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**THE PROBLEM OF SEMANTICS IN PROPER AND COMMON NAMES**

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**Abstract**

It is well known that the issue of the relationship between a name and a concept has not yet been resolved. This situation repeatedly brings the question of the relationship between proper and common nouns back to the agenda. The article investigates the relationship between proper and common nouns and analyzes the semantic features specific to proper nouns.

**Keywords:** Proper noun, common noun, denotatum, signifikat, connotation, semantics, concept.

**INTRODUCTION**

Proper nouns, which constitute a part of the lexical system of any language, represent a distinct category of words with unique features. However, the relationship between a name and its concept has yet to find a definitive solution. Analyses indicate that there are two main perspectives regarding the semantics of proper nouns. According to the first viewpoint, proper nouns have no inherent meaning because they do not express constant concept-significants; therefore, they are referred to as "meaningless (asemic) words" or "labels." The second viewpoint argues that proper nouns do have meaning both in language and speech, but they manifest semantic features that distinguish them from common nouns.

The unique characteristics of proper nouns are evident not only in semantics but also in the grammatical structure and function of language units. Consequently, in the current linguocultural environment, the semantic space of an actual onym (proper name) changes, expands, and even forms anew.

The opposition between proper nouns and common nouns is one of the fundamental concepts in the language system. While the primary function of common nouns is to single out an object, proper nouns involve the obligatory designation of the concept with its similar objects, alongside the optional naming of a specific object. For proper nouns, the naming of a particular entity is mandatory, whereas the matching of concepts is optional.

## METHODOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS AND RESEARCH METHODS

The methodology of this research is based on interpreting linguistic phenomena within their historical and social context, without isolating them from the broader historical processes in which they occur.

The theoretical foundation of the study draws on analytical approaches commonly employed in modern linguistics, particularly in the field of onomasiology. As research methods, classification and description of the material, analysis based on structural and formative characteristics, and comparison of linguistic facts were utilized.

In addition, the research is grounded in dialectical principles such as the interrelation between the general and the particular, the essence and the phenomenon, and the form and content—core categories frequently encountered in linguistic analysis.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Proper nouns do not possess general meaning and are not directly linked to a conceptual understanding, while common nouns lack individualized reference. A proper noun always refers to a specific, clearly defined entity, and this direct association is considered one of its defining characteristics, as a name cannot exist without denotation. As noted by A.A. Reformatsky, a proper noun does not describe but rather names; “the designative capacity of proper nouns is inherently limited” [10, 10]. This view corresponds with O.S. Akhmanova’s argument that proper nouns are devoid of descriptive function and are “simple markers indicating a particular object, event, status, etc.” [1, 5–18].

Such perspectives have long influenced the direction of onomastic research, which has focused on the primary nominative function of proper names. Proper nouns, while conforming to the internal rules of a given language, differ significantly from other linguistic units in both content and expression. In written language, features like capitalization, quotation marks, and hyphenation serve as additional tools to distinguish proper nouns.

A.V. Superanskaya and A.V. Suslova emphasize that the division between proper and common nouns represents a fundamental lexical distinction. These two types differ in their purpose, function, and communicative roles. Common nouns categorize objects into general classes, enabling us to understand the surrounding world through generalization. In contrast, proper nouns assign an individual name to each entity that “has its own general label.” An object with a common noun reference is indefinite and general, whereas an object referred to by a proper noun is always specific and unambiguously distinguished from others. Even widely used or repeated proper names are uniquely interpreted in each instance [13, 8–9].

Proper nouns are often considered “semantically reduced” and not directly tied to conceptual content: the transformation of a common noun into a proper noun primarily involves the loss of conceptual content and a shift toward a label-like function. Conversely, the transformation

of a proper noun into a common noun is associated with the development of new conceptual meanings based on additional, significant features [11, 61–62].

Even semantically motivated proper names eventually become signs used solely to identify a person or object, with little to no relevance to the literal content of speech. Any part of speech can be transformed into a proper noun, either fully or partially adopting nominal characteristics, thereby altering its syntactic potential. As a result, immutable parts of speech—or even entire phrases—can function as nouns by acquiring a nominal definition.

The issue of distinguishing between proper and common nouns has been addressed to some extent in global linguistics. For example, Russian linguist V.D. Bondaletov concludes that “proper nouns are not communicative but nominative units of language; in many world languages, they fall under the category of substantives, and their uniqueness lies in both structural-linguistic and functional aspects” [3, 20]. Similarly, Y.A. Karpenko argues that “proper nouns fulfill only nominative functions and are incapable of performing semasiological functions. Moreover, they are not characterized by polysemy; when the same name is used for different entities, it constitutes a case of homonymy.” Thus, the manifestation of any semantic variability in proper nouns, in connection with the polysemy typical of common nouns, essentially implies a rejection of the inherent nature of proper nouns, indicating either their transition into common nouns or a tendency in that direction [4].

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the semantic distinction between proper nouns and common nouns remains a significant area of inquiry in modern linguistics. While common nouns are tied to the expression of general concepts and categories, proper nouns serve primarily a referential function, denoting specific entities without necessarily conveying conceptual meaning. This nominative uniqueness highlights the particular role proper nouns play within the language system, both in structure and function.

The study has shown that proper nouns, though semantically limited, are not entirely devoid of meaning; instead, they convey meaning through associative, cultural, and pragmatic contexts. The transformation between proper and common nouns, as observed in both diachronic and synchronic perspectives, reflects the dynamic and multifunctional nature of language.

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