

## Proper Names in Education: Global Tendencies and Local Traditions

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### Abstract

Within the higher education field proper names can be confusing as identifying them and tracing their occurrences is quite a difficult task. Not only is their history quite unclear. They occur and function in our conceptual lives in different ways (Reyes, M. et al. 1993). They update dynamically due to all the changes that evolve in society (Crystal 1986; 1987). Thus their variability inevitably leads to ambiguity and hinders their use in understanding the cultural and social contexts of other languages.

This paper presents the results of the research of historical, cultural, communicative, semantic and structural aspects of various types of English proper names in higher education which are considered as constituents of lexical and semantic fields. The author analyzes their structural, semantic, and cultural features, and stresses the complexity of their nature.

Peculiarities at the structural and semantic levels, including the number, meaning and the character of the relationships of their generic and specific (topographical, anthropological, social and cultural, etc.) components are described. Stressed are the peculiarities revealed in the connotative component of their meanings, conventional and emotional attitudes. They are viewed as a reflection of global and local social, cultural and linguistic tendencies as well as natural association of language and local identity (Steadly 1996) of the names of higher educational institutions. In this respect, suggestions are made regarding the comparative and cross-cultural study of proper names in higher education.

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### 1. Introduction

In recent years, the research of English proper names has evolved considerably due to the increased role of the English language as “lingua franca”, but unfortunately there has been very little interest in proper names in the area of education.

English proper names in education are possibly one of the least examined onyms as they largely escape close observations by onomasiology. My concern here is with identifying the underlying nature and features of English language proper names in higher education and then considering the implications that this may have on their use in other languages and cultures.

My implication of the *proper names in higher education* is that they represent a language microsystem that points out the “meeting place” of the language speaker and the encoded culture. In the context of this research the latter is viewed as a set of relationships connecting the world and the human being and as “a system that accumulates and organizes the information about the past and the present” (Novoseltseva 2004: 151).

Being the product of culture, the microsystem of proper names in education, including its features, nature and naming traditions, is influenced by all the changes that both global and local societies undergo; it invariably reflects them and is never neutral in this regard. Indeed in common with other language systems, this microsystem doesn't exist in a vacuum (Crystal 1986: 10) and rather acts not as a dependent closed structure of forms and meanings, but as a part of human behavior (Karasik 2003: 126) and culture.

At the structural level the microsystem of proper names in higher education is represented by various multicomponent collocations, e.g., *Boston University's* (Massachusetts, USA) ten undergraduate schools and colleges offer students a range of academic possibilities that few other institutions can match.

At the lexical-semantic level this microsystem includes generic (e.g., university, college, institute, school) and specific (anthroponomic, topographic, etc.) lexical components that are created on the basis of already existing words of the literary or specialized layer of the language and are connected by common notions and a number of relevant semantic features.

For example, as a *University of Phoenix* (Arizona, USA) online student, you'll be attending the USA's largest accredited private university, with an unsurpassed reputation for educational excellence and student service. The *Sultan Qaboos University* (Muscat, Oman) was designed to provide all the facilities of a modern campus ([www.archnet.org/library](http://www.archnet.org/library), retrieved 10.07.08).

At the cultural level, the microsystem of proper names in education is composed of larger components that are influenced by various "language pictures of the world." These are created by various people and groups (Dmitrieva, 1995: 6). This means that the proper names in education being a part of a specific culture are based on that culture and are influenced by that culture (Ter-Minasova 2001: 30).

In its inner form (Humboldt 1999), proper names in education *express* the inner life and knowledge of the language speakers and give insights about the concentrated expressions of various cultural and social contexts (Kostomarov 2001) and conceptual spheres (Likhachev 1987).

For example, *George Fox University* (Newberg, Oregon, USA), a four-year Christian liberal arts and science university founded by Quakers in 1891, provides 2,300 students the opportunity to pursue a wide range of undergraduate and graduate degrees in a community based on Biblical standards and Christian principles.

To this day, *McGill University* (Montreal, Quebec, Canada) is a research-driven university on the cutting edge of science and technology (American Colleges and Universities 2002: 243).

At all three aforementioned levels each component of the microsystem of proper names in higher education is mostly determined by the concept of education. This concept is rooted in a common notion that unites all the components of the microsystem of proper names and could be defined as

- "development of the mind and character" and as "a system of training and instruction" (*The All Nations English Dictionary* 1992: 205),
- system of teaching people, usually at school or college; the gradual process by which a person gains knowledge and understanding through learning; the knowledge or training that you have gained through formal and systematic study; the field of study concerned with theories, and methods of teaching; and the general area of work that is concerned with teaching people, especially in school or college (*Collins COBUILD English Language Dictionary* 1987: 450),
- act or process of educating and the product or result of being educated (*The Merriam – Webster Thesaurus* 1989: 189).

All these meanings cover both various narrow and broad understandings of education, focusing on different nucleus components of its lexical meaning (e.g., system of training / instruction; gradual process; knowledge, training / instruction, field of study, act of educating; process of educating; result of being educated; acquisition of knowledge, acquisition of skills). They could be more or less effectively traced in various proper names in education, and in the character of their relations.

The broad understanding encompasses teaching and learning that focus on social, cultural, mental, moral and aesthetic development of a person. It is understood as a part of culture and as a

culture-centered social institution that provides the transfer of general and specialized social experience accumulated by the whole of mankind and individual local societies.

To this broad understanding one can add various narrower meanings that are associated with topographical, anthropological, social and cultural components which bear implicit aspects of the culture of a particular society. These components as a rule tend to fix and reflect some national peculiarities. They also have a unique axiological weight in the society, hierarchy, and brightness of some components of the meaning (Wierzbicka 1996).

Both broad and narrow understandings of the concept of education are expressed in different types and forms of educational institutions, mainly universities and colleges that provide formal study beyond the secondary school level, and in their names.

Proper names in education as the components of the lexical systems of any language act as the words of second nomination. They reflect cultural and axiological orientations of a definite cultural and language society. This fact gives us the right to consider the proper names in education as a specialized type of language and culture.

## 2. Universal Features of the Proper Names in Higher Education

English proper names in education manifest themselves as a complex microsystem of interconnected language units. To learn more about this microsystem we have compiled a monolingual English language corpus of higher educational institution names.

The immediate research goals included the investigation of naming traditions in higher education and demonstration of the possibilities of grouping these names in accordance with their structural and lexical-semantic features.

On the lexical-semantic level of proper names in education we traced a number of features. The analysis of these features made it possible to organize the compiled corpus of higher education names into fourteen groups. Each group presupposes a definite aspect of education and is quite representative as it includes quite a large number of onomastic units.

– **Group 1** Type of higher educational establishment (college, academy, university, institute, graduate school, polytechnic),

(e.g., *Air University* (USA), *Birmingham-Southern College* (Great Britain), *United States Sports Academy*, *Polytechnic University of Puerto Rico*).

For example: The United States Naval **Academy**, established in 1845, is the undergraduate college for the Navy.

The **Polytechnic** of Namibia is a thriving university of science and technology.

– **Group 2** Professional orientation of the higher educational establishment,

(e.g., *Teacher-training College*, *Agricultural and Horticultural College*, *Accountancy and Finance Colleges*, *College of Arts and Social Sciences*, *Music Academy*, *Technological University*, *Institute of Technology*, *Institute for Culture and Society*, *Institute for Administration*, *Monterey Institute of International Studies*).

For example: Berklee **College of Music**, founded in 1945, is an independent **music college** in Boston, Massachusetts.

Computer Arts and **Technological College** (Legazpi City, Philippines) is one of the 8,600 Universities, reviewed and sorted by web popularity ranking.

Brisbane **Commercial College** (Australia) is a Registered Training Organisation which was established in 1993.

– **Group 3** Type and source of finance,

(e.g., *Community College, Public College, Private College, State University of New York System*).

For example: The Minnesota **Private College** Council, Fund and Research Foundation represents seventeen of the best **private**, liberal arts **colleges** in Minnesota.

– **Group 4** Non-resident College/Residential College.

For example: They provide services and programs such as airport pickup, welcome orientation, an international unit of housing in the **Residential College**, an international club, and the Friendship Family Program. Albany **Residential College** is a co-educational boarding facility provided by the State Government of Western Australia.

– **Group 5** Geographical Aspect.

(e.g., *California College of Arts, Wisconsin Lutheran College, University of Arizona, Nizwa University*).

For example: We talked with one young woman enrolled at an elite Liberal Arts College who, during the summer, had taken a course at a **West Coast University** (California, USA), and, during her junior year, had an internship semester in Washington (Boyer, 1987: 228). **Niagara College** is one of twenty-four Ontario colleges of applied arts & technology established under the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Act of Ontario, Canada.

– **Group 6** Anthroponymic aspect,

(e.g., *John Brown University* [Arkansas, USA], *William Woods University* [Missouri, USA]).

For example: Richard Watson Nodd is an Associate Professor in Applied Linguistics at **King Mongkut's University of Technology** Thonburi in Bangkok (Todd 2002: 19). **George Brown College** is located in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, offering applied education courses and programs. The **Sultan Qaboos University** was designed to provide all the facilities of a modern campus.

– **Group 7** Mode of Delivery Aspect,

(e.g., *virtual university, virtual college, online college*).

For example: **Virtual University** is a member-supported, global learning community and the largest educational portal on the Internet today; yet, its roots extend back to the 1960s. **Virginia College Online** is an accredited **online college** offering eighteen Certificate, Associate, Bachelor, and Master degree programs in Business.

– **Group 8** Religious Aspect,

(e.g., *Oklahoma Christian College, religious college, Jesuit and Catholic private university, Catholic-affiliated university, Evangelic Christian College, Central Baptist College*).

For example: George Fox University, a four-year, **Christian Liberal Arts and Science University** founded by Quakers in 1891, provides 2,300 students the opportunity to pursue a wide range of undergraduate and graduate degrees in a community based on Biblical standards and Christian principles. Liberal Arts **Christian College** offers undergraduate degrees in business, education and the sciences.

– **Group 9** Gender Aspect,

(e.g., *co-educational (mixed) college, college for women, university for men and women*).

Information about the inaugural **Women's College** Alumnae Awards can be found here. **Dubai Men's College** in the United Arab Emirates has deployed a converged IP voice and data network from Nortel.

– **Group 10** Academic Aspect,

(e.g., *Liberal Arts College, the Academy of Sciences, Academy of Educational Sciences, Education Science Institutes*).

For example: Besides **Liberal Arts College** (Minnesota, USA), there are many other types of colleges. The **Academy of Educational Science and Technology** (Texas, USA) offers comprehensive e-learning solutions for businesses, schools and universities.

– **Group 11** National and racial aspect,

(e.g., *Black colleges, International university, American University of Sharjah, American Jewish University, American Indian College of the Assemblies of God*).

For example: Spelman College is a private, liberal arts, historically **Black college** for women located in Atlanta, Georgia. The **American Indian College** Fund provides scholarship support directly to each tribal **college** annually.

– **Group 12** Local / Global Aspect,

(e.g., *American Intercontinental University, National University of Health Sciences, National American University*).

For example: Based in San Diego, California, USA, **National University** offers a range of educational opportunities for varying degrees and learning options. **American University** (Washington, DC, USA) was founded in 1893 as a graduate institution.

– **Group 13** Academic Degrees,

(e.g., *Baccalaureate institutions; Baccalaureate-granting college, the BA degree University, the Master's College, the Master's seminary*).

For example: Los Angeles Baptist College changed its name to **The Master's College** (California, USA) in 1985 when the school became a non-denominational Christian college.

– **Group 14** Stage of Higher Education (*upper division college, junior college*)

For example: New Mexico **Junior College** (USA) as a comprehensive community **college**, promotes success through learning. Modesto **Junior College** (California, USA) has been providing university-caliber instruction to motivated individuals for 84 years.

Some of the proper names in education constitute synonymic relationships. The examples of these are numerous and include: 1) co-educational college – mixed college; 2) higher education establishment – higher education institution – higher learning institution – higher education school – tertiary education institution; 3) institution of higher education – institution of tertiary education – institution of higher learning; 4) online college – virtual college; 5) online university – virtual university.

For example: **Kottayam Public College** (Kerala, India) established in 1984, has proven to be a first class institution for higher education. Riyadh **Private College** of Dentistry and Pharmacy is one of the 8600 Universities reviewed and sorted by web popularity ranking.

Some antonymic relationships of the constituents are also registered. They include such pairs of semantically opposed lexical units as: 1) state college – private college; 2) public college – private college; 3) public university – private university; 4) traditional college – virtual college; 5) traditional college – online college; 6) traditional university – virtual university; 7) junior college – senior college; 8) coeducational university – women's university, etc.

For example: Why should you consider a **women's college** like Mills? [American Colleges and Universities, 2002: 212]. Working with IBM Global Services, **Dubai Men's College** (United Arab Emirates) implemented an advanced integrated infrastructure [www-001.ibm.com/software/success/cssdb.nsf/CS/DNSD, viewed 12.07.08]

The generic component in complex proper names in higher education is expressed as a rule by the nouns “college” and “university”, though other types of higher educational institutions are also used. They make collocations of different types following as a rule such models as “noun + noun” – NN, “noun + preposition + noun” – N prp N or “adjective + noun” – AN.

For example: **Macquarie University** (Sydney, Australia) is a modern research-intensive institution. The **University of Cyprus** (Nicosia, Cyprus) is a public university with approximately 300 staff members, 4,000 undergraduate and 1,000 Master's and Ph.D. students. **Imperial College** (London, Great Britain) provides world class scholarship, education and research in science, engineering, management and medicine.

The geographical and anthroponymic proper names in higher education (e.g., Clare College, College of William and Mary, the University of California, Rhodes University, etc.) are the most frequent ones.

For example: Glenn Deckert is an Associate Professor of ESL/TESOL at **Eastern Michigan University** (Michigan, USA) where he has taught ESL and MATESOL courses since 1993 (Deckert 2004: 17). Paul Michael Chandler supervises teacher development and beginning Spanish language instruction at the **University of Hawaii** at Manoa (Chandler and Ortiz, 2004: 29). Founded in 1850, **Illinois Wesleyan University** (Bloomington, Illinois, USA) is ranked by U.S. News & World Report among the best liberal arts universities in the United States.

The basic structural types of proper names in education could be grouped into the following seven nominal collocation patterns:

- “Noun + preposition + Noun” – **N prp N**  
(e.g., the University of Virginia, the University of Colorado)
- “Noun + preposition + Adjective + Noun” – **N prp AN**  
(e.g., the University of North Carolina, the University of South Carolina)
- “Noun + Noun” – **NN**  
(e.g., Radford University, Miami University)
- “Noun + Adjective + Noun” – **NAN**  
(e.g., Towson State University, Bloomsburg State University)
- “Noun + Noun + Noun” – **NNN**  
(e.g., James Madison University, Warren Wilson College)
- “Adjective + Noun + Noun” – **ANN**  
(e.g., East Carolina University, Old Dominion University, West Virginia University)
- “Adjective + Noun” – **AN**  
(e.g., Northwestern University)

The proper names in higher education tend to abbreviations. This feature characterizes not only the names of the universities, institutions, colleges and departments as in UBC – University of British Columbia, JMU – James Madison University, PI – Petroleum Institute, ELMDs – English Language Major Department, but also the names of Students' and Academics' Unions and Associations, e.g., ISO – International Student Organization, OSA - Old Students' Association, TECSCU – Teacher Education Council of State Colleges and Universities. It is also characteristic of the names of other higher education associations and boards, e.g., AUA – Association of

University Administrators, AGB – Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges.

For example: Recent national publications have rated *AIU* as the safest university campus in San Diego and among the safest in the nation (American Colleges and Universities 2002: 226). Welcome to UBC.ca, the **University of British Columbia**'s central web site.

Aforementioned are general commonalities of proper names in the higher educational establishment. These can be viewed as their universal features which nevertheless tend to vary in name creation, naming history and frequency in naming traditions due to local social and cultural contexts.

### 3. Local Traditions in Naming Higher Educational Establishments

The analysis of the proper names in different educational environments suggests their dynamism due to cultural and social bias especially because of differences in culture specific naming traditions. This dynamism could be traced in changes of both generic (nucleus) and specific (dependent) components in the course of history.

The analysis proved that specific (dependent) components of the proper names in education have a rather diffusive though very compact character. Moreover it has been noticed that they are very often substituted by other lexemes. This can probably be connected with different social and cultural circumstances in the history of the language community.

In this regard, I would like to briefly describe a controversial history of naming one Russian educational institution that contributes to better understanding the cultural and social peculiarities of higher education names and to revealing their close connection appearance and further development.

My personal and professional life is inseparably connected with Rostov Pedagogical University, where I studied for five years and worked from 1982 to 2006.

Rostov State Pedagogical University has a long history. This history has always been reflected in its names as a successor of Rostov-on-Don Institute of Teacher Training that was organized on a basis of Warsaw Imperial University. **Warsaw Imperial University (Cesarski Uniwersytet Warszawski, Warszawsky Imperatorsky Universitet)** was founded in 1870. In 1915 after World War I began it was evacuated with all its library, staff, and European traditions to Rostov-on-Don.

The fact of the university transfer to the capital of the Don Cossacks led immediately to the change of its name. At first it was renamed to **Don University**. Later it got the name of the **North Caucasian University** as Rostov was also known as the "Gateway to the Caucasus". The transition of the toponymic (specific) component in the university name from "Warsaw" to "Don" and later to "North Caucasian" served a very important function in the social context of Russia at that time as then it facilitated a new social and state identity.

The University at this time comprised a number of departments including the Teachers' Training Department. In 1931, the Teachers' Training Department was separated into an independent public education body that got the name of **Rostov State Pedagogical Institute**. The component "state" at that time became a must in the names of higher educational institutions (cf. Moscow State University, Taganrog State Pedagogical Institute, etc.) and started to carry one of the identification features that were typical for the official naming tradition in the field of education.

Due to recognition of its educational and research activities the status of Rostov State Pedagogical Institute changed at the beginning of the 90's. In 1993 the Institute got the status of university. Since then it has been called **Rostov State Pedagogical University**. Though this change did not lead to major changes in its academic policy and structure, the Southern Branch of

the Russian Academy of Education was organized on its basis, and it became one of the largest research and pedagogical establishments in the South of Russia.

In 2006, due to the launching of National Projects in Education initiated by the Russian Government, the University changed its name again. It lost its independence and became a structural unit of the **Southern Federal University** that comprises several formerly independent institutions of Rostov and Rostov region. Thus it acquired a rather compound name of the **Pedagogical Institute of the Southern Federal University**.

Each of the aforementioned names reflects the transformation of the naming traditions in Russia as a reflection of the way of living and thinking. They also serve as significant indications of the changes in approaches to educational institution naming during different periods of the country's history. In its compound structure they integrate various geographical, political and social components. The descriptive components of these names tend to bear social and political connotations, while generic components reflect the change in attitudes to the teaching profession as well as to the status of teachers' education (e. g., from "institute" to "university" and back).

The analysis involved with the names of one educational institution in the South of Russia in my opinion gives some valuable key to understanding naming traditions and approaches in regard to a more profound study of the proper names in education in a historic diachronic perspective.

#### 4. Conclusion

To conclude, proper names, being a part of the onomastic space of higher education, reflect peculiarities of both linguistic and extralinguistic character. The problems connected with the study of these onyms are rooted in the multifaceted character of their interpretation, which includes such aspects as geographical, semiotic, semantic, psychological, communicative, socio-cultural and some other aspects.

National and cultural peculiarities in the proper names in education can be traced in their connotative meaning that includes conventional assessments and emotional relations. They can also be revealed when the conceptual content of the proper names in education is studied in a general context, which implies their complex systemic relationships in the hierarchy of other lexemes in the field of education, on the one hand, and includes the relationships with other groups of proper names in the language, on the other

In spite of obvious cultural connotations in some of the proper names, the prevailing general background is the one that contains no culturally marked units. The functions of the proper names in education are focused not on characterization, but on nomination. This presupposes some universal structural, semantic, social and cultural features of proper names in education as onomastic units. Among these features is a typical two- or three-component structure and a generic component, which is well known among the members of the society and is borrowed from an existing arsenal of lexemes. On the semantic level, the proper names contain information that is extremely individual. This is rooted in the fact that the proper names analyzed not only name, but also address and give some additional knowledge. Thus the real meaning of the proper name in education can only be traced in a specific social and cultural context. Moreover their motivation has a psycholinguistic character and can be extralinguistic, etymological, metaphoric and metonymic (Chernobrovov 1999).

Thus the proper names in education can be considered as peculiar markers of the cultural space with a broad spectrum of cultural associations.

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