: heliumsonglines.blogspot.com/2014/09/biblical-references-in-handmaids-tale.html)
- ▶ “The Old Days, on the other hand, did have a genuinely Eliotish flavour about it.” (Google search: topcatsalley.blogspot.com/2015/07).

X-ic, again having a similar meaning to **X-esque**, but more rare, e.g. *Byronic*, *Miltonic* (beside *Miltonian*), *Socratic*.

- ▶ “Socratic Dialogue is an open discussion between therapist and client with no pre-defined outcome other than exploration.” (Google search: <https://deploymentpsych.org/content/socratic-dialogue/2020/08>)

B. From proper nouns to compounds

⁸ According to *Online Etymology Dictionary*, they both, as well *-ic* discussed below, come from Proto-Indo-European **-iskos*.

X-like, meaning ‘resembling X’. B&H (p.1711) observe that “Such words can be formed as productively as the corresponding syntactic phrases *like X*.”⁹ These formations may be analysed as compound adjectives with two free components: the preposition *like* and the anthroponymic noun X. They may be classified as adjectives both on semantic and syntactic grounds: semantically, they denote gradable PROPERTIES, and syntactically, they never function as nouns (or prepositions) and are found in the positions typical of adjectives; in particular, in all the COCA examples I have found they are used attributively, as noun modifiers, but the first example shows that they may be used as predicative complements too.

- ▶ “Mark Wahlberg: ‘I played golf with Donald Trump. He was very Donald Trump-like” (Google search: <https://www.theguardian.com/discussion/p/556zq>)
- ▶ “Poland and Hungary returned fire Tuesday after former U.S. President Bill Clinton accused the two countries of thinking that “democracy is too much trouble” and wanting “Putin-like leadership”.” (Google search: <https://www.politico.eu/article/us-democracy-putin-like-not-us-say-poland-and-hungary-in-response-to-bill-clinton/>)
- ▶ “Donald Trump got Reagan-like support from union households” (Google Search: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/gdprconsent/?destination>)

X-style, by and large synonymous with *X-like*, but obviously related to the prepositional expression *in the style of X*, in which *style* functions as an ordinary noun. Thus, the whole unit should be classified as a regular endocentric N-N compound. Functionwise, however, *X-style* compounds are much more common as modifiers than nominal heads. To give just two recent examples: there are only two occurrences of the compound *Trump style* used as a nominal head in COCA vs. three its occurrences as modifiers, while the compound *Putin-style* does not occur at all as a nominal head and occurs twice as a modifier (*Putin-style bully* and *Putin-style authoritarian*). This may indicate a semi-adjectival status of this compound, similar to that of *X-like* discussed before. In the two Google returns below *Putin-style* and *Trump-style* are also used attributively.

- ▶ “Childish Rants or Putin-Style Propaganda?” (Google search: www.motherjones.com/politics/2017/07/trump-rants-propaganda)
- ▶ “Trump-Style Negotiation: Powerful Strategies and Tactics for Mastering Every Deal by George H. Ross” (Google search: www.goodreads.com/book/show/16792193-trump-style-negotiation)

2. Name-based syntactic constructions

There are a number of productive grammatical constructions, in the sense of construction grammar (cf. Goldberg 1995, 2007; Hoffmann & Trousdale 2013), whereby proper names function as conceptually central elements, although the constructions have different syntactic heads (cf. Bierwiazzonek 2016).

2.1. Prepositional Constructions

⁹ *Like X* construction is discussed in Section 2.1.D below.

Prepositional constructions, most of which are traditional prepositional phrases, consist of a preposition functioning as the head of a phrase followed by another phrase functioning as its complement, e.g. *on the plate*, *in the cellar*, *near the bank*. Prepositions are usually complemented by NPs or noun-like constituents, e.g. nominal clauses or *ing*-clauses, although they may be complemented by adverb phrases, other prepositional phrases or adjective phrases, as well (cf. Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). Like verbs, prepositions denote relations between a trajector and a landmark; unlike verbs, however, they denote relations which are atemporal: they do not develop in time (Langacker 1987). The unique property of the prepositional constructions we discuss below is that the landmarks of the relations designated by these constructions are people, often well-known people, referred to by their proper names, although, again, they often function also as conceptual points reference for further metonymic extensions.

A. Considerably internationalized French *à la X* construction, meaning ‘in the style or manner of X’. Although the value of X does not have to be a proper name of a well-known personality and it may be filled by other nominals too, e.g. its most common construct is *à la carte*, examples with anthroponyms are extremely common¹⁰. Here are a few examples:

- ▶ “Our guess is a simple one: he wants to end on a high note a la Logan” (COCA: Will HBO's GAME OF THRONES Leak Actually Affect The Show? MAG: Nerdist, 2017-08-16).
- ▶ “BOLLING# Talking about the one, the big one, the temporary moratorium on travel, a la Donald Trump. And that's the same 9th Circuit that decided incorrectly that it was unconstitutional.” (COCA: President Trump Comes Out Swinging In Paris, Defending His Son Donald Trump, Jr. Over His Meeting With Russian Lawyer Natalia Veselnitskaya; One Congressman Has Now Officially Filed An Article Of Impe, FOX TV, 2017-07-13)
- ▶ ““Rachel made her way to the arms of her beau-in-waiting, who was dressed to the nines in Scottish garb – kilt and all, *à la* Sean Connery.”” (Google search: https://r.search.yahoo.com/_ylt=AwrP4o0B1xBEggARR0zhgx)

B. *Before/After/Until X* construction.

The construction is based on the metonymy PERSON FOR TIME IN WHICH THEY ARE/WERE ACTIVE and is commonly used in various languages in their versions of the expression *B.C.*, i.e. before Christ. However, there is no shortage of its instances in modern English either. For instance, the recent internet *BBC Insight* article (Jan. 5, 2020) was entitled *Who will star next after Messi and Ronaldo*, where the names of the two footballers were used to define the whole period in which they have been active and considered the greatest players. The construction usually occurs with historically important characters but it may be used in more mundane contexts too, as in the *Sue* example below:

- ▶ “Take a walk around this city, and suddenly you are on Achilles Street or Socrates Street or the street named after Pindar, who wrote about the early Games, before Caesar, before Napoleon, before Juan Antonio Samaranch.” (Google search: <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/08/08/sports/athens-summer-2004-olympics-where-it-all-began>)

¹⁰ Exact statistics in English are hard to establish on the basis of the English corpora as the construction is often spelt without the diacritic on *a* and there are numerous French and Spanish texts in which the sequence *a la X* has other meanings and functions. However, it may be noted that in the Polish national corpus NKJP, there are 474 instances of this construction with hardly any X element *not* realized by a proper name.

- ▶ “Dean LIEBERMAN This man would take us back to where the Democratic Party was before Bill Clinton.” (COCA: Anybody-But-Dean Campaign: Is it Working?; Malvo Sentencing Verdict Reached, CNN_Politics, 2003-12-23)
- ▶ “Wales told The Chronicle. " Before Sue, we operated as a community club. Now we operate as a community club with sound management.” (COCA: Chris Cadelago, Chronicle Staff Writer, Online encyclopedia defines its future; Despite popularity, Wikimedia Foundation ties its value to education, not advertising, Main News; Pg. A1, 2008-08-24).
- ▶ “But, yeah, it's basically everything rolled into one, and especially because after John Paul II, Benedict the XIV hasn't traveled so much.” (COCA: The Papal Visit, a Blogger's Guide for the Curious, The Bryant Park Project 8:00-9:00 AM, 2008-04-14)
- ▶ “But this began long before Obama showed up, and I don't think it's going to change very much after Obama.” (COCA: Jonathan Tilove American-Statesman Staff, White Dems still lose ground, Austin American Statesman, MAIN; Pg. A1, 2014-12-07).
- ▶ “And Ronald Reagan-- Ronald Reagan compromised on everything. We thought until Obama he was considered the most ideological President of my lifetime.” (COCA: For November 7, 2012, CBS, CBS THIS MORNING 8:30 AM EST, 2012-11-07)
- ▶ “The post-Donut King era was never as eventful - until John Henry.” (COCA: Steve Woodward, Top trainers take different tacks to top, USA Today, 1990-10-26)

Interestingly and surprisingly, the PERSON FOR TIME IN WHICH THEY ARE ACTIVE metonymy motivating the temporal senses of proper names in the *Before/After/Until X construction*, does not allow them with another prototypically temporal prepositions *during*, so expressions like *during Obama* or *during John Paul II* are impossible.

C. According to X construction

The construction has an anthroponym as the value of X, functioning as the source of knowledge, based on the metonymy PERSON FOR THEIR STATEMENTS/OPINIONS/VIEWS. The construction is used either in order to evoke an external authority that supports Speaker's views or in order to implicate that Speaker does not share X's opinion.

- ▶ “Thus, according to Fletcher, the function of arrest, trial, and punishment is to overcome this dominance and reestablish the equality of victim and offender.” (COCA: Boeglin, Jack, A Theory of Differential Punishment, Vanderbilt Law Review, Nashville Vol. 70, Iss. 5, (Oct 2017): 1499-1559).
- ▶ “According to Gunnar Myrdal (1962) in An American Dilemma, a sort of market force was needed to challenge the status quo of racial discrimination.” (COCA: Ramrattan, Lall B, American Exceptionalism: An Appraisal--Political, Economic, Qualitative, and Quantitative, American Economist, Thousand Oaks Vol. 62, Iss. 2, (Oct 2017): 222-246).

D. A subcategory of the comparative prepositional *like X construction*, with X standing for a personal point of reference, e.g. *(to sing) like Freddy Mercury*.

An important aspect of this construction is that the paragon must be compatible with the domain activated by the verb. So, actually, we should probably propose a **Verb Y like Noun X construction**, where Activity Y is strongly culturally associated with X, who is the paragon of Y, as in the example below:

- ▶ “Nervous 13-Year-Old Girl Stuns Audience When She Sings And Performs Just Like Janis Joplin” (Google search: doyouremember.com/79095/courtney-hadwin-janis-joplin)

A related construction, with the interrogative pronoun *How* followed by an infinitive VP [Verb Y *like* Noun X], is common in advertising commercial courses offering to teach the activity Y on the level comparable to X. Here are a few representative Google returns:

- ▶ How to Sing Like Frank Sinatra/John Lennon/Michael Jackson/Tom Waits/Bob Dylan
- ▶ How to paint like Monet, Picasso, Van Gogh, Jackson Pollock, Kandinsky, ...
- ▶ How to play like
 - Ronaldo, Messi, Neymar, Stephen Curry, ...
 - Jimi Hendrix, Eric Clapton, BB King, Sanatana, Steve Vai

2.2 Comparative (as) Adj as NP construction¹¹

This construction is normally used with a whole range of possible points of reference culturally associated with the property designated by the adjective, some of which have become fully lexicalized idioms, such as *as black as a pitch*, *as blind as a bat*, *as busy as a beaver*, *as free as a bird*, etc. However, there are a few fixed constructs of this construction with proper names as well, some of them going back to the mythical or biblical characters, such as Croesus or Solomon in *(as) rich as Croesus* and *(as) wise as Solomon*, but COCA search shows that the construction is open for modern, and often local, paragons as well. Consider the following:

- ▶ “She didn't understand it. She was at least as pretty as Michelle Pfeiffer. Her figure was a million times better than Bridget Fonda” (COCA: Cherry, Kelly, Famousness. Fall2014, Vol. 57 Issue 4, p17-43. 27p.)
- ▶ “Nobody on True Blood is half as successful as Mad Men's Don Draper or half as smart as Breaking Bad's Walter White, but that's their whole appeal: Everyone's just like your uncle's best friend's cousin.” (COCA: Melissa Maerz, Dirty Pretty Things, Rolling Stone, June 24, 2010, , Iss. 1107; pg. 35)
- ▶ “Though he's not as rich as Gates or the Google guys, today Jobs is tech's biggest rock star.” (COCA: Paul Boutin, 25 Days That Changed Everything, PC World, March 2008)

2.3 XYZ blend construction

As I pointed out in Section 1.2 above, paragonic names often become recategorized as common names of axiologically marked subcategories to which the paragon belongs. These new taxonomies are regularly activated in the constructs of the XYZ blend construction, first discussed in cognitive terms by Fauconnier and Turner (2002). The blend may be illustrated with Ruiz de Mendoza and Galera Masegosa's (2014:114) example *Humboldt is the Shakespeare of travelers*. What is characteristic for the XYZ blends is that although they formally represent three elements represented by three NPs, in actual expressions, they conceptually evoke four elements with the missing element being evoked (and implied) by element Y of the blend. As argued in Bierwiazzonek (2020), in the example above, the proper

¹¹ Because of limitations of space other comparative constructions, such as e.g. *more/less* Adj *than* NP construction, have not been discussed. However, their general conceptual structure is analogous to the *(as) Adj as* NP construction. In particular, they also rely on the Point of Reference designated by NP, which is often expressed by names of paragons, e.g. *I hear his dad is richer than Rockefeller*.

noun *Shakespeare* is used as a paragon implying other outstanding playwrights, like Molière, Tchekov, Lope de Vega, etc. and the meaning of the blend consists in establishing correspondences between Shakespeare and other outstanding playwrights in the domain of playwrights and Humboldt and other travellers in the domain of travellers. Of course the relation may also involve particular individuals and other related entities, such as places or times, as in the following two COCA examples, in which *Hitler* is used as the paragon of evil:

- ▶ “WESTMORELAND: Well, I think he has probably six months. But I think he's got to articulate this. You know, here in the 1990s, Saddam Hussein is the Hitler of the Middle East.” (COCA: Persian Gulf Anti-War Dissent Grows in U.S., ABC Nightline, 1990-10-19)
- ▶ “Mr-GREEN: Hold on a second. This is the new Hitler of the '90s. Stand up there, Hitler. George Bush is the new Hitler of the '90s.” (COCA: PART III-ART, SMUT, AND CENSORSHIP, Ind Geraldo, 1992 1992-03-12).

The diagrammatic representation of the conceptual and formal integration of the expression *George Bush is the Hitler of the '90s.*, based on Hitler’s and G. Bush’s frames and formal representation of the XYZ construction, is given below in Figure 4.

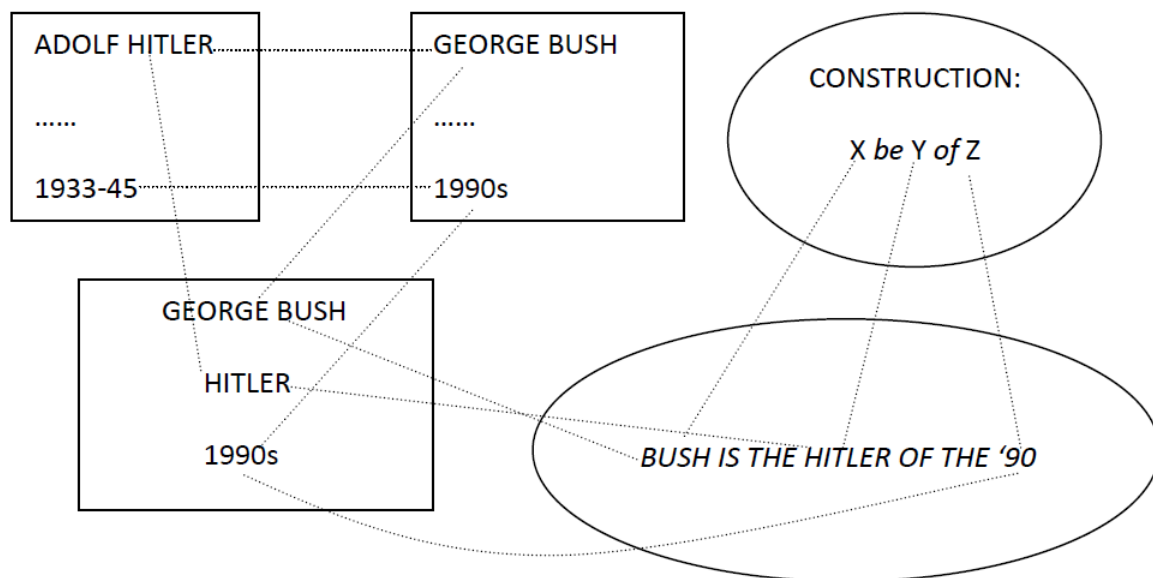


Figure 4. Conceptual and formal integration of the expression *George Bush is the Hitler of the '90s.*

3. Conclusions and final remarks

All the words and more complex constructions we have discussed show that people provide an important class of conceptual Points of Reference for our cognition and their names often become vehicles for new senses and/or entrenched lexical items by means of metonymically motivated extensions or derivations. This is hardly surprising given the importance of particular individuals in and for our history, science and art.

Thus, English has developed a number of linguistic means whereby anthroponyms may be used in the process of meaning construction. Some of these means are purely conceptual,

such as eponymous metonymies and extensions of names of human paragons to subcategories of people belonging to the category represented by the paragon. Others are name-based derivations marked formally by various affixes, which use rich representations of the shared knowledge about those outstanding individuals. The resultant meanings of such derivations may pertain to systems of thought, ideologies, followers of those individuals and even the everyday things they used and their favourite sayings, as in *Darwiniana*.

In addition, there are also a number of partly schematic grammatical constructions often “attracting” human Points of Reference, such as the *à la X* construction, *like X* construction, clausal comparative constructions, and the XYZ blend construction.

Needless to say, people are elements of the ever changing sociocultural and historical context of languages, subject to biological as well cultural limitations. In other words, they come and go and are often forgotten along with their names, only to be replaced by new names of new important individuals who become our new Points of Reference and sources of meanings. This is certainly true of various celebrities and passing stars of popular culture, sport and politics. But some of them, unpredictably, find a unique niche in the lexical network of a language and stay in it for good, and speakers use them like other words of their language, without even knowing that they were once names of people. The verb and noun *boycott* is certainly a case in point.

The conclusion is humanistic and mildly optimistic: In our technological, artifactual and digital world, people still matter – not only in life, but in cognition and language as well (even if some of them are bastards).

References

- Bauer, Laurie. 1983. *English Word-formation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bauer, Laurie & Rodney Huddleston. 2002. Lexical word-formation. In Huddleston, Rodney & Pullum, Geoffrey (eds.), *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language*, 1621–1721. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Barcelona, Antonio. 2004. Metonymy behind grammar: the motivation for the seemingly ‘irregular’ grammatical behavior of English paragon names. In Radden, Günter & Panther, Klaus-Uwe (eds.), *Studies in Linguistic Motivation*, 357–374. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Bierwiaczonek, Bogusław. 2013. *Metonymy in Language, Thought and Brain*. Sheffield: Equinox.
- Bierwiaczonek, Bogusław. 2016. Lexical polysemy and its grammatical consequences. In Bierwiaczonek, Bogusław & Paszenda, Joanna (eds.), *Polysemy in Language and Translation*, 29–46. Katowice: Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Zarządzania Ochroną Pracy.
- Bierwiaczonek, Bogusław. 2020. Figures of speech revisited: introducing syntonymy and syntaphor. In Baicchi, Annalisa (ed.), *Figurative Meaning Construction in Thought and Language*, 226–251. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Booij, Geert. 2013. Morphology in Construction Grammar. In Hoffmann, Thomas & Trousdale, Graeme (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Construction Grammar*, 255–273. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Brdar, Mario. 2007. Where have all the metonymies gone? In Kosecki, Krzysztof (ed.), *Proceedings of the International Conference ‘Perspectives on Metonymy’ (2005)*, 69–86. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.
- Cruse, Alan. 2000. *Meaning in Language. An Introduction to Semantics and Pragmatics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dancygier, Barbara. & Sweetser, Eve. 2014. *Figurative Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Dirven, René. 1999. Conversion as a conceptual metonymy of event schemata. In Panther, Klaus-Uwe & Radden, Günter (eds.), *Metonymy in Language and Thought*, 275–287. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Fauconnier, Giles. & Turner, Mark. 2002. *The Way We Think. Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities*. New York: Basic Books.
- Gibbs, Raymond W. Jr. 1999. Speaking and thinking with metonymy. In Panther, Klaus-Uwe & Radden, Günter (eds.), *Metonymy in Language and Thought*, 61–76. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Goldberg, Adele. 1995. *Constructions: A Construction Grammar Approach to Argument Structure*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Goldberg, Adele. 2006. *Constructions at Work: The Nature of Generalization in Language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hoffmann, Thomas & Trousdale, Graeme (eds.). 2013. *The Oxford Handbook of Construction Grammar*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Huddleston, Rodney A. & Pullum, Geoffrey K. (eds.). 2002. *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kosecki, Krzysztof. 2005. *On the Part-Whole Configuration and Multiple Construals of Saliency within a Simple Lexeme*. Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego
- Lakoff, George. 1987. *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal About the Mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Langacker, Ronald. 1987. *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar: Vol.1*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Langacker, Ronald. 1993. Reference-point constructions. *Cognitive Linguistics* 4. 1–38.
- Nerlich, Brigitte & Clarke, David. 2001. Serial metonymy. A study of reference-based polysemisation. *Journal of Historical Pragmatics* 2(2). 245–272.
- Panther, Klaus-Uwe & Thornburg, Linda (eds.) 2003. *Metonymy and pragmatic inferencing*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez, Francisco José & Galera Masegosa, Alicia. 2014. *Cognitive Modeling. A linguistic perspective*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Schönefeld, Doris. 2005. Zero derivation – functional change – metonymy. In Bauer, Laurie & Valera, Salvador (eds.), *Approaches to Conversion/Zero Derivation*, 131-157. Münster: Waxmann.
- Szymanek, Bogdan. 1998. *Introduction to Morphological Analysis*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.

Bogusław Bierwiaczonek
Jan Długosz University in Częstochowa
al. Armii Krajowej 36a,
42-200 Częstochowa, Poland
e-mail: bbierwiaczonek@gmail.com

In SKASE Journal of Theoretical Linguistics [online]. 2020, vol. 17, no. 3 [cit. 2020-10-14]. Available on web page http://www.skase.sk/Volumes/JTL45/pdf_doc/02.pdf. ISSN 1336-782X