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# CONNOTATIVE ADVERTISING NAMES: THE DYNAMIC ASPECT

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## *Abstract*

This study comprises the analysis of connotative semantics of widely known advertising names (the names of goods, services, and commercial enterprises), which have changed or acquired auxiliary emotional and social evaluative meanings in the post-Soviet era (from the early 1990s till today). The goal of the study is to detect the mechanisms due to which advertising names form connotative components in their meanings and to define the stability/variability of those connotations which depends on the historical period and the degree of the name's popularity. As the material for the study, we have taken both global names widely spread in Russia of the mentioned era and local commercial names to which the native speakers of Russian have formed controversial attitudes. Contextual analysis of these advertising names has shown that they changed their connotative meanings from onymic to post-onymic relatively fast. Referring to a certain object, advertising names with onymic connotations express emotional-value attitudes to that object, reflect the social perception of wealthy and poor, modern and old-fashioned, etc. At that, they are used in their literal meanings (denoting an abject) and keep their onomastic status. Advertising names with post-onymic connotations start to get used figuratively, to denote abstract notions referring to a sum of objects. In some contexts, they lose their onomastic status. At a certain stage of their semantic development, advertising names come into the corpus of the evaluative means of the Russian language.

**Keywords:** Advertising name, onymic connotation, post-onymic connotation, language dynamics.

# 1.   Introduction

## 1.1.   The Notion of an Advertising Name

Under the general term *advertising name*, we mean all the names of goods, services, and commercial enterprises. In spite of the variability of their semantic structure and different denotative references, these names may be regarded as a single body of onomastic lexis for they have much in common: all of them belong to one conceptual field and denote the objects subjected to advertisement; they are alike in their pragmatic orientation, and probable impact on the addressee is taken into account at the stage of invention; they denote an individual object's symbol, which comprises verbal as well as non-verbal components (Kryukova, 2008).

For a long time, these words used to interest only economists and marketing experts, while linguists qualified them as simple tags and labels. However, in two recent decades, their attitude towards this part of lexis has changed. Today, no one of the researchers doubts the fact that verbal trademarks and the names of enterprises refer to the proper name category. Recently, advertising names (or *commercial names*, as they are called in contemporary Western-European studies) have been studied from the view of pragmatics, language policy, linguistic fashion, modern linguistic contacts and so on. The reviews of scientific approaches to this phenomenon are given in the works of various Russian and foreign linguists (Goryayev & Bugeshu, 2018; Sjöblom, 2016).

Even though many studies devoted to advertising names have already been published, the problem of those names' connotative meanings which are used as the means of social and emotional evaluation in a certain historical period still needs to be out to a thorough examination.

## 1.2. The Notion of a Connotative Advertising Name

Advertising names that acquire auxiliary emotional-evaluative meanings due to their long usage in advertising texts and other contexts are regarded as part of connotative lexis, as well as other proper names (anthroponyms, toponyms, mythonyms, etc.). We define the onomastic connotation on the basic concepts of the connotation theory, which were formulated by Apresyan (1995). He denotes connotation as the evaluation of an object which is liable for this language and has the word under study as its name. However, he pays special attention to the social character of connotation, the reflection of unessential but stable attributes of the notion which display the evaluation of an object or phenomenon by a linguistic collective (Apresyan, 1995). While overviewing various concepts of connotation, Shakhovskiy (2018) points out that in spite of the difference in scientific approaches, most researchers call the emotional (emotive) evaluation an essential component of connotation.

Considering all the listed above, we define the connotation of a proper name as a complex component of onyms' semantics. This component is added to the onym's literal meaning, reflecting attitudes of the speakers towards subject/object of nomination, which once became widely known in a certain linguistic collective (Kryukova, 2019, p. 164).

Talking about connotative advertising names, we mean any names of goods, services, and commercial enterprises displaying auxiliary informativity, emotionality, and expressivity, which are

naturally or potentially used for emotional or social evaluation of contemporary objects and phenomena, even if they are not primarily connected with advertising discourse.

## 2. Problem Statement

One of the main distinctive features of the advertising name, setting it apart from other classes of proper names and common lexis, is its rapid adaptation in the modern language (Kryukova, 2008). They rapidly become parts of the language, start to get used frequently in everyday communication and fall into disuse in the same way. These short life-cycles enable us to trace changes in their connotations in relatively short periods.

According to this, we analyzed only those advertising names which had displayed connotative components' development or changes within the post-Soviet era (from the 1990s until now). This period in modern Russian history is characterized by the change of the social system. It affected economic and political processes, as well as value priorities of the Russian society, which were reflected in the lexis. Over the past decades, modern linguists have been studying these changes, including their reflections in the language of commerce and advertisement (Katsman, 2017). However, most of those studies do not take into account the functional peculiarities of the advertising name.

The object of our study comprises 50 advertising names. Each of them corresponds to the characteristics mentioned above, and all of them may be qualified as connotative names. Among them, there are global brands that acquired a wide popularity in Russia in the period under study (*Adidas, Disneyland, Ikea, Coca-Cola, Lego, MacDonald's, Mercedes, Snickers*, etc.), as well as the names of Soviet and post-Soviet goods, services, and big financial enterprises, which arise controversial attitudes among the native speakers of Russian due to some economic and socio-cultural reasons (*Bolshevichka, Krasnaya Moskva, Zhiguli, Zaporozhets*, *MMM, Khopyor Invest, Vlastilina, Gazprom, Lukoil*, etc.).

As you could notice, some of them stayed in the Russian language and culture for a while, others dropped out of active usage, but they remain interesting in the aspect of theoretical understanding of the advertising names' connotations, as they have precise time and space coordinates, which means that they are characteristic of the Russian speech of a certain period.

## 3. Research Questions

The description of connotations appears to be technically difficult from the perspective of theory and methodology due to their variability in structural-semantic and functional aspects. Over recent years, Russian and foreign linguists have proved the heterogeneity of onomastic connotations. All the connotative meaning of onyms fall into various groups depending on their semantics (Nyström, 2016), grammar (Langendonck & Velde, 2016) and linguistic dynamics (Kryukova, Vrublevskaya, & Kirpichyova, 2016). Analyzing the connotations of an advertising name, we will base our conclusions on the previously proven statement that widely known proper names of different categories (anthroponyms, toponyms, etc.) have onymic and post-onymic connotations (Kryukova, 2019). However, the analysis we conducted earlier has shown that the problem of the dynamics of the advertising names' connotations

needs more thorough research, conducted separately from other categories, as their short life cycles determine their connotative specifics, which have never been studied.

## 4.    Purpose of the Study

The problems mentioned above have specified the main goal of our research, that is to determine the mechanisms which form connotative components in the meanings of widely known advertising names and to define the stability/variability of connotations of advertising names according to the period of their usage and the degree of their popularity.

Considering this goal, we have stated the following tasks of the study: 1) to define the corpus of contexts where advertising names are used as the means of emotional and social evaluation; 2) to define the types of connotative meanings of advertising names depending on the degree of the named object's popularity; 3) the characteristics of gradual changes and transformations of advertising names' connotations.

## 5.    Research Methods

Having adopted these tasks, we decided to use the following methods:

- component analysis – for the identification of connotative components in the meaning of an advertising name and the determination of connotative polysemy;

- contextual analysis – for finding proofs of the existence of these connotative components in a contextual environment;

- comparative method – for the comparison of connotative components of advertising names' meanings at different life stages and the determination of the dynamics of connotative meanings.

We identify the semantic transformations in the meaning of an advertising name on the basis of the corpus analysis of the contexts in which it is used. Those contexts have been taken from the National corpus of the Russian language (RNC, 2020). Contexts under study are given in that easily accessible Russian text search engine in chronological order which has enabled us to trace the dynamics of connotative meanings. As a result, we could analyze: 1) the frequency of a name's usage in a connotative meaning; 2) the chronological sequence of connotative shifts; 3) contextual factors affecting evaluative diversity.

Using this methodology, we have analyzed more than 1500 contexts of connotative names' usage.

## 6.    Findings

The analysis has displayed the dynamics of advertising names' connotative meanings, from onymic to post-onymic connotations.

### 6.1. Onymic connotations

Onymic connotations are characteristic of advertising names which have formed stable evaluative concepts of the named object. Such extralinguistic characteristics of the named object as the economic and social value of the named object, together with other features that are perceived and evaluated by the

society, serve as actualization agents of advertising names. On Based on existing views on goods, services, and commercial enterprises, status and evaluative connotations of advertising names are formed, which determine their ability to define the position of a person compared to other members of society on the scale *wealthy—poor* or *modern—old-fashioned*. In the researches of recent years, linguists pay attention to the leading role of evaluation in socio-linguistic analysis of a person's status (Karasik, 2002), on the tight connection between status and evaluative semes in a word's structure, for the status is included in the axiological picture as a value (Poluektova, 2015).

According to the observations of Pitina (2019), in the Russian naïve world picture, personal social status is usually explicated via the opposition *wealthy—poor* (p. 137). This statement is proven by advertising names with onymic connotations. Some of them are associated with wealth: – *This is a lot of money! I'm not Lukoil to afford it* Trud-7, 2007.11.02 (RNC, 2020). Others are connected with poverty: *I drove up to the building, weaving between the parked cars, mostly Zhigulis and Moskviches. This wasn't a prestigious district.* S. Lukyanenko. Night Watch (RNC, 2020).

The peculiarities of each of these concepts are vividly seen in contrast when two advertising names with contrary evaluations are put together. It is especially remarkable when global and Soviet names are compared, for example, such names as Mercedes and Zaporozhets or Cardin and Bolshevichka as the symbols of prosperity/modernity and poverty/old-fashionedness, respectively. *V. Matvienko is flying to Volgograd to talk to the governor. She is going to visit the heroic land of Stalingrad in a Bolshevichka dress, rather than a luxury attire by Cardin.* Information Web Site of Volgograd. 2018.05.18 (RNC, 2020). *All of us once in our lives likely had a desire to possess a magic wand, to turn a tiny flat into a luxurious apartment, and a small old Zaporozhets car into a Mercedes.* Trud-7, 2000.05.26 (RNC, 2020).

Thus, the contextual antonymy of an advertising name is created, even though it is not characteristic of proper names in their regular usage.

It is noteworthy that, for one thing, most of advertising names' onymic connotations have short life spans, which is determined by the relevance of the name connected with its popularity. For example, the name of the Snickers chocolate bar in the 1990s became a symbol of a prosperous life and a fat wallet, due to a big advertising campaign and a relatively high price. *You're such a big guy and still cannot buy a Snickers bar to your daughter. Even I can afford a Snickers.* Alexey Motorov. Doctor Parovozov's Crime (RNC, 2020). *Three-story houses stay next to miserable dwellings of the families whose kids have seen a Snickers bar only on TV.* Trud-7, 2004.09.28 (RNC, 2020). However, today, those connotations have vanished.

Here is another characteristic example: the names of collapsed financial pyramids of the 1990s. They were often used in a row displaying common connotative meanings like 'any criminal organization involved in fraud': *He was sitting in a throne of some financial empire called Alfa Corporation, a sister company of such notorious enterprises like MMM, Vlastilina, Khopyor Invest and many others* (Andrey Rostovskiy. Under the Law of a Wolf Pack (RNC, 2020). However, today, only MMM remains a stable substitute for a fraudulent company, while other names have dropped out of the active Russian vocabulary and turned into historical onyms. Such advertising names can be referred to as the keywords of the period. According to Shmelyova (1993), their major characteristic is time-binding and frequent changes.

For the other thing, some names change their evaluative attributes from positive to negative. For example, the verbal name Adidas was a symbol of prosperity in the 1990s. *People, I'm not a rich person, but I can afford a couple of imported beers from time to time. And I go to work in a pair of Wrangler jeans and Adidas sneakers.* Stolitsa, 1997 (as cited in RNC, 2020). In the early 2000s, however, this name lost the connotative semes 'prestige value' and 'well-being'. It started to associate with criminal gangs and acquired a new connotative seme – 'bad taste': *Back then, their clothes were the embodiment of bad taste, anarchy, and even abuse. Their summer uniform included Adidas track pants and all-season sneakers.* Trud-7, 2007 (RNC, 2020). *He's known as a crime lord, but no one can tell it by his looks. The new mayor of Vladivostok hasn't been wearing golden chains and Adidas tracksuits for a while.* Komsomolskaya Pravda, 2004 (RNC, 2020). However, modern Russian speakers do not recognize these connotations of Adidas trademark without a special commentary on the realia of the 1990s.

In spite of the fact, that in the most of these contexts advertising names are used in Cyrillic transcription and sometimes they lack the capital letter, they keep their onomastic status, for they are still associated with the basic features of certain objects, and these objects are well known to the audience at the moment; these names are used in their literal meanings to point at a certain object.

### 6.2. Post-Onymic Connotations

Post-onymic connotations are registered only among the most widely used names, which denote fully functional concepts, the names with regular metaphorization, whose figurative meanings are equally understandable by people belonging to different social classes and generations along the whole historical period under study. They turn from the keywords of the moment to the key notions of the era losing their onomastic status in some contexts.

For example, among all the names of financial pyramids of the 1990s, which previously displayed onymic connotations, only MMM possesses post-onymic connotations. This is caused by the scale of its fraudulent activity, catchy TV ads and the disclosure of its criminal scheme which was high on public agenda. As a result, there is the abstract notion 'fraud', that is added to the onymic connotations mentioned above. This notion is no longer connected with any organization: *The absence of mechanisms of state economic responsibility leaves the bitter aftertaste of MMM and other notorious frauds of the past.* Nash Sovremennik, 2011 (RNC, 2020). *MMM today — or decent retirement tomorrow?* Pensionnoye Obozreniye, 2013 (RNC, 2020).

Global names are the most indicative of post-onymic connotations. One of their distinctive features is polysemy (Kryukova, 2013). The polysemy of connotative advertising names is based on the ability to refer to several characteristics of the named object.

For example, the name of Lego construction sets, which have become popular on the Russian toy market since the early 2000s, started to be used in various types of discourses, not primarily connected with toys. This name has acquired several figurative meanings: 1) 'uniformity'. *All the things around were unpainted, prefabricated, reusable. A perfect mixture of a LEGO set with an IKEA store* (Geo, 2005; as cited in RNC, 2020); 2) 'something primitive' *Actor is not a part of a Lego set.* Trud-7, 2010 (RNC, 2020). 3) 'something that can be easily assembled out of many parts' *Within the next 10-15 years we will see so-called Lego education, which will be supplied by various independent institutions, and people will*

*be able to collect their own educational set throughout all their lives.* Komsomolskaya Pravda, 2013 (RNC, 2020); 4) 'the option of changing the places of components to get a new result'. *Molecular Lego, or Several Questions of Bioethics* (headline). *The viral genome was recreated via the inverse interference method (the creation of genes by the combination of their fragments like in a Lego set).* Nauka i jizn', 2007 (RNC, 2020).

When advertising names form post-onymic connotations, we observe a gradual change in their meaning, from common nomination to symbolization. At that, their figurative abstract meanings, as well as literal, can develop various evaluations, often opposite to each other. For example, MacDonald's used to display positive connotations at the start in Russia, meaning 'a big and stable international company': *Clothing MacDonald's* (headline). *The fact is Sela is a clothing fast-food chain, like MacDonald's* (Ekspert, 2004). Or: *Military MacDonald's* (headline) *Professional contract army is a regular corporation which has very much in common with factory or a fast-food chain (like MacDonald's).* Nezavisimaya Gazeta, 2003.07.29 (as cited in RNC, 2020). In just a few years, we come across this name with a negative connotation of 'management principles on which low-grade same-type services are supplied in minimum time': *Intellectual MacDonald's* (headline) *The reform of higher education passed unnoticed, but it rapidly turned this system into an intellectual MacDonald's.* Literaturnaya Gazeta, 2012 (RNC, 2020). The pragmatic effect is doubled by the usage of the name in headlines.

Moreover, the name *MacDonald's* is used by Russian anti-globalists as a symbol of globalization with strong negative connotations: *This gigantic wave of globalization will wash out everything national, everything which has been fostered by generations of our people as something precious. There will be nothing Ukranian, nothing Russian. There will be only one gigantic MacDonald's.* Radonezh, 2006 (as cited in RNC, 2020). Compare the alike usage of the name *Disneyland*: *The* nationalists *of all countries hate America for this poisonous pop culture, bright-colored like rotting flesh, turning our national shrines into a celluloid made-up Disneyland.* Zavtra, 2002 (as cited in RNC, 2020). Here, as we see, there are several figurative meanings of a single name combined in their supreme forms: 'sameness, monotony', 'primitiveness', 'falsity, artificialness'. Such examples demonstrate an option for a famous global advertising name to expand its connotative meaning.

## 7.  Conclusion

The material of the study enables us to make some conclusions on the advertising names' connotations, common for global brands and Russian commercial names.

Advertising names (the names of goods, services, and commercial enterprises) with auxiliary emotional-evaluative and social-evaluative shades of meanings are a part of the corpus of connotative names.

Such names often drop out of the speech usage due to the changes in the economic and political situation. This process determines the dynamics of advertising names' connotations on their way from onymic to post-onymic connotations. Advertising names with onymic connotations are used in literal meanings; they refer to a certain well-known object and arouse various emotional-evaluative reactions connected with the object. Advertising names with post-onymic connotations can be used in figurative meanings and denote abstract notions, applied to a certain variety of objects. As a result, at a certain stage

of their semantic development, advertising names come into the corpus of the evaluative means of the Russian language.

In conclusion, we would like to mention that the misunderstanding of semantic changes which any of connotative advertising names have undergone may result in linguistic conflicts of the Russian language native speakers, especially when they belong to different social and age groups. It may also create barriers in intercultural communication, for example, if an advertising name has not been recognized by one of the communicants, or if it has opposite evaluative characteristics in his or her view. This specifies the relevance of the research and shows the potential benefits of lexicographic description of advertising names in the Dictionary of Connotative Proper Names of the Soviet Era, on which we are working today.

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