

# SEMANTIC MODIFICATION OF GLOBAL ONYMS IN RUSSIAN LINGUOCULTURE

IRINA KRYUKOVA

Volgograd State Social-Pedagogical University, Russia

## Semantic modification of global onyms in Russian linguoculture

**Abstract:** In the present paper, by the term “global onym” we understand a proper name (*Hollywood, Oxford, Davos, Disneyland, Barbie* and suchlike) that is used worldwide and thus has a global dimension. Such names are characterized by repeatability in speech, which leads to their fixation in various language collectives and stipulates semantic transformations. We show how global onyms develop plural forms and several figurative meanings, and how they eventually acquire the ability to depict the contemporary Russian systems of values. The study is based on excerpts of Russian journalistic texts and Internet communication.

**Keywords:** global onym, appellativization, pluralization, figurative meaning, polysemy.

## Introduction

By “global onyms” we mean proper names that are well known around the world. These are onyms of different categories:

- Personal names that refer not only to real world-renowned politicians, actors, showbiz stars (e.g. *Barack Obama, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Alain Delon*), but also to fictional characters from fairy tales, movies, cartoons (e.g. *Mickey Mouse, Harry Potter, Batman*);
- Names of places, connected with some noticeable objects or remarkable events (e.g. *Hollywood, Oxford, Davos*);
- Names of mass media of international importance (e.g. *BBC, CNN, The Times*);
- Names of prestigious awards (e.g. *Oscar, Nobel Prize*);
- Names of holidays which have become international and whose customs are well known in various countries (e.g. *Halloween, Saint Valentine’s Day*);
- Global brand names (e.g. *McDonald’s, Adidas, Coca-Cola, Barbie*), and suchlike.

It seems logical that among internationally popular proper names americanisms prevail, as the active internationalization processes and mass media propaganda of American values and life style are the most vivid consequences of globalization.

In spite of the fact that such names belong to various onomastic classes from the point of view of the reference to denoted objects and the character of nomination, they possess some *substantial common hallmarks*, on whose basis we can treat them as a single body of proper names. We distinguish three such hallmarks:

- 1) The name denotes a singular phenomenon, which has international cultural, socio-political, or economic value;

2) It is well known to people involved in transcultural communication;

3) It is characterized by repeatability in speech, which leads to its fixation in various language communities and thus stipulates semantic transformations.

The listed criteria define the degree of involvement of global onyms in speech; and within a certain linguoculture this involvement is manifested in different ways.

This study aims at identifying the semantic modifications of global onyms in contemporary Russian linguoculture and showing the peculiarities of the derivation of the figurative meanings of such names. We base our study on the statement of Jan Blommaert, an acclaimed socio-linguist, who said that, “in the context of globalization, linguistic resources change value, function, ownership and so on” (Blommaert 2010: 32).

The data for the study consists of text excerpts from contemporary Russian journalism of the beginning of the century and everyday colloquial speech reflected in Internet communication (excerpts with global onyms have been translated by the author).

The analysis proved that a substantial semantic shift is observed when global onyms undergo partial appellativization. By “appellativization” we mean the transference of a proper name into other various lexical systems – like nomenclature or terminology – or common lexis (Podolskaya 1988: 37). Partially appellativized names are characterized by the ability to be equally used both as onyms and appellatives.

This study does not purport to be a complete analysis of such complicated and complex phenomena; it deals with the most frequent and indicative semantic features of global onyms in Russian linguoculture.

## **The peculiarities of semantic changes**

### ***Pluralization***

One of the markers of the partial appellativization of global onyms is their pluralization. By “pluralization” we mean name-forming in plural form (Podolskaya 1988: 107); it takes place in certain contexts which were described by W. Van Langendock (2007). Practically all the researchers who mentioned this phenomenon pointed out that pluralization refers a name to an open class of objects. The functional analysis of global onyms in the Russian language showed that in case of their pluralization simple nomination of one-type objects is accompanied with an emotional charge:

*All the people of The United States, from sea to shining sea, drink all the same competing colas. (T. Tosltaya, Ice And Fire)*

*Oh those sellers, good for them! They managed to plant in Russian land all those Halloweens, and Saint Valentine's, and whatsoever. Now they got some extra holidays to sell their shelf-warming stuff. (<http://otvet.mail.ru/question/87594505>)*

It is noteworthy that global names in plural form have prevailing negative connotations. For instance, if a global onym is preceded by the cumulative pronoun *всякие* (which means ‘all those’), it refers to an open class of objects, but it also conveys the connotation of scorn. Such expressions are often observed in the speech of patriotic-spirited native speakers, who renounce the values of a foreign culture:

*Our school is the best school in the whole world. All those Oxfords are no match.* (<http://vk.com/club7202320>)

*They would publish some ratings where handsome men are ranked, like all those schwarzeneggers and alain delons. Rubbish! Yuri Gagarin, a common Russian guy, is the best and the most handsome man on the planet.* (<http://otvet.mail.ru/question/38857462>)

In the last example we see that the initial letters in the names of actors were not written with capital initials, which refers to the native speakers' intuitive image of the status change of the names – from proper name to appellative. However, pluralized global onyms still denote objects and phenomena which do not belong to Russian linguoculture. The functional potential of global onyms is not limited to that.

### **Figurative meanings**

A. Gardiner distinguished two classes of proper names – embodied and disembodied (1954: 73). In view of it, we would like to mention that an embodied name (connected to a certain known object) can potentially be used figuratively.

While an embodied name develops a figurative meaning, its link with a certain object is substituted for a reference to a group of objects, which have some common characteristics. Names of this kind, which characterize objects in a figurative way, are referred to by Russian linguists as precedent names (Gudkov 1999).

As D. Gudkov rightfully mentioned,

When a name becomes precedent, the characteristics of the denoted 'object of culture' undergo generalization. This object turns into a standard of comparison for the qualities of a class of objects; at that it still possesses individual character (ГУДКОВ 1999: 71).

It is noteworthy that global onyms develop precedency in their own way. This process is not that vertical and time-oriented, but more horizontal, space-oriented. Thus, a certain semantic diffusion takes place, in which the cognitive base of a name is expanded.

In the context of global onyms, this is a metaphorical shift of the name initially denoting a well-known thing to a less known object with the same initial characteristics. For example, every large Russian economic forum is called by the media *a Russian Davos*, elite colleges are referred to as *Russian Oxfords*, Russian prestigious ski resorts are often addressed as *Russian Courchevels*, and so on. At that, home culture is valued in comparison with foreign cultures.

Grammatical structures are worth mentioning. In most cases global names act as predicates, and they are preceded with qualifiers like *Russian, our, second, local* etc.

*The 7<sup>th</sup> of November is in a way the Russian Halloween, the day of all-nation exorcism. I think in time it will become a happy holiday with people rigged out as sailors, staged assaults of Zimniy Palace, and with the Aurora battleship firing its guns. Respectable old fellows in good western suits – that's who will celebrate this day.* (*Argumenty i Fakty*, 11/13/01).

*An elderly Yakut millionaire has opened a local Disneyland in his native town. In Yakutsk, which is far away from Moscow, he built an estate in national style and is now putting up the tourists to the ways of the place. It's not for free though.* (*Argumenty i Fakty*, 09/09/07).

Word collocations like *Russian Halloween* or *Local Disneyland* are subjected to figurative transformation, and they are repeatedly wholly reproduced in speech. However, these examples show that the transformed global onyms still refer to a holiday and an entertainment park.

The analysis has shown that sometimes, when global onyms develop figurative meanings, secondary characteristics move to the forefront; those characteristics are not primarily connected to the initial denotation. For example, the article *Sewing McDonald's* is devoted to the opening of *Sela* chain stores in Russia (*Expert* magazine, 06/02/2003). Here the word *McDonald's* is not anyhow connected to the well-known fast food restaurants, but it has a more generalized meaning, which is a large enterprise network with branches in many countries. And in the article *Intellectual McDonald's*, which represents a critical outlook on the reform of Russian higher education (*Literaturnaya Gazeta*, 11/07/2012), the name *McDonald's* is extremely abstract; it is not connected to any certain venture, and refers to labor management, which implies similar-type low grade service at minimal amount of time.

### **Polysemy**

As we can judge from the analysis of world-renowned names in Russian journalism, almost every global onym is figuratively polysemic. It is associated with several qualities belonging to the denoted object. At that the potential repeatability of the qualities is initially assumed.

Let us illustrate this statement with the example of the usage of the word collocation *Russian Hollywood*. This collocation has fixed the development of at least seven metonymic and metaphoric meanings, based on initial characteristics of the global onym *Hollywood*:

- 1) Ethnically Russian actors and directors who work in Hollywood. *Milla Jovovich is one of the most popular women of Russian Hollywood.* (*Komsomolskaya Pravda*, 04/20/2005);
- 2) Russian movie stars whose popularity can be compared to their Hollywood colleagues. *Russian Hollywood Mysteries of Russian Sensations series tells about the backstage of Soviet and contemporary Russian movie stars* (NTV, featurette, 06/02/07);
- 3) A place in Russia where modern cinema facilities are planning to be built. *Anapa will become the Russian Hollywood: On the territory of a famous resort a film studio is announced to be set. The studio is going to become the base for filming Russian movies and TV-series. The project is estimated at a hundred million euros.* (*Den'*, 11/09/2006);
- 4) A place where genuinely Russian cinema is made. *Suzdal has been declared the Russian Hollywood. On the streets of the town, which has not changed in a hundred years, more than forty movies have been shot.* ([www.lenta.ru/kino/2002/02/11/suzdalwood/](http://www.lenta.ru/kino/2002/02/11/suzdalwood/))
- 5) Films aimed at the propaganda of national values. *"Russian Hollywood should become the factory of firmly Christian cinema, which would educate the people of Russia in an Orthodox way, as well as of patriotic TV-series and action movies, telling stories*

- about soldiers who fight for the interests of Great Russia” – says the press-release of Orthodox Citizens’ Union (Noviy Region – Moskva, 05/17/2006).*
- 6) Low-quality Russian movies, filmed according to the lowest Hollywood standards. *Russian Hollywood is insufferable* (title). *According to the words of a famous film expert from Voronezh, who wrote a book about cinema education* (subtitle). (*Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 08/25/2005).
- 7) High-quality Russian movies, corresponding to the highest world standards. *While watching Paragraph Seventy-Eight, one could see that Russian Hollywood is starting to revive.* ([www.tver.geometria.ru](http://www.tver.geometria.ru))

Global onyms are involved in transonymization, which proves their cognitive and emotional value for Russian native speakers. By “transonymization” we mean the transition of onyms from one class to another (Podolskaya 1988: 87). As a result, practically all the figurative meanings of global onyms come out.

For instance, there was an exhibition in Moscow called *Russian Hollywood*, where the photos of Soviet movie stars were exposed; there is the *Russian Hollywood night club* in Saint-Petersburg, and all its visitors take chance to participate in video performances; Russian Hollywood film company makes movies according to high-level international standards, with all kinds of visual effects; the documentary musical film project *Russian Hollywood* is devoted to the masterpieces of Soviet cinema production; the excursion series *Russian Hollywood* puts up the tourists to the history of the oldest Russian film studio Mosfilm.

It is noteworthy that the last mentioned two meanings of the collocation *Russian Hollywood* represent antipodal views in relation to a single phenomenon, namely Russian movies of low and high quality.

To put this in perspective, the names, which are well known to Russian native speakers, display a single characteristic, while the other turn out to be non-essential (*Otello* – jealousy, *Plyushkin* – stinginess, *Mozart* – genius) (Брилева, Вольская, Гудков, Захарченко, Красных, 2004). However, we think that almost all precedent Russian global onyms are polysemic, and what is more, they have antonymic attitudinal meanings. Let us compare two controversial semantic characteristics of the global onym *Barbie*, which we have found in a web-forum thread:

*Barbie is a woman from head to foot, an ideal one. When I found myself as Barbie, my life was altered for the better!* ([www.volchat.ru/forum](http://www.volchat.ru/forum)), and

*Is it possible that a barbie-doll could be in any way better than a woman, who can talk about something more than rags and beauty salons? ...* (the same source).

Inhomogeneity in perception of global onyms is primarily connected with the contemporary notion of globalization, which is ideologically disputed and is often used with both negative and positive connotations. This peculiarity is one of the distinctive features of global brand names that function in Russian linguoculture (Kryukova 2008). For example, anti-globalists often use the brand names *McDonald’s* and *Disneyland* perceived as a whole, with the meaning of symbols of globalization:

*This gigantic wave of globalization is a real threat, it will take us in in hours, and there is no historical time left. This wave will demolish everything we consider national, everything we have built as a nation. There will be nothing Ukrainian, and nothing Russian. There will be only one big McDonald's (Radonezh, 06/19/2006).*

*Nationalists of the world hate this pop-culture, which is harsh-colored, motley, and rotten. It turns any national shrine into celluloid painty Disneyland (Zavtra, 01/ 292009).*

In this case a well-known name acts as the renderer of anti-globalists' radical outlooks.

## Conclusion

Taking all the aforesaid into consideration, we would like to mention that there is a common quality for all global onyms, which differ from each other functionally and with respect to the time of fixation in Russian linguoculture: they are emotionalized by native speakers. Global onyms are subjected to partial appellativization, which is accompanied by the following processes:

- Pluralization. By this, global onyms refer to the groups of similar foreign linguo-culture objects; negative emotional attitudinal meanings are formed;
- Transonymization. Through this process, the characteristics of initial objects and phenomena, which are substantial for Russian culture, are taken into account when a global onym is used in speech as the name of a different class;
- The development of several figurative meanings. As a result of this process, global onyms refer to the objects and phenomena of Russian reality, which have a common semantic feature with initial objects and phenomena; antipodal emotional attitudinal meanings are formed. These meanings reflect complex attitudes to the process of globalization and its results in Russian society.

As can be seen from above, global onyms are one of the most effective means of expression of the modern system of social values. As a result, at a certain stage in their development, these names get included in the Russian sphere of concepts.

## References

- Blommaert, J. 2010. *The Sociolinguistics of Globalization*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Gardiner, A. 1954. *The Theory of Proper Names: A Controversial Essay*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Kryukova, I. 2008. The Brand Name's Life Stages. In *Atti del XXII Congresso Internazionale di Scienze Onomastiche, Vol. 2*, M. G. Arcamone, D. De Camilli, and B. Porcelli (eds.), 733–741. Pisa: ETS.
- Брилева, И.С., Н.П. Вольская, Д.Б. Гудков, И.В. Захарченко, В.В. Красных. 2004. *Русское культурное пространство: Лингвокультурологический словарь*. М.: Гнозис.
- Гудков, Д.Б. 1999. *Прецедентное имя и проблемы прецедентности*. М.: Изд-во МГУ.
- Подольская, Н.В. 1988. *Словарь русской ономастической терминологии*, 2-е изд. М.: Наука.
- Van Langendoek, W. 2007. *Theory and Typology of Proper Names*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.