

On the Presentation of Onomastic Idioms in Bilingual English-Polish Dictionaries of Idioms

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The paper discusses the lexicographic description of onomastic idioms in contemporary English-Polish dictionaries of idioms, with a special focus on the cultural character of the onymic component. Onymic idioms are distinguished as a group of particular interest for lexicographers, since onyms tend to be culture-bound elements of international, national or local character. Thirteen English-Polish dictionaries of idioms have been analyzed so that the presentation of onymic idiomatic expressions in such lexicographic works could be discussed. The macro- and micro-structures of such dictionaries are analyzed in order to identify the problem areas in the bilingual description of onomastic idioms. From the cultural-linguistic point of view, two methods of presenting onomastic idioms are observed in the dictionaries, i.e. the inclusion of cultural information regarding the onym or the exclusion of such information. In the case of the inclusion of cultural information, the lack of consistency is common in one dictionary, i.e. some of the onyms are commented on, while others are not described at all. Since onyms tend to be culturally-specific components of idioms, cultural information is essential to ensure a proper understanding of the idiom. The problem of insufficient lexicographic description of such fossilized phrases is presented in order to draw attention to the need for the creation of an onomastic idiom dictionary, enabling both users and advanced learners (of English) to have an insight both into the language and the culture. Bearing in mind that idioms undergo various modifications when used in particular contexts, such an approach to describing onomastic units of idiomatic character renders it possible for the user to acquire a proper command of idioms containing onomastic components.

1. Introduction

Idioms of a given language reflect the culture, illustrating the correlation between language and culture (Teliya et al. 2001: 55). The relations between language and culture are complex, since the language expresses, embodies and symbolizes cultural reality (Kramsch 2000: 3), thus, they can be analyzed from various points of view. For instance, it is possible to distinguish certain groups of components, which tend to be culture-bound elements in the majority of languages, both European and non-European, e.g. the names of material realia, faunal and floral terms particular to the area occupied by a given ethnic community (Fernando 1996: 93), and proper names (Laskowski 2003: 145). The last group mentioned above contains various kinds of nomina propria (cf. McArthur 1996: 652), such as anthroponyms, toponyms, chrematonyms, ideonyms and zoonyms. It is worth emphasizing that onyms are culture-bound components which function at a universal, national or local level.

Furthermore, proper names tend to be the key components of phraseological units. Therefore, in case of numerous phraseologisms the connotations of a given onym are of great importance for decoding such idioms, since onomastic components are names appearing in the collective memory of a given nation. It should be stressed that many onyms constituting the mental map of a language user function as evaluation markers. Therefore, a question arises whether idiom dictionaries available contain sufficient information regarding onomastic idioms, i.e. entries provide the dictionary users, who are advanced learners of English, with linguistic-cultural information enabling the person to use and understand the idiom in a proper way in a variety of contexts (cf. Rodger 2006). In order to discuss the issue popular English-Polish dictionaries of idioms, both English and American phrases, have been analyzed.

2. Approaches to the lexicographic description of onomastic units in bilingual English-Polish dictionaries of idioms

English-Polish dictionaries can be divided into three groups according to the type of macrostructure. The most numerous group is composed of lemma-based dictionaries (6), the second largest group consists of alphabetical dictionaries (4), while only three dictionaries are thematically-organized lexicographic works.

2.1. The lexicographic descriptions of onomastic idioms

The cultural information can be excluded completely from the lexicographic description, i.e. the onymic component is not commented on and the motivation of the idiom is not provided, either. The exclusion of cultural information is observed in eight dictionaries (Bor, Dzi, Fis, Liz, Rad, Sim, Wit, Wyż). The entries of onomastic idiomatic expressions contain various elements, e.g.:

- the idiom, the stylistic label, the L2 idiom and/or meaning: *carry coals to Newcastle* (przysł.) lać (wozić) wodę do studni; niepotrzebnie się trudzić (Bor41);
- the headword onym, the grammatical information on the onym, the translation of the onym, the L2 idiom and/or meaning, the stylistic label: *Peter* n. Piotr, *to rob Peter to pay Paul* przen. spłacić dług pieniędzmi pożyczonymi od kogoś innego (odebranymi od kogoś innego) (Wyż238; cf. Sim);
- the idiom, the L2 idiom and/or meaning, the stylistic label, examples with their literal translation, e.g.: *nice Nelly lub nice Nellie* (1) n. (w języku potocznym) – ktoś, kto jest do tego stopnia uczciwy, że wzbudza sensację; zarozumialec, pedant. Adam took Edward for a nice Nelly when he couldn't fight. Adam wziął Edwarda za zarozumialca, kiedy ten nie chciał się bić. (Liz176; cf. Wit);
- the headword onym, the idiom, the literal translation of the idiom, the L2 idiom and/or meaning, the stylistic label, examples with their literal translation, e.g.: *Jack, Jack of all trades and master of none*, dosł. Jack do każdego fachu i mistrz w żadnym, majster do wszystkiego, dyletant, The chairman they chose is unfortunately a Jack of all trades and master of none. What we need is a strong financial man. Niestety wybrali przewodniczącego, który nie zna się dobrze na niczym. A my potrzebujemy mocnego finansisty. (Dzi73).

2.2. The lexicographic description of onomastic idioms comprising the cultural information regarding the onym/the idiom

The other group of dictionaries is composed of the works comprising the cultural information regarding the onomastic component and/or the idiom (Dom, Gul, Kon, Mar, Wil). The following patterns are observed in the dictionaries analyzed:

- the idiom, the literal translation of the idiom, the explanation on the onym/cultural information, L2 idiom and/or meaning, the stylistic label, examples with their literal translation, synonyms, e.g.: *tell it to the marines/ Sweeney!* [powiedz to żołnierzom piechoty morskiej/Sweeney'owi (popularna nazwa nieokrzesanego człowieka)] (zwrot używany w zachodnich stanach) – nie wierzę ci, przestań mnie oszukiwać; ≈ akurat!; bzdury!; powiedz to koniowi!; tere fere!; You say you were in Japan two years ago. Tell it to the marines! Mówisz, że byłeś w Japonii dwa lata temu. Powiedz to koniowi!; Synonimy: come off it!; forget that noise!; flush it!; get off it!; in a pig's eye! (Mar131);
- the headword onym, the idiom, the stylistic label, the equivalent L2 idiom and/or meaning, the example, cultural references and/or origins, e.g.: *Waterloo, meet one's Waterloo* (raczej. żart.) spotkać swoje Waterloo; ponieść druzgocącą klęskę; zostać ostatecznie pokonanym: The thief met his Waterloo when he tried to rob our local judo champion. [W bitwie pod Waterloo (1815) Napoleon został pokonany po raz ostatni. Zwrot ten został utworzony przez Wendella Philipsa]. (Wil532);

- the headword onym, the idiom, the L2 idiom and/or meaning, the stylistic label, the example, the literal translation of the example, variations and/or synonyms, e.g.: *Trojan, to work like a Trojan / like Trojans* harować jak koń, jak wół, “The workman are working like Trojans so that the house will be ready by next week.” – Robotnicy harują jak woły, żeby dom był gotowy na przyszły tydzień. (por. work like a slave/like hell/like a dog/a horse/beavers/like a dream / like magic) (Gull149; cf. Fis);
- the headword onym, all meanings of the onym, the literal translation of the idiom, the meaning, the L2 idiom(s), e.g.: *Croesus* Krezus; krezus; bogacz; milioner, *as rich as Croesus* zn.: bardzo bogaty; posiadający ogromne bogactwa, odp. pol.: (bogaty jak) krezus. Uwaga! Krezus król Lidii: ok. 560-546 p.n.e., słynny z niesłychanych bogactw (Dom64).

The above presentation shows clearly that the microstructures of the entries analyzed differ, since their structures contain various combinations of elements, ranging from the basic “L1 idiom – L2 idiom and/or meaning” structure to much more detailed entries containing cultural information, literal translations of idioms, synonyms etc.

3. Proposal of the macro- and microstructure of a bilingual onomastic idiom dictionary

The analysis of bilingual lexicographic descriptions of onomastic idioms renders it possible to draw several conclusions of general character. First of all, basing on the assumption that onyms compose a culture-bound group of idiom components, one can draw the conclusion that it is worth providing the advanced language learners with a dictionary devoted only to units containing proprial elements. As to the macrostructure, the most appropriate way to present onymic idioms is to arrange them by onomastic headwords listed in alphabetical order. The idioms at issue contain hardly any so-called isolated components, which facilitates the implementation of such a macrostructure (cf. Żmigrodzki 2003: 107).

It can be assumed that in order to understand the cultural-linguistic reality, the L2 language user should be provided with a bilingual dictionary covering the needs, both cultural and linguistic. Therefore, the model of lexicographic description of an onomastic idiom can be composed of the following elements:

- the headword onym and, optionally, its L2 equivalent: the inclusion of the L2 equivalent depends of the onym, as in some cases the equivalent does not exist in L2;
- the pronunciation of the onym: the inclusion of the onym pronunciation is important, since numerous idioms contain names unfamiliar to L2 users, therefore, it is advisable to familiarize the user with the proper pronunciation of the onym. Apart from some common names, such as *John, London* or *America*, many components belong to onyms of relatively low frequency. It should be stressed that numerous names, especially those of biblical and mythological origins, appear in a variety of European languages, but their pronunciations differ in L1 and L2. L2 language users tend to pronounce the onyms in the way they are pronounced in their mother tongue. It is worth emphasizing that relatively few names at issue appear in course books, therefore, foreign language students are not familiar with their pronunciation; therefore, they are likely to rely heavily on their intuition. In fact, they should use the pronunciation dictionary to be able to pronounce the onomastic components correctly, which requires a fairly high level of linguistic awareness;
- the idiom (the stressed marked): marking the stress/stresses enables the L2 user to pronounce the idiom correctly; all optional elements included in brackets to be distinguished from obligatory elements, usage-dependent components in cursive (cf. Bielińska 2007: 321);
- the stylistic marker of the idiom: its inclusion is of great importance, since it is vital for proper usage (cf. Pronińska 2005: 138-139);

- the literal translation of the idiom: develops the L2 user's linguistic awareness by showing differences in expressing the concept in two languages;
- the meaning of the idiom: the inclusion of the meaning given as a definition, not another idiom, allows the L2 user to understand it properly, it should be emphasized that there are relatively few idioms possess absolute equivalents in L2;
- the L2 idiomatic equivalent(s): if there are equivalent idioms in L2;
- examples, i.e. illustrative sentences;
- usage restrictions (if any): in the case of some idioms such information should be included, as the lack of it may result in an inappropriate usage of idioms;
- additional information: a variety of information may be included depending on the idiom, e.g. the etymology of the onym, which in the case of allusive/ornamental names seems to be of great importance; a reference to the fact that the idiom is one of the realizations of a model of international character; one-word appellative deonymic derivatives, etc;
- L1 variations: the inclusion ensures a better command of idioms;
- L1 synonyms: the inclusion develops the user's competence and increases his linguistic awareness;
- L1 idioms semantically related to the L1 idiom: the inclusion enables the user to understand better the mechanisms of idiom motivation;
- cultural information regarding the onym and/or the idiom: depending on the character of the onym/idiom may be in the form of a brief supporting gloss or a cultural box. The inclusion of connotations of a given name, its cultural meaning, etc renders it possible for foreign language users to have an insight into the culture, and in consequence, to understand and use the language in a more natural way. Moreover, idioms tend to be paraphrased by language users, therefore, it is advisable to possess the cultural knowledge enabling the user not only to understand the idiom in its canonical form, but also to decode the modified units (cf. Chlebda 2003: 248-254);
- as a subentry the idiom(s) containing derivatives of the onymic headword should be included with proper lexicographic and cultural information.

It should be emphasized that the inclusion of the above-mentioned items in the entry depends of the unit.

As an illustrative example the elements of description of the idiom *every Tom, Dick(,) and Harry* are discussed. The headword is the anthroponym *Tom*, the two names, *Dick* and *Harry*, are also keywords after which the link is given to *Tom*. The difference between the British and American pronunciation of the name *Tom* should be marked and stresses shown clearly. The labels *pot.*, *zazwyczaj pejorat.* (lit. infml, usu. disapproving) have to be included. Then, the literal translation of the idiom has to be provided (jacykolwiek Tomek, Ryś i Henio), followed by the explanation of the meaning (jakikolwiek osoby; o ludziach, których się nie zna i nie uważa się za ważnych). Polish equivalents are listed (wszyscy; byle kto; kto popadnie; pierwsi lepsi), then, the example of usage shows how the idiom functions (*He is a talented designer, so he wouldn't like to work for any Tom, Dick and Harry*). The Victorian origins are presented in the entry (idiom pochodzi z czasów wiktoriańskich; pierwszy zapis w piosence pochodzącej z XVIII wieku, *Farewell, Tom, Dick, and Harry. Farewell, Moll, Nell, and Sue*). Some comments on the usage included regard the fact that masculine names do not imply exclusion of females as well as the substitution of *and* with *or* which results in a semantic change, i.e. the variant describes one unspecified person (w idiomie występują imiona męskie, jednak może być używany w znaczeniu ogólnym; funkcjonują też dwa warianty z imionami żeńskimi; wariant z *or* zamiast *and* ma znaczenie 'ktokolwiek; każdy'). The cultural information focuses on the popularity of the names in the English culture (męskie imiona popularne w Anglii: *Harry*

(Henio) < *Henry, Dick* (Rysio) < *Richard, Tom* (Tomek) < *Thomas*). Variants are provided as well (*any Tom, Dick(,) or Harry; every Tom, Dick(,) and Harriet/Sheila; any Tom, Dick(,) and Harriet/Sheila*). The link to *Brown, Jones and Robinson* ends the entry.

Such a description of onomastic idioms is bound to provide the dictionary user with sufficient information to use the fossilized expression properly as well as it is certain to contribute to the development of the L2 user's intercultural competence. The dictionary will facilitate finding information regarding onomastic phraseological units and will enable the user to analyze such idioms in a broad perspective.

4. Conclusion

The lexicographic description of onomastic idioms should enable the user to enrich not only his language, but also to expand his knowledge of the culture. The linguistic and cultural awareness contributing to the user's intercultural competence is indispensable for L2 advanced learners in order to function properly in the target culture.

The process of idiom acquisition is of complex nature; therefore, the description ought to cover various aspects and cannot be limited to providing the meaning of the idiom or an L2 idiomatic equivalent. The analysis of English-Polish dictionaries of idiom and phrases shows that there is a need to compile such a bilingual dictionary of onomastic idioms, with a focus on the cultural character of such units.

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