

Semantic Structure of Toponymic Units: Denotative Meaning, Connotation, Evaluation, And Pragmatic Functions

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Abstract: This article is dedicated to the analysis of the semantic structure of toponymic units (phraseological units, proverbs, and constructions in literary discourse), a pressing issue in linguistics. In the study, the semantic layers of toponyms - denotation, connotation, evaluation, and pragmatic functions - were systematically studied. The main content of the article covers the following areas: The denotative layer is considered the referential core of the toponym, but it is interpreted not as an "absolute empty" indicator, but as a phenomenon that carries meaning in the process of nomination. Connotative layer: The connection of geographical names with historical background and collective memory. The evaluation component analyzes the axiological (positive/negative) nature of toponyms and their relationship to socio-psychological factors. Pragmatic functions: The impact of toponymic units in speech, particularly their cumulative (accumulating experience) and directive (directing) functions, is illustrated through proverbs.

Keywords: Toponym, phraseologism with a toponym component, toponymic units, semantic layer, denotation, connotation, axiological evaluation, pragmatics, cumulative function, directive function, discourse.

Introduction: The semantic structure of toponymic units (toponyms themselves, phraseological units with toponymic components, paremia, and toponymic constructions in literary discourse) is usually revealed through the interconnection of four layers, with attention focused on denotative meaning, connotation (associative-cultural background), evaluative component, and pragmatic functions. In this section, these layers are systematically analyzed as "internal semantics," with attention focused on semantic mechanisms.

The denotative layer, the referential core of a name and the denotative core of a toponymic unit, is primarily defined by the function of clearly indicating the referent. However, modern toponymic semantics views denotation not as an "absolutely empty" indicator, but as a "meaningful" phenomenon in the process of nomination. L.N. Davletkulova emphasizes that the process of naming toponyms is not limited to simple denotation: "In addition to denotation, connotation is

carried out - the introduction of additional meanings." This statement rejects the old view that the denotative layer is "zero." Thus, denotation is the core, but it immediately begins to "work" with connotative suffixes; especially when a toponym enters a phraseologism, the relationship between the core and the periphery changes.

To systematically illuminate the denotative layer, Meiring proposes the "right questions" principle: in semantic analysis, experts prioritize the question of "what feature is actually being named and how it is described." It divides the denotative layer into smaller parts: the type of object (river, mountain, city), the distinguishing feature of the object, the naming motive, and the expression of this motive through linguistic units. Therefore, denotation, along with being the "indicating" function of a toponym, is also the result of the character chosen in naming.

The connotative layer: "descriptive backing," associative meaning, and cultural background - in

toponymic units, connotation is often the key to understanding meaning. Meiring bases this on the "descriptive backing" model, meaning that the speaker and recipient working with geographical names, relying on "shared knowledge," make the name "meaningful." Therefore, names like "Waterloo" and "Rubicon" convey conventional meaning through "historical backing" in idiomatic and metaphorical expressions. This approach connects the connotation of toponymic units not only with lexical meaning but also with encyclopedic knowledge (historical events, stereotypes, collective memory). As a result, the toponym's connotation becomes a layer that becomes "activated" during the speech process and intensifies according to the context.

In the semantic structure of evaluative components, including axiological "positive-negative" polarization and emotionally expressive toponymic units, the evaluative component is often combined with connotation, but separating it as a separate layer is methodologically. In toponymic units, the evaluative component often harmonizes with connotation, assigning an axiological judgment (positive/negative, acceptable/unsuitable, safe/dangerous) to "place"; this evaluation can vary depending on individual experience and the communicative situation.

It is emphasized that a single name evokes different emotional responses (feelings) in different groups and individuals, meaning that evaluation depends on socio-psychological factors. The fact that geographical names can evoke different feelings in different people is illustrated with examples. This nature of the evaluation layer makes two criteria mandatory when analyzing toponymic units:

1. collective assessment (stereotype, collective memory): "name + social assessment" can remain stable for a long time.
2. situational evaluation (depending on context): the same name acquires different "tones" in different discourses.

For example, if a toponym denotes a "center," it can sometimes become a symbol of prestige, sometimes of pressure; therefore, evaluation is a variable but important layer of semantics. The evaluative component defines the axiological meaning of the toponymic unit and, along with connotation, creates a

value-based interpretation of the "location concept."

The pragmatic layer, primarily influencing, cumulative, and directive functions, as well as the pragmatic layer of toponymic units, is viewed not as an "addition" to semantics but as a speech realization of meaning. In V.V. Kunin's definition, "pragmatic function... targeted influence... on the addressee," phraseologisms enhance the pragmatic orientation of the context. Thus, in units with toponymic components, pragmatics intensifies in two ways: for example, the toponym evokes a "symbolic background" and the phraseologism acts as a "ready-made speech formula," accelerating the impact (advice, warning, irony, legitimization).

One of the important manifestations of the pragmatic function is the cumulative function; therefore, it is particularly active in proverbs and phrases that serve as a generalization of folk experience (this idea is consistently presented in toponym.docx) (with examples from Rydout). In units like "All roads lead to Rome" or "Rome was not built in a day," the toponym provides more of a "general experience model" than a denotative referent, meaning Rome here works with the semantics of "center/goal," "large work/large time."

The toponym component enhances pragmatics in two ways:

- The background quickly calls for knowledge (the connotative scenario is triggered instantly);
- transforms the evaluation into a compact "code" (the same toponym is called "big historical narrative" or "social stereotype").

As a result, toponymic units can serve as "arguments" in speech: they do not embellish the sentence, but rather prove, warn, irony, or normalize it. As a special form of pragmatics, cumulative (accumulation of experience) and directive (orientation of behavior) functions are distinguished.

"Coded" semantics: the interpretative nature of toponymic units in fairy tale discourse: toponymic units do not always convey a "ready-made" connotation; in some cases, the meaning is coded and requires interpretation. Repintseva and Kocharian substantiate this using the example of "semantic toponyms" in English folktales: toponyms can be related to context and characterize the referent or play a role in revealing the content of the plot; on the other hand, their

semantics are "encoded," "requiring deciphering." This approach complicates the equation of "toponym and meaning": in fairy tale discourse, a toponym often serves as a semiotic signal, moving the reader into a "magical realm"; therefore, the semantic structure, in addition to the line of "denotation and connotation," also includes the stage of interpretation and decoding.

The authors also provide a semantic classification: semantic toponyms... 1) individualizing... 2)...abstract objects with free interpretation. This classification indicates the inclusion of "fairy tale denotation" (a space built in discourse, not real geography) in the denotative layer of toponymic units. For example, the toponym "Elfland" within "King of Elfland" is not merely a place name but enhances the character's "magical legitimization"; it serves as a semantic amplifier within the anthropotoponymic complex.

The toponym and idiom/paremia, in which the semantic mechanism in the "Waterloo - Rubicon - Rome" triad, the following micro-analysis shows how the semantic layers are redistributed in the combination "toponym and ready-made formula."

a) Waterloo model

Denotation: a real place name.

Connotation: a scenario of a historical event (decisive defeat).

Score: negative (defeat, outcome).

Pragmatics: warning/emphasis ("this is ultimate ruin").

Quote (theoretical basis). The name "Waterloo" can create a conventional meaning through "historical backing" in idiomatic and metaphorical usage (Meiring, 1993).

In this model, the denotation is a "activating button": the main meaning is transferred to the historical scenario; therefore, the toponym Waterloo already conveys the meaning of "defeat."

b) "Rubicon" model

Denotation: river name

Connotation: The scenario of an irreversible decision/crossing the border.

Assessment: neutral-negative (risk, irreversibility).

Pragmatics: evaluation + strategic warning ("there's no going back").

Rubicon, in its idiomatic sense, relies on shared knowledge (Meiring, 1993). The Rubicon model demonstrates the "scenarization" characteristic of a toponymic unit: the toponym, separated from real geography, provides a "step-by-step" frame (the effectiveness of the action).

c) "Rome" model

Denotation: city name.

Connotation: center, norm, greatness, long-term/labor.

Assessment: often positive (greatness), sometimes normative (adaptive requirements).

Pragmatics: directive ("adapting"), cumulative ("takes a lot of time").

The thesis of a directive function.

The Roman toponym is multifunctional in paremia/idiom: it simultaneously represents a "cultural center" and a synthesis of the "time-labor" experience. Therefore, a single toponym can function differently in different pragmatic regimes. The "Waterloo-Rubicon-Rome" triad demonstrates how semantic layers are centered within a toponymic unit: denotation shrinks, and connotation and pragmatics become dominant.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the semantic structure of toponymic units consists of a denotative core that indicates the referent, a connotative layer that activates the encyclopedic and cultural background, an evaluative component that gives axiological judgment to "place," and a combination of pragmatic functions that constitute the speech effect. In phraseological and paremiological systems, pragmatics (cumulative, directive) is particularly strong; in fairy tale discourse, the semantics of toponyms are often coded and require decoding and interpretation. As a result, the meaning of toponymic units is fully revealed not within the framework of "name and indicator," but rather in the model "Toponymic unit is interpreted as a complex unit that includes background knowledge, evaluative component, and pragmatic impact along with indicator characteristics (name = indicator + background knowledge + evaluation + impact)."

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